

## Yemen's Chargé d'Affaires in Damascus: Reopening the Embassy Marks a Pivotal Moment



On September 21, 2014, the Houthi group, also known as Ansar Allah, seized the Yemeni capital Sana'a in a coup against the Yemeni state. The group continued its military campaign across the country, eventually reaching the southern city of Aden.

Despite gaining control over numerous cities, the Houthis have never received international recognition and therefore were unable to assume control of Yemeni embassies abroad. Iran and Syria, however, proved to be notable exceptions.

In Damascus, the Houthi movement appointed an ambassador about a year and a half after taking control of Sana'a, and then named another ambassador in 2016. But in October 2023, Syrian authorities instructed the Houthi-appointed envoy to vacate the premises of the Yemeni embassy and leave immediately. From that point until April 26, 2024, Yemen had no formal diplomatic representation in Syria.

Dr. Mohammed Al-Ezzi Baakr was appointed as Acting Chargé d'Affaires. At the time, the Yemeni Ministry of Foreign Affairs released a statement declaring the embassy's return to operational status in Syria a "historic and diplomatic

milestone in the relations between the two brotherly countries and peoples.”

Before his appointment to Syria, Dr. Mohammed Al-Ezzi Baakr held several diplomatic positions in Turkey and other Arab states. In this exclusive interview with Noon Post, the senior Yemeni diplomat discusses the current state of Yemeni diplomatic missions worldwide, the challenges facing the Yemeni community in Syria, and his comparisons between Syria before the fall of Assad's rule and the situation in Yemen today.

To what extent have Yemeni embassies fallen short in addressing the violations Yemenis are facing recently, particularly in Jordan, Egypt, and Djibouti?

Constructive criticism is a healthy phenomenon that contributes to institutional growth as long as it isn't criticism for its own sake. What is sometimes perceived as failure often stems from individual shortcomings rather than systemic dysfunction within Yemeni embassies.

It's only fair to acknowledge the efforts these diplomatic missions are making within their consular and diplomatic capacities, especially under the extraordinary pressures imposed by the ongoing crisis in Yemen.

These missions have done what they could with the resources available, in line with the laws of host countries which, it must be said, deserve appreciation for hosting large numbers of Yemenis during this critical period in our history.

You were responsible for Yemeni students in Turkey. Across many countries, Yemeni students often complain about delayed financial disbursements, which hinder their education. How did you manage to address this issue?

This issue is a direct reflection of the instability caused by the Houthis' coup against Yemen's legitimate institutions. It has significantly disrupted the timely payment of students' financial aid abroad.

During my tenure, along with colleagues at the embassy, we prioritized full transparency with our students engaging in open dialogue, listening to their concerns, and explaining the difficult circumstances our country is going through.

We then worked to find practical solutions within the limitations we faced, despite the economic hardships caused by the war.

We were met with remarkable awareness and cooperation from our students, who demonstrated exceptional patience in light of the severity of the situation. Thanks to the government's continued support, we were recently able to disburse two quarters' worth of stipends (six months' aid) within less than a month a positive step toward alleviating their burden and helping them continue their studies.

How would you assess the current state of Yemeni diplomatic missions around the world?

As I mentioned earlier, Yemeni diplomatic missions continue to carry out their consular duties, protect Yemen's interests, and promote relations with other countries in accordance with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' strategic directives—guided by the Presidential Leadership Council. All of this, despite the considerable challenges they face on multiple fronts.

Let's move to your recent appointment to represent Yemen in Damascus—a post that had been vacant for years. What does the resumption of diplomatic ties mean for the Yemeni government and people?

Yemen was among the first countries to announce the reopening of its embassy in Damascus on April 27, 2024. This came as the culmination of extensive coordination and diplomatic efforts led by H.E. Dr. Shaea Mohsen Al-Zandani, Yemen's Deputy Foreign Minister, and H.E. Dr. Asaad Al-Shaibani of Syria's Foreign Ministry.

This achievement carries significant political and symbolic weight. It restores the bilateral relationship to its proper course and reflects the shared history and values between our two nations. It also aligns with the Foreign Ministry's broader efforts to reinforce the state's legal legitimacy and revive its diplomatic presence both regionally and internationally.

Moreover, it marks a vital step in easing the suffering of Yemenis in Syria, helping to address the many issues that have accumulated over the past several years.

What are the main issues facing the Yemeni community in Syria?

The absence of a legitimate government representative created numerous difficulties for the Yemeni community here. Chief among them were problems obtaining passports, delays in verifying academic and professional documents, and a general lack of official channels to safeguard their interests and resolve disputes.

Those challenges largely ended with the reopening of the embassy. We're now actively addressing these issues within our means and in close coordination with our Syrian counterparts.

What achievements has the Yemeni Embassy in Damascus made since you assumed leadership?

Since reopening, the embassy has worked diligently to restore bilateral cooperation after years of disconnection. We've held multiple official meetings with Syrian ministries and institutions, and we're continuing down that path.

We've also prioritized the needs of the Yemeni community and students enrolled in Syrian universities. So far, three semesters' worth of financial aid has been distributed. We've issued 73 passports and handled the cases of 185 citizens—out of 300 who visited the embassy between the reopening and mid-August.

We previously covered the case of the missing Yemeni officers in Syria. What's the latest update on this issue? Has any progress been made in locating them?

This case dates back to 2012. Since then, the Yemeni Foreign Ministry has made numerous efforts to uncover their fate. However, the volatile situation in Syria at the time made it difficult to follow through.

Recently, the embassy reopened the case with relevant Syrian authorities through formal meetings and memos. We've received full cooperation, and we expect concrete results from these efforts soon.

How have you dealt with Yemeni figures in Syria who have ties to Houthi-linked investments and projects involving Iran?

According to the information available to us, the Houthi militias no longer have any visible presence or activity in Syria, following recent developments in the country.

How would you compare Syria's pre-uprising period under Assad to the current situation in Yemen?

Both countries have endured extremely difficult periods. Yet we believe they are now on a path toward realizing the aspirations of their people—for development, security, stability, dignity, and equal citizenship. With their rich heritage and wise leadership, we are confident they will succeed.

In your view, where is Yemen heading?

Just causes never die, sacrifices are never in vain, and no people can be defeated. The Yemeni people—steeped in history and civilization—will overcome all foreign agendas and internal challenges. No matter how long the night lasts, dawn will come. The progress we are witnessing today—on diplomatic, economic, and development fronts—is clear evidence of that.