



Medicine arriving in Sanaa'a, c. 2017-2018.

Photo courtesy of Gunther Wallauer.

## Yemen

---

### MELANIE RICHES WIXWAT

Melanie Riches Wixwat, B.B.A. (Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan), currently lives in Beirut, Lebanon with her husband Michael, the treasurer for Middle East and North Africa Union (MENA U). She is administrative assistant to the president and the executive secretary of MENA U in addition to working as assistant to the regional editor for the ESDA project. One of her hobbies is studying Arabic and this has led her to be involved with one of the local Arabic Adventist Churches in Beirut.

---

### Overview of the Country

Yemen, officially Republic of Yemen, is situated at the southwestern corner of the Arabian Peninsula. It is mostly a land of green and rugged mountains with walled and gated villages perched on peaks and ridges, and ancient terraces stair-stepping into wadis (valleys) far below. It is also a land of deserts, camels and nomads, and of ships and trade on the high seas. Yemen has an area of 203,850 square miles (527,969 square kilometers), and a population of approximately 31 million people (2022).<sup>1</sup> It is bordered by Saudi Arabia to the north, Oman to the east, the Red Sea to the west, and the Gulf of Aden in the Arabian Sea to the south. The capital Sana'a is at an elevation of 2,200 m (7,200 ft) and has a pleasant climate year-round.

In Arabic the word Yemen means "the South" and "the right" (when one stands facing east, the south is to the right). In Arabic the word "yamana" denotes "he went to the right," but can be expressed as "he was happy." This corresponds to the Latin name for the region, "Arabia Felix," or the "Fertile or Happy Arabia." There are reasons for Yemen's happiness beyond that of it being "to the right." The high Sarawat Mountain range (the southern portion of the Hijaz Mountains), which parallels the west coast of Yemen, captures more rainfall than any other place on the Arabian Peninsula (instigating another nickname, "the green Arabia").

The history of Yemen stretches back over 3,000 years. From about 1000 BC this region of the Southern Arabian Peninsula was ruled by three successive civilizations, Minean, Sabaean, and Himyarite. All three kingdoms depended on the spice trade for their wealth. Aromatics such as myrrh and frankincense were greatly prized in the ancient world and were used as part of various rituals in many cultures, including Egyptian, Greek, and Roman.

Yemen had an early monopoly on the frankincense trade. The main overland route from Oman through Yemen and on to Egypt and the Levant was well established by 1500 BC. Yemen is also located at the crossroads of trade between Africa, India, and the Mediterranean Region. The port of Aden has been the area's most valuable natural resource, with thousands of ships putting in for refueling, servicing, and transfer of goods. From the 15th through 17th centuries the world's trade in coffee centered on the Yemeni Red Sea port of Mocha.

Yemeni tradition says that Bilquis, the Queen of Sheba (Saba in Arabic), came from Yemen to visit Solomon and learn his wisdom's secret. Some have speculated that she may have been concerned that his fleet of ships in the Red Sea would circumvent her control of the overland frankincense trade.

Christianity was once well represented in Yemen, but it was almost completely wiped out by the 7th Century Muslim conquest. Tradition also claims that Sana'a was founded by Noah's son Shem after Noah died, and the local nickname for Sana'a is Sam (Shem in Arabic) City. We do know that Sana'a has been inhabited for more than 2,500 years.

Arabic is the official language of Yemen, and the population is predominantly ethnic Arab, although there are African (primarily Somali, Eritrean and Ethiopian), Indian, and Turkish influences. Yemen is also home to five non-Arabic languages. Two of these are nearly extinct (Bathari and Hobyot in Mahrah governorate), but three are active with populations of 50,000 to 70,000 each: Razih (in Sa'ada governorate, northwestern Yemen, on the

border of Saudi Arabia); Mehri (in Mahrah governorate, on the border of Oman); and Soqotri (in the Soqotra islands in the Gulf of Aden).

Yemen is more than 99 percent Muslim. About 35-45 percent are Shia, primarily confined to northwestern Yemen, an area that includes the capital of Sana'a. Most of the Muslim population are Sunni, primarily belonging to the Shafi'i school of jurisprudence. The only other indigenous religious minority are Jews. There are reports by expatriates who lived in Yemen of contact with individuals who claimed to belong to indigenous Christian communities, remnants of Yemen's pre-Islamic Christian community, but these claims could not be substantiated. As of 2022, there are no recognized indigenous Seventh-day Adventist believers today in Yemen.

## Seventh-day Adventist Work

In early Adventist literature, Adventist pioneers made reference to Joseph Wolff's visit to Yemen as evidence of the worldwide nature of second advent expectations in the early 19th century. Wolff, the "missionary to the world," traveled to Yemen around 1836 on his way to Bokhara:

The Arabs of Yemen, he writes, "are in possession of a book called *Seera*, which gives notice of the second coming of Christ and His reign in glory; and they expect great events to take place in the year 1840."<sup>2</sup> He continues to write: "In Yemen ... I spent six days with the children of Rechab. They drink no wine, plant no vineyard, sow no seed and live in tents, and remember good old Jonadab, the son of Rechab; and I found in their company children of Israel, of the tribe of Dan, ... who expect, with the children of Rechab, the speedy arrival of the Messiah in the clouds of heaven."<sup>3</sup>

The prophet Jeremiah affirmed the children of Rechab for their faithfulness (Jeremiah 35:1-19). Jehonadab, son of Rechab, was a Kenite, a descendent of Jethro, Moses' father-in-law (Judges 1:16), who joined Jehu in his revolt against King Ahab's family (2 Kings 10:15-16).

In spite of these early Adventist references to Yemen, the first and only outreach occurred in 1972 when K.S. Oster from the Middle East Union conducted an antismoking clinic in Sana'a, the capital. For the next two decades there was no organized Adventist effort to open work in the country.<sup>4</sup>

In the early 1990s Roy Facey, a British Adventist sea captain, arrived in Yemen to work with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on a project for international commerce at the Port of Aden. The port was near the mouth of the Red Sea and had previously been a strategic location for the British Empire. The Aden Protectorate was granted independence by the British in 1967, becoming the People's Republic of South Yemen, which remained a separate nation from north Yemen (Yemen Arabic Republic) until reunification in 1990.

In 1992 Facey travelled to Larnaca, Cyprus, to attend some meetings. There he met with Svein Johansen, president of the Middle East Union, and Jim Neergaard, the MEU ADRA director, whose offices were located in Nicosea. Roy encouraged them to visit Yemen in pursuit of establishing ADRA work there. Several months later,

with the support of the union administration, Neergaard made an exploratory visit to Aden, where he spent a week visiting potential project sites and getting a feel for the country.

After several months he returned to Yemen, but this time to Sana'a, where he followed up with some of Facey's contacts to arrange a country agreement for ADRA. Neergaard met the typical run-a-around. He was unable to get an appointment with the key people who had the authority to grant such an agreement. At the time there were no American-based NGOs operating in Yemen. While trying to find his way through this maze of bureaucracy, Neergaard met a young professional Sudanese man working with the Ministry of Planning and told him that he was with ADRA. Upon hearing this the young man brightened up and exclaimed, "We need ADRA here in Yemen!" He explained that he had a relative who worked for ADRA in Sudan and who had given a good report on their work there.<sup>5</sup>

This contact proved to be beneficial, as not long afterwards Neergaard received an appointment for the purpose of negotiating an agreement. After productive meetings and another visit, he was asked to return in late February 1994 to sign the ADRA/Yemen Country Agreement.<sup>6,7</sup>

## First Organized Presence of Adventist Work

ADRA's establishment marked the first organized presence of the Adventist church in Yemen. Until then, no known indigenous Christian church of any denomination had ever operated. Corporate worship by tentmakers and other expatriate Christian workers in Yemen was officially proscribed by law, except for a limited number of carefully monitored locations. Christian activities outside of such premises were illegal and Yemenis were forbidden to attend Christian gatherings.<sup>8</sup>

In September 1994 the Middle East Union asked Greg Bratcher to be the new ADRA/Yemen Country Director, and he accepted.<sup>9</sup> On October 25, 1994, Bratcher and ADRA Program Director Gerald Whitehouse arrived in Sana'a to begin plans for a child survival health project. After visiting several locations, they drove to the port city of Al Hudaydah in the Tihama region along the Red Sea coast. While meeting with the health authorities there they were informed that the three districts at the southern end of the governorate (Hais, Khokha, and Jebel Ras) were districts where there was no current NGO work. They drove to the Hais Health Center and met with local staff to assess the needs. Soon thereafter the Child Survival Project proposal was submitted to USAID and it was granted funding.<sup>10</sup>

The first expatriate family, Ed and Jennifer Dysinger, arrived December 25, 1994. Ed became the Child Survival Project Director. In 1995 ADRA/Yemen was able to get funding for additional, complementary projects such as a Women's Literacy and Small Credit project, a Village Pharmacy project, and a Water Project for the town of Hais (population of 11,000).

In 1995 Adventist World Radio began to play a key role in Global Mission's quest to reach the Middle East Region, as programs broadcasted for more than seven hours a day in Arabic and Farsi. Mail response increased every month, with a considerable amount coming from Yemen.<sup>11</sup>

By 1997 ADRA's program area was comprised of three governorates in the Tihama coastal region in western Yemen, bordering the Red Sea. They had succeeded in establishing a quality development program with strong support from local communities. This had been a slow, arduous task, only made possible by a patient and sensitive team, headed by four expatriate Adventist development workers.

Because most communities had no prior contact with foreign organizations, and the presence of expatriates was a new and stressful experience for this society, great patience and sensitivity were required as ADRA personnel sought to break down these natural barriers in order to gain acceptance and build a measure of trust with rural communities. A close relationship was developed between ADRA expatriates and indigenous Yemeni employees, a relationship of trust which served to resolve challenges and misunderstandings of ADRA in the communities.<sup>12</sup>

## Challenges and Dangers

The workers faced other dangers as they pioneered the work in this remote country. It was dangerous for an expatriate to drive in Yemen. Foreigners were often taken hostage by local tribes, and then held for a ransom. If one had an automobile accident with a local Yemeni who was injured, he could face exorbitant settlement demands, or even jail. Once, at a local market, a potential car thief sought to take the Land Cruiser from the country director. After jumping in his car and cutting his hand with his jambiya, the thief fled on foot from the scene. The director received eleven stitches in his hand and was fortunate to be alive.

One day in 1997, as the ADRA employees were at the ADRA office in Sana'a (which was also the Bratcher home), there was a knock at the gate. Upon opening it they were greeted by a security officer. He showed them a picture of a man and asked, "Do you know this man?" No one in the office recognized him. The security officer then explained that the man was a Syrian bomb expert who was on the most wanted list of terrorists. He had recently been captured by Yemeni security forces and among the effects they found in his possession was a hand drawn map with an X on a certain location. The security officer traced the map to the X, which turned out to be the ADRA office.

## ADRA Projects in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

ADRA has continued to help the people of Yemen by assessing their needs, submitting proposals, and seeking funding from various governments for different projects.



In 2001 the United States government initiated the first international school lunch program, in which ADRA Yemen participated, caring for school children all over the country.<sup>13</sup> Between 2002 and 2005 ADRA received another grant from USAID for the Basic Health project, which required an experienced finance director to manage the compliance with donor regulations. Chosen for this position was Imad Madanat, who was working with ADRA International in Silver Springs, Maryland, and spoke fluent Arabic.

In an email correspondence, Imad remembered the Yemenis to be very hospitable and welcoming to other fellow Arabs. Religion was not an issue if everyone respected each other's religious beliefs and did not engage in debate.<sup>14</sup>

In 2005 the Yemen Ministry of Health asked ADRA for help stopping a polio outbreak in February 2005. Polio had virtually dropped out of existence since 1989 after an aggressive global effort to eradicate it, but an ongoing outbreak in Yemen had already affected 179 children.

To stop the outbreak, ADRA led a national polio vaccine campaign from May 31 to June 2, 2005 in Sana'a, and one in Al-Jawf, which ran until June 16. During the campaign's first three days, ADRA organized 320 health workers and vaccinated 17,229 children in four districts, reaching more than 95 percent of the children in the target areas. Over 80,000 children under the age of five benefited from the vaccination program.<sup>15</sup>

Since 2002 ADRA Denmark has worked in Aden in South Yemen and is active in relief and development work. ADRA Germany joined ADRA Yemen in 2012, and together they have implemented health projects throughout the country. ADRA currently (2022) maintains 12 health facilities that act as hubs when help is needed!<sup>16</sup>

In 2020, the humanitarian crisis in Yemen was at its worst since the start of the Yemeni Civil War in 2014. Though the country and its needs were not often featured in the news, Yemen earned the distinction of being the country with the greatest humanitarian need in the world.

"Health care is among the areas hardest hit by the conflict," ADRA workers said. "Hospitals and health facilities have not been spared the ravages of war. With dwindling resources, healthcare providers are less able to continue working and are deprived of means to provide for their families. A worsening fuel crisis complicates the transport of critical supplies. Entire regions have been left without life-saving care."

ADRA Canada together with ADRA Yemen renovated and fully equipped three health units, including a fully functional laboratory. The project is also helping to pay the salaries of health-care providers, including doctors, obstetricians, midwives, nurses, and nutrition experts, so that they can continue to improve their communities while also providing for their families.<sup>17</sup>

## Summary

Today (2022) ADRA Yemen is the largest ADRA in the world. It has established a reputation as a reliable, creative, and innovative partner for the development of Yemen as it works with local people and organizations to create

enduring solutions for the future. It assists those in need without regard to ethnic, political, or religious affiliation, and has a long-term commitment to the people of Yemen.

Furthermore, Adventist values have generated curiosity from the Yemenis, while ADRA leaders have left a positive impression on local communities, as they have chosen to live among the people despite the harsh conditions of no electricity, hot and humid weather, and isolation. Comments received included, “You Adventists made us Muslims better believers in our values and closer to God.” Feedback from Yemeni staff has included comments about the office culture as being respectful, kind, not entertaining of bad language, good work ethics, and interpersonal skills among workers. This has generated loyalty to ADRA by the local staff. According to Imad Madanat, ADRA’s success in Yemen has been based on “living our values, being humble and showing genuine care and love to the people of Yemen.”<sup>18</sup>

Current programs (2022) include: Community Development Project for Refugees, Self-Reliance, and SUR: Support for Urban Refugees<sup>19</sup>

## Organization

In 1951 the country of Yemen became part of the Middle East Division. From 1959-1962 it fell under the leadership of the Nile Union in the MED, and in 1970 was reorganized under the Middle East Union as part of the Afro Mideast Division. In 1981 the MEU became an attached Union to the General Conference, and in 1999 the country of Yemen was transferred to the Trans-European Division. The Greater Middle East Union (attached to the GC) was formed in 2012, of which Yemen became a part. In 2015 another reorganization took place, and Yemen is currently under the jurisdiction of the Middle East and North Africa Union.<sup>20</sup>

---

### SOURCES

“Adventist World Radio Beams to the Middle East.” *ARH*, May 1995.

“ADRA Yemen.” Adventist Development and Relief Agency. Accessed July 9, 2022.

<https://www.devex.com/organizations/adventist-development-and-relief-agency-adra-yemen-28559>

“Helping Save Lives in Yemen.” *ARH*, July 9, 2020. Accessed June 21, 2022. <https://adventistreview.org/news/helping-save-lives-in-yemen/>.

Middle East Union Executive Committee Minutes, October 18-29, 1993, Appendix D. Middle East and North Africa Union Archives, Beirut, Lebanon.

Middle East Union Executive Committee Minutes, May 7-8, 1995. The Middle East and North Africa Union Archives, Beirut, Lebanon.

Middle East Union Executive Committee Minutes, November 15, 1997. The Middle East and North Africa Union Archives, Beirut, Lebanon.

Sahlin, Norma. "250,000 Children in Three Countries to Benefit from First International School Lunch Program." *Adventist News*, January 31, 2002. Accessed June 21, 2022. <https://adventist.news/news/250000-children-in-three-countries-to-benefit-from-first-international-school-lunch-program?searchsite=adventist.news&ref=on-site-search&searchterm=yemen>.

Schweitzer, Pierre. "ADRA Germany Donates 500,000 Euros to Yemen." *Adventist News*, October 17, 2021. Accessed June 16, 2022. <https://adventist.news/news/adra-germany-donates-500-000-euros-to-yemen?searchsite=adventist.news&ref=on-site-search&searchterm=yemen>

*Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*. 2nd rev. ed., vol. 10. Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1996.

*Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* "Yemen." Accessed July 7, 2022.

<https://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/Forms/AllItems.aspx>

Staff, Ann. "Yemen: ADRA Works to Stamp Out Polio." *Adventist News*, June 21, 2005. Accessed June 21, 2022. <https://adventist.news/news/yemen-adra-works-to-stamp-out-polio?searchsite=adventist.news&ref=on-site-search&searchterm=yemen>.

"Yemen Population." *Worldometer*. Accessed June 15, 2022. <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/yemen-population/>.

Wolff, Joseph. "Missionary Journey and Memoir of the Rev. Joseph Wolf, to the Jews." Revised and edited by John Bayford, ESQ, F.S.A. New York: Published by M. Bliss & M. White, 128 Broadway, 1824.

World Church. "ADRA opens new office in Yemen." *ARH*, March 31, 1994.

---

## NOTES

1. "Yemen Population," *Worldometer*, accessed June 15, 2022, <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/yemen-population/>.
2. Joseph Wolf, "Missionary Journey and Memoir of the Rev. Joseph Wolf, to the Jews," revised and edited by John Bayford, ESQ, F.S.A. (New York: Published by M. Bliss & M. White, 128 Broadway, 1824), 377.
3. *Ibid*, 389.
4. *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (SDAE), second rev. ed., (1996), s.v. "Yemen."
5. Edwin Dysinger, email interview with Jim Neergard, June 26, 2019.



6. Ibid.
7. World Church, "ADRA opens new office in Yemen," *ARH*, March 31, 1994, 6.
8. Middle East Union Executive Committee Minutes, November 15, 1997, Yemen DAB – ADRA Director, 3. The Middle East and North Africa Union Archives.
9. Ibid., May 7-8, 1995, 27.
10. Ibid., October 18-29, 1993, Appendix D, 18-20.
11. "Adventist World Radio Beams to the Middle East," *ARH*, 172 no. 18, May 1995, 31.
12. MEU Committee Minutes, November 15, 1997.
13. Norma Sahlin, "250,000 Children in Three Countries to Benefit From First International School Lunch Program," *Adventist News*, January 31, 2002, accessed June 21, 2022, <https://adventist.news/news/250000-children-in-three-countries-to-benefit-from-first-international-school-lunch-program?searchsite=adventist.news&ref=on-site-search&searchterm=yemen>.
14. Imad Madant, email correspondence with Melanie Wixwat, July 11, 2022.
15. Ann Staff, "Yemen: ADRA Works to Stamp Out Polio," *Adventist News*, June 21, 2005, accessed June 21, 2022. <https://adventist.news/news/yemen-adra-works-to-stamp-out-polio?searchsite=adventist.news&ref=on-site-search&searchterm=yemen>.
16. Pierre Schweitzer, "ADRA Germany Donates 500,000 Euros to Yemen," *Adventist News*, October 17, 2021, accessed June 16, 2022. <https://adventist.news/news/adra-germany-donates-500-000-euros-to-yemen?searchsite=adventist.news&ref=on-site-search&searchterm=yemen>.
17. "Helping Save Lives in Yemen," *ARH*, July 9, 2020, accessed June 21, 2022. <https://adventistreview.org/news/helping-save-lives-in-yemen/>.
18. Madanat, email correspondence.
19. "ADRA Yemen," Adventist Development and Relief Agency, accessed July 9, 2022. <https://www.devex.com/organizations/adventist-development-and-relief-agency-adra-yemen-28559>.
20. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, "Yemen," accessed July 7, 2022. <https://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/Forms/AllItems.aspx>.

---

encyclopedia.adventist.org is an official website of the [Seventh-day Adventist World Church](#)