

# **Yemen (Republic of)**

**Last updated: 31-01-2004**

## **Location and area**

Yemen is a country in southwestern Asia, on the southwestern coast of the Arabian Peninsula. It is bordered on the north by Saudi Arabia, on the east by Oman, on the south by the Gulf of Aden, and on the west by the Red Sea. The interior boundaries are mostly undemarcated. Yemen includes the islands of Socotra in the Gulf of Aden, Kamaran in the Red Sea, and Perim in the strait of Bab el Mandeb. The area of Yemen is about 527,970 km<sup>2</sup>. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

## **Topography**

Yemen can be divided in four regions:

1. The southern region is a narrow, sandy, almost rainless area with a coastline of about 1,200 km extending along the Gulf of Aden.
2. Along the western coast a semi-desert region, the Tihamah, extends inland an average of 50 km. This area has a coastline of about 450 km along the Red Sea.
3. The mountain area, with mountains broken by deep valleys, and highland plateaux dominate the centre of the country, where abundant but irregular seasonal rainfall sustains an agricultural economy. The highest mountain in Yemen is Jabal an-Nabi Shuayb, which rises to 3,760 m above sea level. The largest valley is Hadhramaut in the central region. The highlands have no permanent streams, but numerous wadis (watercourses that are dry except in the rainy season) have cut valleys and gorges in the terrain.
4. Near the northeastern border the elevations decrease, and the land is dominated by the great sandy desert of the Rub' al Khali ("Empty Quarter"). (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

## **Climate**

The climate of the coastal plains is hot and dry; the average annual temperature is about 28° C. Average annual rainfall is 75 mm on the southern coast, 230 mm on the western coast. Winds blowing northwest in summer and southwest in winter bring severe sandstorms. The mountainous interior has a temperate climate, and the winters are generally cool. Annual rainfall in the highlands ranges from approximately 400 to 750 mm, making this the Arabian Peninsula's rainiest area. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

## **Land use**

Yemen's most productive farmlands are found in the wadi areas and near springs and oases. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

## **Wetlands**

*Wadi* systems throughout Yemen are being adversely affected by severe degradation of the catchments as a result of deforestation for fuelwood and the charcoal industry, and overgrazing by domestic livestock. The Ta'izz marshes are critically threatened by excessive extraction of groundwater and conversion to agriculture. (Spiers 1999).

According to the interpreted World Soil Map (Van Engelen & Huting 2002) no histosols nor gley soils exist in Yemen.