



# PROJECT *on* Middle East Democracy

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**“Corruption in Yemen: Screening of ‘Destructive Beast’”  
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace  
1779 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Washington, DC  
Thursday, September 30, 12pm – 2pm**

On Friday, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace hosted a viewing and discussion of “Destructive Beast,” a documentary on corruption in Yemen created by the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE) with funding from the National Endowment for Democracy. **Abdulwahab Alkebsi**, the Regional Director for Africa and MENA at CIPE, gave a response to the film and **Christopher Boucek**, an associate in the Carnegie Middle East Program, moderated the discussion.

Introducing the film, **Alkebsi** said that it is not an attempt to “name and shame” specific people but instead a look at the institutionalization of corruption in Yemen and the effect it has had on the lives of ordinary people. **Ultimately, all of the issues that Yemen faces today, from terrorism to youth unemployment, “stem from endemic corruption,”** Alkebsi added.

The film weaves together the stories of store owners forced to pay bribes for non-existent sign licenses, a man engaged in a twenty-year dispute over a piece of land and members of the Supreme Authority to Combat Corruption (SNACC) working for reform to explain how corruption jeopardizes Yemeni society as a whole. (You can view the trailer [here](#).) The film concludes by providing five recommendations for combating corruption Yemen: (1) raise awareness about the dire effects of corruption on Yemen’s economic and political stability; (2) work to simplify the country’s taxation system; (3) limit abuses by civil servants; (4) improve the ability of the Chamber of Commerce and other organizations to advocate on the behalf of citizens; (5) and train journalist to report on corruption and support them when they do so.

After the film ended, Alkebsi commented that the movie always gives him a sinking feeling in his stomach; corruption is truly the force driving Yemen toward failed state status. The film is meant to be a tool to raise awareness in Yemen, Alkebsi said. **While everyone knows that corruption is an issue, most view it as a small and necessary evil. Few comprehend how corruption destroys the economy.** Alkebsi cited the passport system as a prime example. Yemenis can get passports easily if they are willing to pay bribes but these passports are not accepted in many countries. This reality limits international trade and prevents Yemenis from going abroad for work. The most dangerous issue is that many in Yemen do not believe there is anything that can be done about corruption, Alkebsi said. **The way to combat the growing passivity is to sponsor small, simple projects that yield clear results.**

Before opening the floor for discussion, **Boucek** added that the often exclusive focus on Yemen’s security issues in the West is misguided. **In fact, it is corruption that fuels the social ills which in turn motivated people to look toward Al-Qaeda and other extremist groups for answers.** We need to look beyond short term security issues and build a strong relationship with both the Yemeni people and state.

Boucek then began the question and answer session by asking Alkebsi what the Yemeni government has done thus far to address corruption. **Alkebsi responded that the biggest shift in Yemen has been that officials today fully understand the extent of the problem and are interested in finding a solution.** A commenter from the audience added that there has been some specific progress including the firing of corrupt judges and land reform.

In response to a questioner who asked if Yemen's situation was worse than that of other countries in the region, Alkebsi said that **while all countries have corruption, the issue in Yemen is that many citizens have given up hope.** Boucek added that in Yemen today, there is a remarkable confluence of issues including separatism, water shortages and international terrorism.

A final questioner asked if there is the political will to address corruption at the highest level of the Yemeni government. Alkebsi responded that while he cannot "see the hearts" of Yemen's leaders, he is sure that they have a firm understanding of how precarious their current position is and are also sensitive to international pressure.