

hold them accountable—I decided instead to excuse myself from the meeting as I objected to this kind of behavior. Although my behavior may have seemed disrespectful to the Yemini minister, I believe it was the only solution to avoid any embarrassment for the delegation. Offering khat to guests is a favored custom for many Yeminis and that is the origin of the scourge, unfortunately, because the prevailing legitimate *fatwa*—religious declaration—says that khat is *halal*, being considered a stimulant and not a drug. Whether the truth is this or that, it is still a major cause of cancer, a waste of water reserves, and a product only consumed locally because it cannot be exported. I'm only saying this because it is a given that Yemen has vast fertile lands suitable for the cultivation of coffee, nuts, and fruits of all kinds. So how can poverty and famine coexist in a country basking in all these blessings? Let's not forget the enormous potential for wealth from fishing, tourism, oil and gas, and a strategic location for some of the world's most important ports. Yet, we still see poverty and illiteracy destroying Yemen.

How can a number of Yemini scholars consider a pest like khat to be halal? How can officials allow this practice to be legal in a country that requires a decisive storm against the deadly “Kawkaban Trio” of poverty, illiteracy, and khat.