

“The UN Envoy Is Not Welcome “

Tracking the online campaign against the UN Special Envoy for Yemen

This briefing by Insecurity Insight analyses public social media activity from 03-14 September 2026 in Yemen.



THE BACKGROUND

On 7 September, UN Special Envoy for Yemen Hans Grundberg stated in an official statement published by the Office of the UN special envoy for Yemen that recent Houthis attacks across several frontlines had triggered increasingly intense clashes. He called on the parties to cease hostilities, exercise maximum restraint, prevent further escalation and preserve space for dialogue and political negotiations.

Grundberg's statement became a focal point for an online campaign calling for Grundberg to be expelled or no longer recognised as a mediator in Yemen. Posts accused him of favouring the Houthis and encouraged other accounts to amplify calls for his removal. The discussion subsequently widened to include opposition to negotiations, Omani mediation and, in some cases, the UN presence in Yemen more broadly. As emotional images of killed people appeared online, these were used to amplify the campaign by calling for his expulsion in the form of comments under these images, creating a visual link for a responsibility not based on facts.

On 14 September, 20 aid organisations operating in Yemen issued a joint statement expressing concern over the escalation in fighting across Taiz and the West Coast since 3 September and its humanitarian impact, including civilian casualties, mass displacement and constraints on humanitarian access. The statement called on all parties to respect international humanitarian law, protect civilians and civilian infrastructure, ensure humanitarian access, and support an inclusive, Yemeni led political process. The statement generated little relevant discussion on public social media platforms, and the criticism directed at the UN Special Envoy did not extend to the wider aid sector in the monitored discussion.

THE ANALYSIS

This briefing analyses 292 public social media posts relating to the UN Special Envoy for Yemen, published from IP addresses indicating Yemen and 2,552 comments. Of these, 289 posts were identified during the main monitoring period between 6 and 8 September, while three additional posts referring to the UN Special Envoy were identified during separate monitoring of five incidents affecting vital civilian services. The briefing examined the narratives that followed these incidents, including where discussion was linked back to the UN Special Envoy.

Activity on the subject was highest on 7 September, when 168 posts were posted, followed by 118 on 8 September. The public conversation on the topic was concentrated on X, with 285 posts, with only four posts on the subject identified on Facebook. The posts reached around 1.74 million social media users. Between 3 and 14 September, 50 posts and 48 comments were examined in response to the five incidents affecting vital civilian services. Three of the 50 posts, 6%, made reference to the UN Special Envoy. Follow up searches were also conducted for reactions to the 14 September joint NGO statement, using multiple search variations both with and without a Yemen IP filter. No relevant public social media discussion of the statement was identified.

289

Public posts
provisional

2,552

comments
X ≥15 / FB ≥15

1.7 M

Estimated reach
X + Facebook (prov.)

KEY OBSERVATIONS

- Calls for Grundberg's expulsion developed into an online campaign.
- Claims that the envoy favoured or protected the Houthis were a recurring narrative.
- Some posts widened from rejecting Grundberg to rejecting negotiations, Omani mediation and UN involvement.
- A small number of comments went further, including calls for violence against the envoy.
- As images from the conflict violence emerged on social media, the calls for expulsion were reiterated as comments under emotionally disturbing pictures showing killed civilians.

POSSIBLE DRIVERS OF THE NARRATIVES

- While attribution of online campaigns is never certain, various indicators suggest that the campaign content was strongly anti Houthi in its framing, but the data do not identify a specific faction behind it.
- At least one account amplifying the campaign appeared to have links to government institutions, but the data do not prove that the campaign was organised by the Internationally Recognised Government (IRG), its armed forces or the Southern Transitional Council or any faction within.
- There is some evidence that the campaign circulated across different parts of Yemen, but location data were available for only 48 of the 289 posts. This is not enough to show whether support was concentrated in areas linked to particular political or military actors.
- The motive remains uncertain, but the narratives suggest an effort to weaken support for Grundberg and international mediation while encouraging continued military action.
- Distressing photographs of people who had been killed may have helped amplify the campaign. The images were reposted alongside expulsion hashtags and criticism of Grundberg, although the data do not show whether this was coordinated.
- The nature of the posts alone does not establish whether the online campaign reflects the growing political strength of a faction advocating military intervention, or whether it is instead part of a deliberate strategy by that faction to increase its political influence.

IMPLICATIONS FOR HUMANITARIAN COMMUNICATION

- The current campaign referenced the UN but did not name any aid agencies by name.
- If the primary motivation for the online campaign against calls for mediation and moderation is to promote an intensification of the military campaign, then calls for further mediation or moderation would be expected to attract similarly strong opposition online.

Calls For Expulsion Developed into an Online Campaign

Between 7 and 8 September, 107 X posts directly calling for Grundberg's expulsion from Yemen, these posts generated 273 comments and reached 283,352 social media users. The conversation quickly moved from criticism of Grundberg's statement to demands for action against him. Users called on the Presidential Leadership Council and government to expel him, declare him persona non grata in Yemen, stop engaging with him or reject further mediation efforts.

Several versions of the same message circulated through hashtags. The first monitored use of an expulsion hashtag appeared at around 16:00 on 7 September, including “#Expelling_The_UN_Envoy_is_a_Popular_demand”. This preceded the



later use of photographs of people killed to reinforce calls for Grundberg's removal. Some posts and comments explicitly encouraged others to amplify the hashtags and keep them circulating, showing deliberate efforts to increase the campaign's visibility.

"We need to launch a major social media campaign rejecting the UN envoy's intervention."

"واجبنا نسوي حملة مزللة في السوشيل ميديا نرفض تدخل المبعوث الأممي"

Photographs of people killed reinforced calls for the envoy's removal

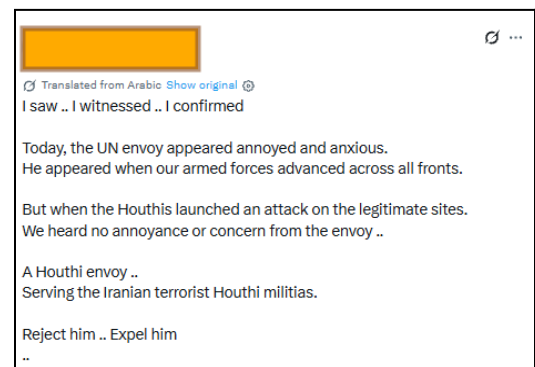
Following the dissemination of conflict impact on hospitals, schools and humanitarian premises in Ta'iz governorate, photographs of people reportedly killed in the wider escalation circulated and these were used through the comment function to call again for the envoy's removal. The original posts that included these images linked the deaths to reported incidents in Marib and Al Ghayl, although the images themselves did not show where or when they were taken.

The photographs were then reused in additional posts calling for Grundberg's removal. Images of one man who had been killed appeared under different captions, including an expulsion hashtag and another attacking the envoy directly, and at least six accounts shared them within a day. By the evening of 7 September, after Grundberg's statement, some accounts were circulating photographs of people killed in the recent fighting under captions blaming Grundberg and describing him as "the Houthis' partner in war crimes" ("انت شريك الحوثي في جرائم الحرب").

Claims of UN Envoy Support for the Houthis

Between 7 and 8 September, individual accounts whose affiliation could not be verified and edited media, considered to be generally supportive of the positions of the Southern Transitional Council (STC), shared 18 X posts claiming that Grundberg or the UN was supporting, or attempting to "save" the Houthis. In one post shared by a very active verified individual account with over 300,000 followers, Grundberg was described as a "Houthi envoy".

These initial posts did not explicitly call for his expulsion. However, several of the posts calling for expulsion of the UN envoy based their calls on claims made in other posts that alleged bias towards the Houthis.



The posts claiming that the UN envoy's support for the Houthis reached an estimated 18,177 social media users.

Similar claims appeared in other comments, claiming that the UN envoy provided services for the Houthis.

"The UN envoy is the one providing services to the Houthis. Be warned about him. No settlement with the Houthis. The United Nations, an envoy, mediation from any country, all are rejected. Cut off the head of the snake and leave its poison inside it. There is work going on under the table for the Houthis. Be careful."

الاممي هو الي يقدم خدمات للحوثي.... انبهوا منه.. لاتسوية مع الحوثي... امم متحدة... مبعوث.. وساطه.. من اي دولة مرفوض... اقطعوا
.. راس الحية واخلوا سمها فيها... ترا اشغل تحت اطاولات من اجل الحوثي... انتا 🇸🇪

This illustrates how high-profile campaigns can begin by laying the groundwork through specific allegations, followed by targeted demands that are justified by reference to the narrative and position established through those initial claims.

The Campaign Widened from Grundberg to Mediation and the UN

Around 24 X posts extended criticism beyond Grundberg to the wider mediation process and the UN role. Some criticised the Omani mediation, which refers to the Omani's role in facilitating dialogue in Yemen, and some other users criticized the UN intervention, while military advances were presented as the preferred route to ending the conflict. This appeared in an X post, which generated 202 comments and was reposted 584 times.

Comments Amplified the Campaign

Many of the 2,552 comments repeated calls for Grundberg's removal, rejected another truce or argued that fighting should continue. Some extended the criticism to the wider UN presence but not the wider aid sector at this time.



“Yes to war and no to a truce. We demand the closure of UN offices.”

” . نعم للحرب ولا للهدنة نطالب بإغلاق مكاتب الأمم المتحدة“

Comments did not, however, reflect a single position. Some questioned the value of expelling Grundberg, suggesting that he should simply be ignored or defended negotiations and Omani mediation.

“Dialogue is not surrender. Dialogue is what will stop Yemeni bloodshed.”

” الحوار مو تنازل، الحوار إللي بيوقف نزيف الدم اليمني“

Some voices pushed the campaign further

A small number of comments went considerably further than calls for Grundberg to leave Yemen and used more extreme language, including direct calls for violence against Grundberg.

“Kill him, do not just reject him.”

”اقتلوه وليس ارفضوه“

Such comments were relatively few within the monitored comments but represent a more serious form of hostile rhetoric than the wider campaign for Grundberg's expulsion.

Hostility Towards the Envoy May affect Acceptance of UN Mediation

The campaign moved beyond criticism of Grundberg to include rejection of negotiations, Omani mediation and wider UN involvement. This broader hostility could affect acceptance of UN facilitated mediation if it gains wider support. However, the monitoring data do not show how influential these voices are beyond social media or how much weight they carry within Yemen's wider political and military landscape. Criticism focused mainly on the envoy and mediation, although a smaller number of posts and comments also called for UN offices to be closed or UN agencies to leave Yemen. No specific mention for any LNGOs or INGOs in the monitored data.

More severe rhetoric remained limited, but comments calling for the envoy to be killed or assassinated introduced a potential staff safety concern if such language became more widespread.

Campaign Origin

Identities behind most social media posts remain uncertain. Geographic origin within Yemen is also difficult to determine, as only 16.6% of the monitored posts could be attributed to a specific area. Among posts with an identifiable location, Aden accounted for 22.9%, Sanaa for 22.9% and Ta'izz for 20.8%. Aden is the principal seat of the Yemeni government and the Presidential Leadership Council, alongside STC networks and Saudi supported military forces. Ta'izz includes areas where Islah and Tareq Saleh's National Resistance Forces are influential, while Sanaa is under Houthi control. These locations provide political context, but do not establish the affiliation of the accounts or identify who drove the campaign.

No Comparable Backlash to the NGO Statement Published 14 September

As a follow up to the 6 to 8 September monitoring, Insecurity Insight reviewed online discussion following a 14 September joint statement by 20 aid organisations operating in Yemen. The statement had raised concerns about escalating fighting in Ta'izz and along the West Coast, civilian casualties, displacement and humanitarian access, and called for the protection of civilians and an inclusive Yemeni led political process.

Multiple search variants in Arabic and English covering Yemen IP addresses and global origin did not identify any relevant public social media discussion in response to the NGO statement.

Geographic distribution of posts

Area	Posts
Aden	11
Sanaa	11
Ta'izz	10
Hadramawt	5
Shabwah	4
t Al Hudaydah	3
Ibb	2
Ma'rib	1
Sa'dah	1

The table reflects the 48 posts for which a geographic location could be attributed to the posts. With only x percent (48, of the 289) posts including such information, this only provides only a partial indication of the location of those who posted.

Source: Insecurity Insight / Topics (Powered by Radarly)

Data Use and Data Privacy

This report includes analysis of publicly available social media content collected from open platforms. All data has been anonymised to remove or obscure identifying details, and no content from closed groups was used. The analysis was conducted in the public interest and in line with the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), under a legitimate interest basis. The purpose of this analysis is to support humanitarian dialogue, inform policy, protect aid workers and those they help, and contribute to public interest research. This document is published by Insecurity Insight - a Humanitarian to Humanitarian (H2H) organisation committed to the Humanitarian Principles. Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

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Other resources

Public online narratives are reshaping the operating environment of the aid sector in the Sahel. *The Shrinking Humanitarian Space on Social Media in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger* focuses on the risks and harms posed by harmful public narratives that frame aid as illegitimate, politicised or foreign controlled. These narratives are steadily shrinking the humanitarian space. As online and offline threats increasingly converge, the report argues that safeguarding digital legitimacy is no longer optional - it is essential to the continuation of principled, neutral, and effective humanitarian action. In [English](#) and [French](#). For regular updates on the Sahel see [here](#).

Humanitarian action in the DRC is increasingly shaped by public digital narratives that the aid sector cannot afford to ignore. The distorted nature of some online discussions about aid can at times feel shocking or uncomfortable. While they may be dismissed as expressing the views of marginal voices, their growing reach and impact make it essential to understand the motivation behind them. *Learning from Social Media Narratives in the DRC* shares findings from social media sentiment monitoring in the DRC, with the intention of helping aid organisations to better understand and track emerging narratives and shifts in sentiment. By monitoring online discourse on the humanitarian space that go beyond the brand name of individual aid agencies, aid actors can anticipate local attitudes, build community acceptance and adapt to a rapidly evolving operational environment. In [English](#) and [French](#). For regular updates see [here](#).

Using data collected by Insecurity Insight, the Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition (SHCC) identified 48 incidents of violence against or obstruction of health care in Yemen in 2025. Among the incidents, 17 health workers were arrested, and health facilities were violently raided or searched 12 times and damaged on at least nine occasions.

Health worker arrests and detentions and health facility raids by Houthi forces increased from April onwards. Damage to and the destruction of health care facilities increased, and health worker killings and injuries continued. Conflict parties' use of explosive weapons that impacted health care surged, with aircraft and drone strikes accounting for 26% of all reported incidents. This ended a 20 month period since July 2023 during which no air strikes affecting health facilities had been reported. Read the full SHCC Yemen Chapter in [Arabic](#) and [English](#).