

**Details of Yemen's daily haemorrhage**

Yemen is living through a variety of problems. The process of diesel and gas smuggling – which official estimates say costs the country 180 billion riyal a year – stands high on the list of these problems.

Senior officials have criticised these smuggling operations, yet the smugglers have continued to operate. Perhaps this diesel and gas smuggling reflects the scale of corruption Yemen is experiencing. Since it began, this activity has been sponsored and supported by senior state officials and it takes place today on a broader scale within a large network that could be called a 'mafia'.

Smuggling has created a series of interconnected and diverse interests. These begin with specific smugglers' links to senior officials and military commanders and continue all the way down to fishermen, soldiers and young professionals.

The profits from diesel and gas smuggling are huge and the cost is enormous for both the nation and for the president personally. While he bears public responsibility for this by virtue of his position, he also suffers direct harm as a result of the use of his name as a shield for this process. Similarly, the names of prominent figures within his state are mentioned as official patrons of this haemorrhage faced by the country.

*Al-Sharea* decided to work on this issue, given its importance, by sending our reporters Naif Hassan and Mohammed Ayesh to the port of Aden and the port of Mocha respectively. After four days of field work they present here a relatively clear picture of the method by which oil smuggling operations are administered.

Because smuggling is hard to prove, *Al-Sharea's* management has decided to withhold the names of the major diesel and gas smugglers. It nonetheless expresses its willingness to present these names to the Anti-Corruption Authority which must now begin a serious investigation of the matter.

*Al-Sharea*

**Where the footsteps of diesel smugglers merge with those of government officials**

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Amid continuing protests and escalating public anger, Aden is home to a struggling port and an active diesel smuggling industry.

At noon on 28 December I went to Aden and the next morning was on my way to its old port, once one of the liveliest and most important areas in the world.

The port lies in the area of Tawahi, where the footsteps of diesel smugglers merge with those of government officials. On the area's coastal strip, the buildings of official institutions crowd together and intermingle with the offices of private marine transportation companies.

I decided to take a boat trip to see the area from a wider perspective. At the tourist quay I waited for over an hour for the boat that would undertake this task, during which time I familiarised myself with the main parts of the area. Clinging to the quay is the coastguard forces building, followed by the old fishing port, then the Yemeni Company for Shipping Fuel Supplies (ABD).

No diesel smugglers can be seen, although many know the names of these smugglers and the companies through which they operate. This port is an active outlet for diesel smuggling – when I took myself there from Sana'a I knew I wasn't going to be hobnobbing with the CEOs of leading Manhattan finance firms.

Sites of corruption in developing countries generally portray an image of themselves quite different to reality. I remembered this while waiting on the tourist quay opposite the coastguard forces building, watching half-naked troops performing a group exercise under the watch of a commander whose strong voice was incapable of bringing their footsteps into time. The soldiers were running along the quay while their modern military boats were anchored a few metres away.

The soldiers continued training to the voice of their enthusiastic commander, while far from their military launches other boats were gathering. A limited number of these non-traditional boats, capable of true efficiency with no need for a zealous, strong-voiced instructor, are involved in diesel smuggling. The majority, meanwhile, are used for fishing – an activity responsible for broad violations which the Yemeni authorities have been unable to stop.

The maritime police are based in front of the entrance to the tourist quay, close to the coastguard boats. A Yemeni navy warship lies at anchor. Everything seems to be in its rightful place. Yet the diesel smugglers are operating here and this ‘everything’ appears to be their insurance policy.

It can reasonably be observed that in developing countries governed by those in positions of power, and in a country such as Yemen where the forces of corruption are strong, the government agencies become an effective tool, directly or indirectly, for the protection of those acting against the law.

Movement at the port was quiet and it was unclear to a journalist arriving from Sana’a how diesel is smuggled from this official port.

### **How do the organised diesel smuggling operations from the Port of Aden take place?**

When I left Sana’a I had unconnected pieces of information on diesel smuggling operations from the port of Aden. After four days of research and investigation there I can tell you how these organised and complex operations take place, and who is behind them.

There are four companies led by four people who are accused of diesel smuggling from the port of Aden. Their activity extends to Al-Mukalla, Al-Mahrah, Al-Hudaydah and Mocha.

The second of these people manages a company believed to belong to the son of a senior military commander. This man has powerful influence in the port and has a ship on which smuggling operations are carried out.

Around two years ago this man rented ten Chinese boats and used them as further cover for his smuggling. He rented these vessels as fishing boats, but in so doing he was driven by the desire to obtain the diesel allocations disbursed to them officially. He used a small number of these boats for fishing while smuggling the rest of the diesel allocated for these boats.

Aden’s refineries allocate between 10 and 15 tonnes of diesel a month to every modern fishing boat and five tonnes to every traditional fishing boat. By a simple reckoning, this man was obtaining 150 tonnes of diesel a month, in addition to the other monthly allocations for his main ship plus other quantities obtained using his influence.

*Al-Sharea*’s sources confirm that these ten boats ceased operating for a long period, but the diesel allocations were still disbursed to them each month.

It is now accepted that diesel smuggling is more profitable than fishing. If we suppose that this man can smuggle at least 1,000 tonnes each month, then his profits from this activity must amount to 670,000 dollars a month (around 134m riyal). If we rely on Al-Arhabi’s statements regarding the scale of smuggling then the monthly profits of this smuggler must be in excess of 2m dollars.

The third man owns a small company that has a boat and good connections at the port. This man is less effective and his smuggling activity is limited.

The fourth person has a private fishing company and his activities in diesel smuggling are unclear. This company runs numerous fishing vessels, but its sales of fish do not correspond to the number of large boats it operates.

It is likely that these people work at senior positions of power in the authority and it is certain that they obtain millions of dollars in a manner that contravenes the law.

A number of traditional fishermen who have private traditional fishing boats operate in diesel smuggling. Around a year ago the smuggling activity of these people was evident. This drove the governmental petroleum company to reduce their diesel allocations to five tonnes of diesel per boat each month, and they were forced to use barrels to load these allocations.

Aden Refinery Company is not untouched by accusations of diesel smuggling. A specialist in this area confirmed to the newspaper that the refineries conduct smuggling operations seasonally. He doesn’t attribute the recurrent crises that occur in relation to the substance of diesel to rises in the activity of smuggling operations alone, but also to the refineries undertaking smuggling operations that he describes as intermittent.

'A.M.' says that the refineries produce large quantities of diesel for the provinces – between 20,000 and 40,000 tonnes – but sell them at sea.

I visited Aden Refinery Company at the end of last month with the aim of meeting its director, Mr. Fathi Salim. However, during the days I spent in Aden I did not manage to meet this man to discuss the matter with him, together with other matters related to the work of the refineries.

On the margins of all this a minor issue occurs that assists the smuggling of diesel. From time to time the president instructs that quantities of diesel (ranging between 3,000 and 5,000 tonnes) are disbursed to a number of influential parties. A source knowledgeable about diesel smuggling operations from the port of Aden confirmed to me that these influential people ask the smugglers to sell these quantities at prices higher than the local price.

### **Operating in the grey area**

Ahmed Salih Al-Issa works with the Petroleum Company as a marine transporter of oil and oil derivatives, and his name stands at the top of the list of diesel smugglers. This man has many ships (a port employee reports that they number as many as 20), having rented numerous vessels from an Italian company. We intended to avoid stating this man's name, but there are numerous factors related to the nature of his work that have prevented this.

Al-Issa transports crude oil through his company, *A'ali Al-Bihar*, via the ship *Safir fi Al-Salif* to the Aden refineries. After the oil has been refined at the refineries he transports it – together with the oil derivatives – to Al-Hudaydah, Al-Mukalla and so on.

In addition to this Al-Issa holds a licence for provisioning ships with fuel. It is this, according to many, that arouses suspicion.

This man has obtained a further concession: a monopoly of the right to supply the island of Socotra with diesel and gas, through a private station he owns there. Al-Issa therefore monopolises both the transportation of oil and oil derivatives at sea and the right of provisioning Socotra with gas and diesel, in addition to holding a licence to supply ships with fuel.

Monopolisation of the right to supply Socotra's fuel is, simply put, a significant outlet for smuggling diesel and gas. While we do not wish to accuse Al-Issa, this is nonetheless how this matter is perceived. If he is serious about throwing off the suspicion of smuggling he must give up his monopoly of the right to provision Socotra with diesel and gas.

## **How the smugglers cross over and benefit from the large diesel price differentials**

The Yemeni Company for Shipping Fuel Supplies (ABD) controls a main part of the old port. It provisions ships with diesel and fuel oil through maritime agencies and companies. Naturally, these agencies and companies buy quantities of diesel from ABD at the international price and travel with them onto the seas where they sell them – also at the international price plus a profit margin – to ships and vessels that place orders in advance. However, this legal process is being violated by transgressions that represent the main artery of smuggling.

Diesel smuggling at the port of Aden is a complex process and it passes through a series of official procedures. To put it simply, the large proportion of smuggling is conducted like this: the maritime companies and agencies receive orders from vessels at sea requesting the supply of fuel. These companies purchase diesel or fuel oil (in hundreds of tonnes) from ABD at the local price (210 dollars a tonne) and sell it to these ships at the international price (890 dollars a tonne), less a discount of between 5 and 10 dollars per tonne.

Sometimes the vessels and boats belonging to these maritime companies and agencies contain large quantities of diesel bought at the local price. They then place an order with ABD for the addition of a small quantity at the international price, after which they go to sea to supply ships with the entire amount.

There is an area used in operations of provisioning ships with fuel at the port of Aden. The diesel smugglers operate within this very area and benefit from facilities that render smuggling an operation carried out with collusion. To be precise, smuggling takes place in partnership with the officials.

There is no genuine process of oversight of the work of the commercial agencies and companies. Communication between the petroleum company's branches in Aden, Al-Mukalla, Al-Mahrah, Al-Hudaydah and Mocha is practically ineffective – a fact exploited by the smugglers. They sometimes obtain the quantities of diesel disbursed to them as monthly provisions from more than one place. Monthly diesel allocations are drawn for non-existent boats.

The Yemen Petroleum Company sells diesel to the vessels at sea, despite the fact that this is not permitted, as it merely has the monopoly for the operation of the local market. The outcome is that there is a disparity between the petroleum company's prices and those of ABD. This differential between the prices of these two authorities always exists: the former sells a tonne of fuel oil at 70 dollars less and diesel at between 20 and 30 dollars less than the prices offered by the latter. These price differences create an ideal environment for the contraventions and facilitations on which the smuggling is based. The information on transactions obtained by *Al-Sharea* confirms that certain commercial agencies that do not have a licence to supply fuel exploit the price differences between those of the petroleum company and ABD. These agencies are permitted to draw large quantities of diesel through ABD from the allocations of the petroleum company.

Another form of manipulation occurs with respect to diesel volumes at the Yemen Company for Shipping Fuel Supplies. The petroleum company calculates and sells a tonne of diesel as 1,200 litres. The owners of the commercial companies and agencies pay the value on this basis, but they receive it from ABD with a decrease of around 30 litres. The remainder is disbursed illegally by means of smuggling. The nature of diesel itself assists in this manipulation as it is affected by the climate and so a tonne of diesel can be calculated as between 1,170 and 1,150 litres depending on its density.

We went to discuss these matters with the director of the Yemen Company for Shipping Fuel Supplies, but its senior official gave the excuse, through his office, of being busy with other engagements and business.

## **Annual losses of 180 billion riyal disappear into the pockets of smugglers**

In Aden I met a diesel smuggling insider. This man presented me with a great deal of information which confirms that he is correct.

He says that the volume of diesel smuggled from Yemen each month amounts to 25,000 tonnes. This means that each month the diesel smugglers earn close to 17m dollars (204m dollars a year).

There is a focus on diesel and gas smuggling because of the governmental subsidy of these two materials. Last year government support for oil and fuels (principally gas and diesel) amounted to 700b riyal, and a similar amount of support was provided this year.

Diesel and gas is subsidised to lessen the burden on people in general and farmers in particular. The drop in the price of these two substances in the Yemeni market in comparison with the international market has provoked serious crises from time to time as a result of shortages of supplies.

Omar Al-Arhabi, chief executive of the Yemen Petroleum Company, explained to September Net that diesel smuggling costs Yemen 180b riyal a year. Al-Arhabi's interview states that the quantities of diesel smuggled from Yemen amount to 100,000 tonnes a month. These official figures confirm that the diesel smugglers are earning around 68m dollars a month (816m dollars a year).

Diesel is smuggled to sell to international vessels at sea, or for sale in the countries of the Horn of Africa through smugglers based on the opposite shore.

*Al-Sabah* newspaper stated on 11 December that at that time, close to Eid, Yemeni smugglers were conducting bartering exchanges with Somali smugglers. A cylinder of gas in return for a sheep, or "eight cylinders of gas for a cow."

Despite the spread of diesel and gas smuggling operations, so far not a single smuggler has been arrested and tried. Over the past ten years there has been one case of a person being accused of diesel smuggling. This matter was before the public funds prosecution in Aden for months without referral to the public funds court.

## **Mocha transformed into an oil town**

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A small port with a relatively long coast – this forms what could confidently be called Yemen's 'smuggling paradise.'

Ineffective laws, non-existent control, full government collusion and representatives of the authorities involved in professional smuggling. These are the four pillars of this paradise, in which the smugglers are operating in an ideal, secure environment for the accumulation of enormous wealth by diverting the most important of the country's already scarce resources: gas and diesel.

Before Mocha grew in importance for Yemen's oil corruption mafia, the oldest of the country's ports witnessed, for a variety of reasons, a gradual diminution in its importance as a tributary for the national economy. The number of commercial containers the port received dropped from 160 a day in the nineteen-eighties to a mere ten a day at the start of the twenty-first century, after which the arrival of containers eventually stopped completely. Last August the governor of Ta'izz governorate, Ahmed Al-Hijri, announced the government's decision to privatise the port, calling for the private sector to prepare to receive and administer it.

The port has become unsuitable for anything except smuggling. It is matched in this by its coasts extending to the north and south.

Visiting Mocha, it is in fact easy to see the extent to which smuggling has become a core industry that drives professional activities in the small city while dragging down other sectors. As happened with the import and export industry, fishing activity has declined seriously as increasing numbers of fishermen have moved into smuggling of oil derivatives as a more fruitful profession.

From the outset, on arriving here you shouldn't expect to see anything that suggests you are in a city with a port and a fishing industry, such as goods transportation lorries or mobile refrigerators. The only thing you will see here are the oil tankers and lorries that are scattered throughout the streets and alleys and lined up in rows close to the port or along the beach. These give the impression that you are in nothing other than an oil town.

The smuggling is conducted by two routes: from the port and from the outlets spread along the coastal strip.

From the port, primarily gas – in addition to some diesel – is smuggled. One of the largest contractors for the transportation and sale of gas and oil derivatives in Yemen is in fact the main smuggler from the port. His company, the headquarters of which is in Ta'izz, transports diesel and gas to and from the port. Using the port's facilities, the company's vessels smuggle this diesel to the Horn of Africa and India.

According to a high-ranking source in Mocha, the port's management provide smuggling operations with the same facilities that they provide for any legitimate act of export. Why? Because the management, according to the source, treat the matter not as 'smuggling' undertaken by a private oil company but rather as 'governmental work' and 'state interest.'

A few years ago, and for uncertain reasons, Mohammed Salih Al-Donin, former commander of the military section in Mocha, decided not to permit one of these ships to sail from the port when it was ready to depart on a gas smuggling journey. The next day Al-Donin received a phone call from a more powerful official that led to the release of the vessel. Since then neither this ship nor any of its counterparts has met with any objection to their ongoing activities.

Informed sources in Ta'izz have confirmed the occurrence of this incident. In Mocha a senior port employee repeated this same story and I also heard it from other officials. It appeared to me that everyone is colluding, without prior intent, in discussing the details of this incident at length as an answer to the question, 'Why is no one able to object to this smuggling? What authority does this trader or smuggler possess such that a sovereign port is subjugated to the interests of his illegitimate activities?'

Throughout the year, close to 100 oil tankers owned by this trader transport to Mocha the diesel and gas allocated for smuggling through the port. These smuggling quantities are diverted from the quotas allocated for the governorates of Ibb, Ta'izz and Al-Hudaydah, in addition to those of Mocha. These are the quotas that are transported from the refineries by the same trader himself.

The collusion of the government is demonstrated more clearly through an understanding of the seasons during which smuggling takes place. Generally speaking these are not fixed seasons because they are set according to the political timings of the authority in Sana'a. 'When there is a crisis in gas and diesel this means that the smuggling is at its peak,' says a port employee. What he does not say, but everyone knows, is that the diesel and gas crises are repeated continuously and they only stop if the government encounters a political turn of events that places it in need of popular support, such as an electoral season. In other words, there is a direct correlation between political battles for governance and the rise or fall in the pace of oil smuggling through the Port of Mocha.

Diesel is also smuggled from the port through contractors and brokers who are less prominent than the major contractor.

For example, in recent years the most famous and powerful wine smuggler in Mocha has decided to repent this profession in order to take up diesel smuggling.

A small ship was anchored close to the quay of the port. One of them pointed it out to me saying that this was one of the vessels that belonged to the smuggler. This ship was designed to transport cattle and it operates, as with other similar ships owned by many powerful people, by importing cattle from the countries of the Horn of Africa. It actually does this, although as a secondary activity to cover the true occupation of diesel smuggling.

The diesel lorries deliver the loads for these ships to the quay at the port with the justification that they are merely 'provisioning' them. This cover story was used when this smuggling was in its early stages, but now no one is interested enough to ask for a justification.

#### **Where does the river of diesel flow from?**

My visit to Mocha in early January this year coincided with a time of rest for the smugglers while they waited for the sea to fall quiet again. The waters are rough during this season every year.

I undertook a journey on the coastal route that links Mocha with Aden and at the same time connects the main smuggling outlets of Dhubab, Ras Al-'Ara, Al-Ma'qar and 'Amran (the fifth outlet – Moshij – lies to the north of Mocha close to Al-Khawkhah).

There are only three fuel stations located along the 55km route. Two of them are located between Mocha and the Bab Al-Mandab strait, one of which belongs to Yemen Petroleum Company. Meanwhile the third station is located after Ras 'Amran and close to Aden.

Yemen Petroleum Company claims that the source of the smuggled diesel is fuel stations in general. According to my observations – and as confirmed by two people who work in smuggling – even if these three stations located close to the four outlets are involved, they would be incapable of sustaining the high level of diesel smuggling activity at these outlets. It is true that the stations on the Ta'izz – Al-Hudaydah route contribute to a large extent, but the main supply remains that which comes directly aboard the oil lorries of the major diesel transportation and distribution contractors.

Regarding the large quantities smuggled from the port, military and civilian sources at the port and an oil sector source in Ta'izz have all confirmed that these come primarily from the oil quota allocated for consumption in Ta'izz and Ibb and secondarily from the quota of Al-Hudaydah.

Is the Yemen Petroleum Company's branch in Mocha involved in smuggling? The same oil source says it is. He mentions the official figures acknowledged by the company regarding this branch's sales.

Over three consecutive years – 2004, 2005 and 2006 – the branch's sales of the substance of diesel ranged between 31m and 37m litres a year.

This is a huge number, particularly given that during the same years the sales of the company's branch in an entire governorate – Al-Mahrah – did not exceed a mere 29m litres a year, according to the same company data.

Mocha is a small city and group of villages with a low residential density. It is unreasonable that it should consume more diesel than an entire governorate, or even half of that consumed by a governorate with a high residential density such as Ibb, where the sales of the company's branch totalled just 70m litres a year over the same years.

The movement of ships is absent at the Port of Mocha, so it cannot be said that the rise in these quantities is a result of the branch supplying ships.

Our source states that, “whatever leaks from the governmental petroleum company pours into the well of smuggling.” The situation at the Mocha branch is mirrored at the Al-Hudaydah branch, which tops the list of the company’s highest sales figures each year.

## **Five outlets, numerous contractors and military commanders**

Outside the port there are five main outlets that are very active in diesel smuggling. These outlets are distributed along the coastal strip extending from Al-Khawkhah, north of Mocha, as far as Ras 'Amran overlooking the Arabian Sea to the south.

Between Al-Khawkhah and Mocha lies the outlet of Moshij, and to the south of the port there are consecutively the outlets of Dhubab, Ras Al-'Ara, Al-Ma'qar and Ras 'Amran.

The smugglers at these outlets are oil contractors, traders and military commanders.

Smuggling is conducted using the largest boats and vessels to transport the diesel to ships awaiting them on the high seas. Some also take their load to the shores of Djibouti, Somalia and Eritrea.

Professionals, former fishermen and off-duty soldiers work on these boats. A few work for themselves while most work for large brokers and smugglers.

Large and medium-sized oil tankers transport the diesel to the outlets where it is loaded into smuggling barrels.

There are small, medium-sized and large boats. The capacity of a small boat is 60 to 70 barrels – these are plastic barrels intended for transportation by boat. The load size increases up to the large boats that have a capacity – according to a military source and another person who works in smuggling – equivalent to three heavy transportation lorries.

Added to the quantities that come directly from the largest companies contracted to sell oil derivatives are the supplies that arrive from the fuel stations between Ta'izz and Al-Hudaydah. These are owned by influential personalities active in smuggling or who participate in smuggling operations.

Last August the competition between prominent smugglers intensified, leading to two fishing boats being stopped by a security patrol – as if such patrols are actually conducted! The two boats were carrying in excess of 2 tonnes of diesel en route to smuggle them to Eritrea. The media department of the governing General People's Congress celebrated the incident and indicated, for the first time, that the source of the load in the two boats was a fuel station owned by the military commander of a Yemeni island. Nothing was heard later about any investigations into the case. During my visit to Mocha I investigated some of the details and found that the dispute between the competitors had ended and that the media leak was merely one of the 'below the belt' punches they sometimes exchange.

## **How Mocha whitewashes gold**

The revenues from oil smuggling are very alluring. The percentage of profit received by a smuggler from a single litre of diesel amounts to 400%. The price per litre in Yemen is 35 riyal and a smuggler can sell it at 70 cents, which is the international price. This means that a cylinder sold here at 3.5 dollars can be sold on the opposite shore for 14 dollars. (In Yemeni currency, the local price of a cylinder is 700 riyal while its price after smuggling is around 3,000 riyal.)

The authority has waived its sovereignty over the Port of Mocha and the surrounding beaches in return for the gold that this outlet whitewashes each day into the pockets of its powerful people, or those of its allies among the traders and brokers.

## **Systematic corruption by security authorities and officers in partnership with small-time smugglers**

I assumed that the number of smuggling outlets on the coasts of Mocha and the Bab Al-Mandab strait was – in addition to being a consequence of the number of smuggling destinations on the coasts of the Horn of Africa – a result of a tactic by the smugglers of scattering Yemeni military patrols. But 'Mubarak' – a pseudonym I chose for one of two smugglers I met in Mocha – corrected me in this assumption.

Mubarak, who has worked in diesel smuggling since 2005, states that the diversity of outlets basically aims to deceive the patrols of foreign forces present in international waters, in addition to those of the African countries across the sea.

As regards the Yemeni side, smugglers have nothing to fear. Smuggling is essentially performed on behalf of senior 'bosses' within the sectors of the State, according to Mubarak, who offers a further clarification related to the small smugglers operating in their own boats. These people ensure their safety by sharing their profits with the low-ranking officers and soldiers on the coasts. Sometimes this sharing takes the form of quotas from the number of barrels smuggled, whereby an officer receives the value of 10-15 barrels, for example, from the full load of a particular boat, while another boat reports to another officer or soldier, and so on.

It appears, in fact, as if a systematic weakening of the security and military authorities is taking place in Mocha. Aside from the corruption of these authorities, their divisions here are feeble and lacking in genuine capabilities.

A military section belonging to Camp Khalid is based at the port. The central security and the political security are present, as is the military intelligence branch. However, the coastguard forces are absent. This is the security sector concerned with protecting the coastal strip and combating smuggling activities and other such illegal activities that are very widespread in Yemen's Red Sea waters, foremost among them fishing by dredging.

The coastguard is a security section of recent origin in Yemen in general, as it was only established in the year 2001. It is also true that the focus for support and development of this sector has been restricted to the southern coasts, for reasons essentially connected with the terrorism-related incidents witnessed there. However, it should be noted that 100 coastguard personnel were conscripted to work in Mocha three years ago, but after a brief period they were withdrawn by a military commander to the southern region. Now Mocha has only two personnel on duty at the small building that was recently built for the coastguard management within the port.

Three French boats are owned by the absent Mocha coastguard - millions of dollars were spent to buy them. They are now anchored at the quay within the port in the process of becoming scrap, after their use by the soldiers and port workers was suspended. They now use them as a cable for hanging out their washing.

#### **Gas: A gift from Saudi Arabia and smuggling to Africa**

King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz promised to present 30,000 tonnes of Saudi gas as a gift to Yemen, 3,000 tonnes of which arrived at the Port of Aden last Friday.

The country is experiencing a gas crisis as a result of which the Oil and Minerals Minister, Khalid Bahah, has announced the government's intention to import the substance during the years 2008 and 2009 in order to meet the needs of the local market. This Saudi gift comes in the context of this crisis.

The terrible truth is that the smuggling of gas produced at the Yemeni fields – which are fundamentally incapable of meeting the needs of consumers in the interior (only 130 tonnes of domestic gas are produced a day) – continues apace.

Corroborated information confirms that this smuggling is undertaken by an organised and very powerful mafia, although the sources of the information are unable to present adequate details of the scale and figures of the quantities of gas smuggled. The smuggling brokers are clearly identifiable.

In the face of this mafia, what can this royal gift achieve beyond lessening the crisis, in reality more for the smugglers than for citizens?

During the aforementioned years the Al-Hudaydah branch sold respectively 503m, 519m and 686m litres of diesel, while during the same period the Aden branch sold 405m, 447m and 480m litres.