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THE ESCALATING VIOLENCE

A human rights report documenting the armed attack carried out by the Houthi group on the Al-Baydha village in Al-Salafiyah District, Raymah Governorate, and the killing of Sheikh Saleh Hantous inside his home on July 1, 2025

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Introduction

Anyone following the human rights situation in Yemen over more than a decade of ongoing war realizes fully that what happened to Sheikh Saleh Hantous and his family was not a mere coincidence, but rather part of a continuous chain of violations targeting most directors and teachers of Qur'an education centers, as well as Sunni mosque preachers and imams. The Houthi group views these individuals as holding ideas opposed to its ideology and creed, and therefore as a source of threat to its project—one it has imposed by force of arms in areas under its control—while it rejects any negotiations that might ease tensions or spare bloodshed, especially in this specific regard.

The Houthi group, 71 years old and suffering from several chronic illnesses, subjected the elderly Sheikh Saleh Hantous, over the past years to numerous forms of harassment and violations. These included the suspension of his and his wife's salaries as teachers, followed by a ban on him teaching at the Qur'an school he founded in Al-Salafiyah district 20 years ago. He was placed under surveillance. Moreover, armed Houthi fighters stormed the religious institute where he was teaching, looted its contents, and set fire to the library. They carried out a series of provocative acts, including forcing him at gunpoint to step down from the pulpit so that a Houthi-affiliated preacher could take his place, and compelling him to teach Hussein Al-Houthi's pamphlets as part of Qur'anic study sessions. Because of his refusal, he was threatened with assassination in the context of a meticulously planned killing operation, directed from a central operations room in Hodeidah and another in the district capital of Al-Jabeen. The operation was scheduled for Tuesday, July 1, 2025, at 5:00 a.m., involving a force of about 150 military vehicles mounted with medium-caliber machine guns and nearly 2,000 heavily armed fighters drawn from three military regions.

The operation began with the Houthi group surrounding the village of Al-Baydha in Bani Nafi' Sub-district, Al-Salafiyah District, Raymah Governorate, where the home of the victim, Saleh Hantous, was located. This was followed by heavy shelling that ended with the victim's death on the roof of his house at 8:00 p.m. on the same day. The operation was also accompanied by several grave violations of international human rights law, which targeted civilians from the victim's family and included injuries, arrests, home raids, looting of property, and the spreading of fear among the local population.

Through this report, the American Center for Justice (ACJ) seeks to inform local and international public opinion a comprehensive account of the incident, the events that preceded it, and the violations that accompanied it. The Center urges the regional and international community to exert effective pressure on the Houthi group to immediately cease its armed operations against civilians in areas under its control, to safeguard freedom of religion and expression, and to adhere strictly to the norms and obligations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

Legal Characterization

The right to life is protected under the provisions of Yemeni legislation and the international treaties to which Yemen is a party. Article (73) of the Yemeni Constitution states: *“Every human being has the right to life, and the law shall protect this right.”* Meanwhile, Article (91) of the same Constitution affirms that: *“Homes and private places are inviolable, and except in cases of being caught in the act of committing a crime or to prevent serious harm to persons or property, they may not be entered, monitored, searched, wiretapped, or closed without a prior judicial warrant, for a limited period, and in circumstances specified by law, in a manner that preserves the dignity of their inhabitants. The judicial order must be presented and a copy delivered to the resident of the house before any measure is taken.”*

The Yemeni Penal Code No. (12) of 1994 also criminalizes violations of the sanctity of homes under Article (253), paragraph (1): *“Anyone who violates the sanctity of a home, whether by storming it or assaulting and terrorizing its residents, shall be punished with imprisonment for a period not exceeding one year or with a fine.”* The punishment increases to imprisonment for up to five years or a fine if the crime is committed at night, by using violence against persons or property, by using a weapon, or by two or more people. It is considered an aggravating circumstance if a public official or someone impersonating that capacity commits the crime. If the home invasion results in the death of a person, the punishment is execution.⁽¹⁾

Furthermore, Article (3) of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 provides protection for persons under control, whether civilians or captured combatants, from *“violence to life and person, in particular murder of all kinds, mutilation, cruel treatment, and torture, as well as outrages upon personal dignity, particularly humiliating and degrading treatment.”*

Executive Summary

The field research team of the American Center for Justice (ACJ) in Yemen conducted on-the-ground visits to verify and investigate the accuracy and credibility of the information and data received and collected from both direct and open sources. The team carried out 21 interviews with some victims, their families, and witnesses, in addition to verifying 32 documents that confirmed the validity of this information, including medical reports, written complaints, and audio recordings.

The American Center for Justice (ACJ) confirmed that the Houthi group carried out a violent armed attack on the home of the elderly Sheikh Saleh Hantous, which lasted for 18 hours. During this attack, 89 violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law were committed. These violations included one case of killing, four cases of injury (including one woman), 37 cases of spreading fear among civilians, 12 cases of abduction and enforced disappearance, 20 families subjected to forced displacement, three homes completely destroyed, four homes partially damaged, four vehicles partially damaged, three cases of home raids and looting of their contents, and one case of partial damage to a place of worship.

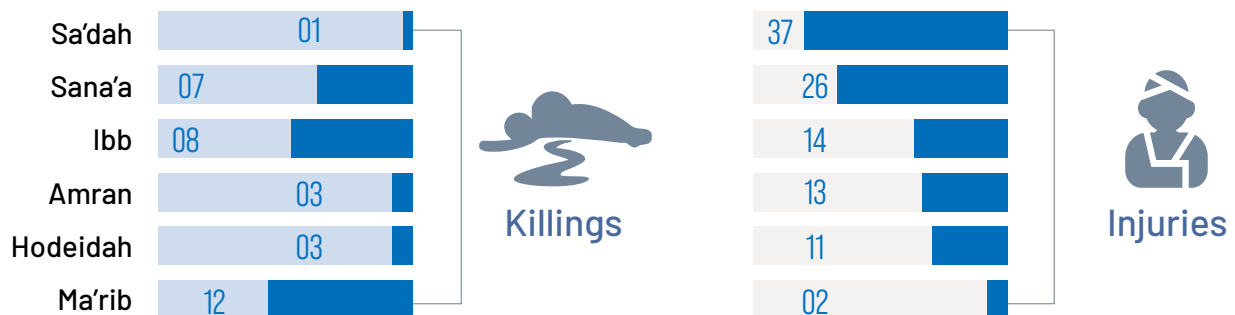
(1) According to Yemeni tribal customs, killing a woman or an elderly man—or even merely assaulting or terrorizing them—falls under what is known as a “black shame”. Anyone who commits such an act is deemed dishonored in the eyes of the entire community and faces complete social ostracism, regardless of status or standing. Tribal justice further dictates that the perpetrator be tried before the tribe and subjected to the harshest penalties, the minimum of which is the so-called *al-muhadda’ ash*, a customary sanction that imposes eleven times the normal punishment. If the offender commits two “black shames” together, the penalty is multiplied to the *murabba’ al-muhadda’ ash*, equivalent to forty-four penalties. Under customary law, the same blame and punishment apply equally to the perpetrator, the protector, or anyone who conceals the crime.

Statistics

A documented statistic from the American Center for Justice (ACJ) indicates that during the period 2014–2025, the Houthi group committed dozens of violations based on sectarian and ideological grounds, targeting preachers, mosque imams, and Quran teachers. These violations included:

76 Victims Cases of Killings:
Among them were 20 Quran teachers, 26 preachers and mosque imams, and 3 muezzins.

111 Victims Cases of Injuries:
Among them were 49 Quran teachers, 29 preachers, 28 imams, and 5 muezzins.



379

Cases of Kidnapping and Arbitrary Detention

The American Center for Justice (ACJ) also documented a total of 379 cases of kidnapping and arbitrary detention during the same period, including 199 Qur'an teachers, 105 preachers, 61 imams, and 14 muezzins, all affiliated with the Sunni community.

(20) detainees from among the followers of the Zaidi scholar Mohammed bin Awad al-Muwaidi, who had a prior dispute with Badr al-Din al-Houthi.

(141) detainees were forcibly disappeared, including 77 Qur'an teachers, and 64 preachers, imams, and muezzins.

Meanwhile, (53) others were subjected to various forms of torture, including 31 Qur'an teachers and 22 preachers, imams, and muezzins.

Report Context

Al-Baydha Village is one of the villages of the Bani Nafi' sub-district, located east of the center of Al-Salafiyah District in Raymah Governorate (southwest Yemen). It is bordered to the east by Al-Dumer sub-district, to the west by the Bani Al-Qurdi sub-district, to the north by Bani Al-Wahidi, and to the south by Bani Al-Jaradi. The village is divided into two areas, Upper and Lower, separated by the Bani Al-Askari sub-district, with a total area of 35 km². Its population reached 8,001 people, distributed across 1,029 houses, according to the results of the 2004 surveys.

The Houthi group took control of Al-Baydha Village in late December 2014 after consolidating full control over Raymah Governorate. This followed their expansion into Hodeida Governorate, which they seized in mid-October of the same year, becoming the first governorate to fall after the capital, Sana'a. In 2016, the Houthis established the first closed military zone in the Dhla' area of Bani Nafi', just 500 meters southeast of Al-Baydha Village—the location addressed in this report.

Events Leading Up to the Incident

The killing of Sheikh Saleh Hantous was neither an isolated incident nor a spontaneous crime. It was preceded by a series of violations he was subjected to—not because of any criminal or political offense he had committed, but because of the beliefs, methodology, and doctrine he adhered to. The Houthi group regarded those beliefs as hostile to its own and was unwilling to allow the existence of, or coexist with, any alternative ideology. Instead, it worked relentlessly to eliminate it by all possible means.

For this reason, prior to the armed attack, the victim had already been subjected to several violations during the period from 2017 to 2025. These included the suspension of the salaries of both the victim and his wife, who worked in the educational field, starting at the end of 2016, and preventing him from teaching at the Quranic School known as Dar Al-Ghufran. This was followed by the forcible closure of the school, expulsion of the students, and looting of its contents, which included a bakery, a library, and furnishings estimated to be worth approximately \$120,000. The Houthis did not stop there; they also set fire to the school's library, which destroyed all of its scientific and literary collections.

Details of the Armed Attack on the Victim's House

At 6:00 AM on Tuesday, July 1, 2025, Sheikh Saleh Hantous went out to perform the Fajr prayer accompanied by four of his brother Saad's children and their sons. The Sheikh called to the prayer (the Adhan) and led the prayer with them. As soon as the prayer ended, some members of the Houthi campaign opened fire on him with a hail of bullets. No one was injured at that moment. The Sheikh quickly returned home, leaving the mosque open. Meanwhile, some of his relatives fell into the hands of Houthi forces, who had already deployed at all the entrances, exits of the village, positioning their medium and light weapons on the surrounding hills and mountaintops, waiting for the zero hour, and orders to strike the pre-identified targets.

One witness, N.G.A., recounted, "Abdulrahman Saad Hantous and some of his children tried to flee the mosque toward their home, but the campaign forces pursued them. Their fate was either

injury or abduction. Before dawn, Houthi militants had already taken control of the mosque and spread across all the entrances and exits of Al-Baydha Village, eventually reaching Sheikh Saleh's house. They surrounded and besieged it from all sides, not to negotiate or resolve the situation, but to locate the Sheikh and make it easier for them to eliminate him."

According to the witness, "The heads of the campaign included Faris Hilal Rub'a, Director of Al-Salafiyah District; Abu Nasr Muhammad Al-Hasani, Director of National Security in the district; Yusuf Al-Ahdal, Director of the Intelligence Apparatus; Qasim Ahmed Al-Qahwi, Supervisor of the Southern Security Sector in the same district; in addition to the Chief of Operations of the Fifth Military Zone."

The forces stationed at Al-Rubou' Market fully displayed their strength before surrounding and besieging Al-Baydha Village, whose residents had already been displaced to schools, prior to beginning the violent shelling of the victim's house.

Fatima Ghalib, the victim's wife, told the American Center for Justice (ACJ), "The Houthis positioned their medium-range weapons on the hills and slopes overlooking our house, while the rest of their forces spread into the surrounding homes. They began a violent and continuous bombardment from 9:30 AM until 12:00 PM, during which my husband resisted alone, moving from place to place with only his personal Kalashnikov. Meanwhile, the rest of Saad Hantous's children and grandchildren stayed in their home until Houthi campaign members raided it, abducting them along with their women and children using their personal identification, and took them to an unknown location.

She continued, "The Houthi shelling continued intermittently from 1:00 PM until 3:00 PM, with heavy gunfire from snipers stationed inside our neighbors' homes, targeting me with a bullet that hit the toes of my left foot while I was in my bedroom. The bombardment then subsided slightly to allow for resumed negotiations, and the Houthis demanded that we leave. My husband requested that the campaign be lifted and granted him at least a one-week reprieve, but they refused, insisting he surrender immediately. They then resumed the shelling in an even heavier and continuous manner until 3:00 AM, despite knowing that the Sheikh had been killed after the Isha prayer."

Between 7:00 PM, after the Maghrib prayer, and 8:00 PM, after the Isha prayer, on Tuesday, July 1, 2025, members of the Houthi group targeted the victim's house with several RPG-7 grenades, caliber 40 mm. One of the grenades penetrated the protective wall of his roof, where he was taking cover, causing him to be hit by multiple shrapnel fragments scattered across different parts of his body, in addition to several gunshot wounds. He was left bleeding throughout the night without anyone being allowed to reach him to provide medical aid. He remained in this condition until Houthi militants raided the house the following morning, retrieving his blood-soaked body. They then searched the house, tampered with its contents, looted valuable items, and took the Sheikh's corpse to prevent it from being subjected to forensic examination or autopsy, which could have revealed the location of the injuries and the types of weapons used, or captured by camera footage, thereby exposing the severity of the crime inflicted on the victim.

On Thursday, July 3, 2025, specifically at 12:30 AM, the Houthis, along with some of the victim's relatives loyal to them, buried Sheikh Saleh Hantous without allowing his wife to have a final farewell. She had been on her way to attend the burial ceremony scheduled for the following

morning according to a prior agreement with the Houthis, which they violated, fearing the gathering of a large number of mourners if the burial had taken place during the day.

Violations Accompanying the Incident

* Alongside the primary violation—the killing of the victim, Saleh Hantous, inside his home—other accompanying violations occurred, including spreading fear among civilians, abduction and enforced disappearance of civilians, injuries, and the forced displacement of dozens of residents of Al-Bayda’a village, as well as the raiding, looting, and partial or total destruction of homes. Some of these violations are summarized as follows:

Violation One: Abduction and Enforced Disappearance

The violations of the armed Houthi campaign were not limited to the killing of the elderly Sheikh Saleh Hantous and the injury and intimidation of some family members; they also included an abduction campaign affecting 12 victims from the same family, including 4 children, as detailed in the following table:

List of the Names of the Victims Detained on 1st July 2025

No.	Victim’s Name	Age	No.	Victim’s Name	Age
1	Abdulrahman Saad Ahmed Hantous	48	7	Anas Abdulrahman Saad Hantous	10
2	Osama Abdulrahman Saad Hantous	20	8	Hamzah Saad Ahmed Hantous	23
3	Suleiman Abdulrahman Saad Hantous	18	9	Abdulmajid Yahya Hantous	11
4	Asad Abdulrahman Saad Hantous	16	10	Ghamdan Ali Mohammed Hantous	10
5	Bassam Abdulrahman Saad Hantous	12	11	Mulatif Mohammed Ghalib Al-Maswari	25
6	Hamid Mansour Saleh Baqash	40	12	Abdu Saleh Al-Haj Saadi	37

According to the testimonies of witnesses (S.M.N.) and (A.A.D.) submitted to the Center, the Houthi group forcibly took the victims to a private detention facility under the group’s control in Al-Jabeen District, the administrative center of the governorate. They were later transferred to an unknown location and remain subjected to enforced disappearance, completely cut off from the outside world. They have not been allowed to communicate with any relatives, nor have their families been permitted to visit or check on their well-being.

In a documented statement to the American Center for Justice (ACJ), (S.S.H.), a relative of the abductees, reported receiving reliable information from inside the detention facility where his family members were previously held in the governorate center. This information confirms that they were subjected to torture before being transferred to an unknown location, in order to extract forced confessions implicating themselves in acts they did not commit. This includes the case of the victim Sheikh Saleh Hantous, who was accused of involvement in events completely unrelated to him—a pattern that the Houthi group consistently follows in handling such cases, especially those that could cause significant public embarrassment locally or internationally, for which they cannot provide a credible justification.(1)

(1) Lawyer Abdulbaset Ghazi, the victims’ attorney, confirmed in a post on his Facebook account dated August 5, 2025, that the Houthi group had referred the detained victims to the Specialized Criminal Prosecution in Al-Hodeida Governorate, in preparation for bringing them to trial. He expressed his deep regret and sorrow over this arbitrary measure against those who had been abducted from their homes.

Violation Two: Assault on Physical Integrity

Case One

Victims: Hamza Saad Hantous, 25, Osama Abdulrahman Saad Hantous, 30, and Suleiman Abdulrahman Hantous, 28.

The three victims were shot by Houthi armed militants during their military campaign, specifically during the first attack on the mosque in Al-Baydha village, Bani Nafea sub-district, part of Al-Salafiyah District. The assault did not end there; the campaign's forces then abducted the three wounded victims and took them to an unknown location. Their injuries continued to bleed without allowing them to receive proper dressing, first aid, or even basic pain relief.

Case Two: Fatima Ghalib Ali Al-Maswari (52 years old)

The victim recounted the incident to the Center, saying, "At 3:00 PM on Monday, July 1, 2025, while I was sitting in my bedroom, I was targeted by a Houthi sniper positioned in the houses opposite ours. A bullet penetrated the window and struck my left foot, causing a deep wound and nerve damage." Her injury was shown in a medical report of which the Center holds a copy.

Violation Three: Spreading Fear Among Civilians

Dozens of families in Al-Baydha Village were subjected to extreme fear as a result of the Houthi group's use of excessive violence and lethal force during the attack on the house of the elderly Sheikh and his family. This caused panic, anxiety, and terror, particularly among children and women, especially the victim's family members who were inside the house. Two cases are highlighted as examples:

Case One: Victim: Saleh Hantous's wife, Fatima Al-Maswari, 52. The wife of Saleh Hantous and her elderly mother experienced intense fear while confined in a dark room inside a house besieged from all sides by death, with bullets and explosives raining down like a storm. She was unable to go to the roof to check on her husband or tend to his wounds, especially after being warned through intermediaries that Houthi forces would target anyone attempting to move within the house. In addition, they were left without food for 24 hours.

At dawn on Wednesday, July 2, 2025, her brothers arrived and took her and her mother to the family home in Al-'Aridhah Village, Maswar Sub-district, part of Mazhar District, Raymah Governorate.

The wife of Sheikh Hantous told the ACJ(1) that she and her mother remained trapped inside a single room on the ground floor of the house, which was besieged by Houthi militants. Explosives and gunfire rained down from all the surrounding hills and nearby homes. The situation became even more terrifying after darkness fell and an atmosphere of complete dread settled over the village. Their fear intensified when they confirmed the death of the Sheikh from the militants' shells and gunfire. Panic reached its peak when, around midnight, the Houthis climbed the walls of the house to reach the roof before storming it entirely, with the apparent intention of abducting her husband's corpse.

(1) The American Center for Justice held a hearing session with the wife of Sheikh Saleh Hantous in Taiz, where she arrived on 7/2/2025/ after leaving her residence and her destroyed home, carrying with her deep wounds that will remain etched in her memory forever.

The same occurred with the wife of Abdulrahman Saad Ahmed Hantous and her children, along with the wives of his four sons (Suleiman, Osama, Hamzah, and Asad) and their eight children, who at the time were inside the house of Sheikh Saad Hantous (the elder brother of the victim). In addition, the wife of Yahya Abduh and her eight children, who were living on the second floor of Sheikh Saleh Hantous's house, were also affected. These five families, together with their children, endured an entire day of fear and terror because of the Houthi shelling and raids that targeted their homes, disrupting the peace and stability of everyone—men, women, and children alike. Most of them still suffer from psychological harm up to the time of writing this report.

Case Two

The elderly woman Sitra Qaed Al-Kubaishi, 90, the mother of Hantous's wife, was denied entry by Houthis campaign members to join her daughter. Instead, she was kept outside the house for more than ten hours without food or water, under the scorching sun, with no consideration for her old age. Her life was put at risk by placing her in an open area of clashes, in addition to the terror she endured because of the fear for her own life and anxiety for her daughter, who was inside her husband's house while she watched flames and fire rising from it due to heavy shelling. The Center obtained an audio recording of her screaming under bombardment, "Help us, people of God, the Houthis are killing us and bombing us inside our homes."

Reactions to the Incident

The Houthi Group: The group justified the incident by claiming that Sheikh Saleh Hantous had rebelled against the group and refused to appear at the Security Administration. This statement was issued by leaders affiliated with the group in Raymah governorate and published through their social media accounts.

The Legitimate Government: The Minister of Information, Moammar Al-Eryani, in a post on his account on the "X" platform, condemned the crime, considering the killing of Hantous a full-fledged extrajudicial execution. He called on the international community to clearly denounce the crime.

Relatives of the Victim: They told (ACJ) that Sheikh Hantous did not refuse the Houthis' request to appear, but rather demanded a judicial order from the competent authorities. He had appointed lawyer Abdulbaset Ghazi to represent him before the official bodies. The Center also documented an audio recording of the victim during the attack on his house, in which he pleaded for an end to the unjustified assault. The incident sparked wide criticism from human rights defenders and activists, who demanded that the perpetrators be brought to justice.

Findings

Through this report, the Center reached a number of conclusions:

1. It was established that the Houthi group carried out a violent and unjustified armed attack on the home of the victim, Saleh Hantous, using excessive force in terms of the number of vehicles, personnel, and weapons. This resulted in several serious violations of international and domestic law, including:

The killing of the victim, Saleh Hantous, inside his home, followed by his burial at night, while preventing any funeral rites or condolences for his family, in addition to storming his home and the homes of his brothers and looting their contents.

The arrest of 12 relatives of the victim, including 4 children.

The injury of 4 civilians, including a woman, because of the shelling of the victim's house.

2. The military campaign instilled fear among dozens of families, including children and women, and caused forced displacement from the village.

Recommendations

To the Houthi Group

Immediately cease all human rights violations against civilians in the areas under its control, and release all individuals who were forcibly detained in connection with this incident without conditions or restrictions.

Respect freedom of thought, culture, and belief, and refrain from attacking those who hold differing opinions or follow different sects in any manner.

Comply with the announced state of truce in Yemen, and stop all forms of violations that could undermine peace efforts aimed at ending the war and protecting the lives of Yemenis.

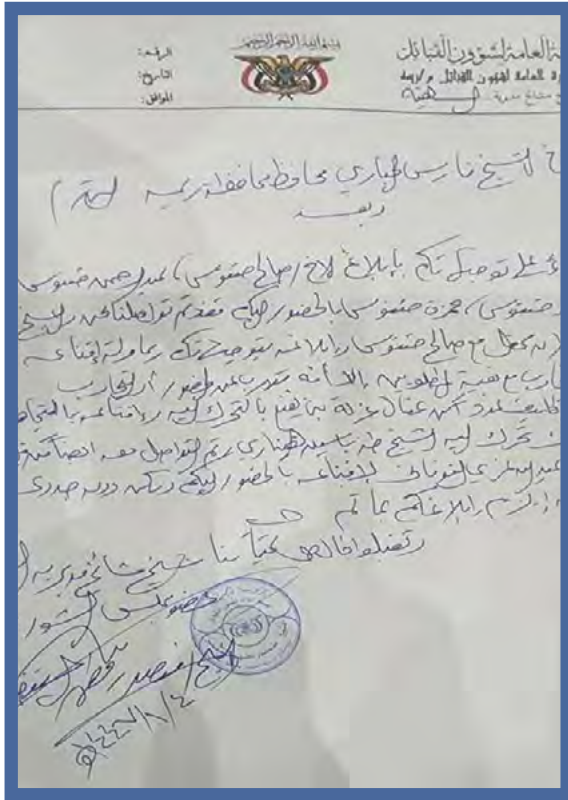
To National Commission to Investigate Alleged Violations of Human Rights (NCIAVHR)

Expedite a transparent and urgent investigation into the assassination of Sheikh Saleh Hantous and all related violations and harms suffered by other family members.

Prepare a comprehensive legal human rights file and submit it to the legitimate judicial authorities in the country to initiate immediate prosecution of those responsible for these violations.

Attached to the report is a copy of written documents issued by the leadership of the Houthi group.

Attached to the report are copies of the power-of-attorney documents.





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