



شبكة التضامن النسوي
Women Solidarity Network



CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Statement by Ms. Rasha Jarhum Security Council Open Arrria-formula Meeting 8 March 2021

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today about the importance of women's participation in peace and security by sharing the example of my own country, Yemen. I am Rasha Jarhum, co-founder and Director of the [Peace Track Initiative](#). Today, I brief you on behalf of my organization and the [Women Solidarity Network](#), which together represent more than 300 Yemeni women leaders.

When the war broke out in Yemen seven years ago, we feared a protracted conflict. We had to focus all our efforts on building peace. Our members have stepped in to facilitate local ceasefires and mediate an end to conflicts over water and land.¹ In Taiz, our members have negotiated opening humanitarian corridors and undertaking evacuations, sometimes tiptoeing around landmines and dodging sniper bullets to bring food to families trapped in crossfire.² Our members, like the Mothers of Abductees Association, have contributed to releasing almost a thousand arbitrarily detained civilians.³ Yemeni women also actively participated during the national dialogue conference led by the UN in 2013, securing women's participation by almost 30%, and contributing to a landmark package of rights that included a 30% quota for women in all state levels.⁴

However, despite the leading role Yemeni women have played in working towards peace, we were subsequently excluded from peace negotiations held in Kuwait in 2016 and Stockholm in 2018, as well as all the committees established thereafter.⁵ Today, women are completely excluded from Track I diplomacy and their participation is limited to a tokenistic role on the sidelines as advisors that are not meaningfully consulted. Women have also been completely excluded from the formation of the new government. This contradicts the national dialogue outcomes and represents a historic failure as it is the first cabinet in two decades with no women.⁶ It also contradicts the Yemeni government's own Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan, launched last year, which calls for women's inclusion.⁷

Despite the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire, which was welcomed by all the conflict parties,⁸ arms have continued to flow into the country and hostilities have escalated,⁹ including in Mareb, where a Houthis offensive has disproportionately affected women and girls and caused widespread displacement. Although Yemeni women's organizations first sounded the alarm for a ceasefire to address COVID-19,¹⁰ our requests to

¹ Women Solidarity Network, Mareb Ceasefire Initiative, 24 June 2020, <https://www.womensolidaritynetwork.org/news-statements-en/mareb-ceasefire-initiative>.

² Forbes, Jackie Abramian Yemen's First Responders Are Women Peace Builders, 28 May 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jackieabramian/2020/05/28/yemens-first-responders-are-women-peace-builders/?sh=46891397592b>.

³ Peace Track Initiative, Yemeni detainees' plight and the political will for peace, 10 April 2020, <https://medium.com/@PeaceTrackInitiative/yemeni-detainees-plaint-and-the-political-will-for-peace-57cd9fbc512a>.

⁴ WILPF, Changes Ahead: Yemeni Women Map the Road to Peace, December 2018, https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/WILPF_Yemen-Publication_web.pdf.

⁵ Council on Foreign Relations, Women's Participation in Peace Processes, Yemen Case Study, 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/womens-participation-in-peace-processes/yemen>.

⁶ Peace Track Initiative and Women Solidarity Network, Yemeni women's statement on a government without women, 18 December 2020, <https://sites.google.com/view/nowomennogovernment/press-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B9%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%A9>.

⁷ Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) Republic of Yemen Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, National Action Plan to Implement United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security 2020 –2023, 13 February 2020, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/124TDuOLOjX1kfXt-qrH9ZHwB6e5WoX0/view>.

⁸ Reuters, Mohammed Ghabari, Lisa Barrington, Yemen warring parties back U.N. truce call, as U.S. starts aid reduction, 26 March 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security/yemen-warring-parties-back-u-n-truce-call-as-u-s-starts-aid-reduction-idUSKBN21D0KN>.

⁹ UN Press Release, Amid Unrelenting Violence, Spread of COVID-19, Crisis in Yemen at Its Worst, Top Officials Tell Security Council, Warning Inaction Will Push Country into Abyss, SC/14266, 28 July 2020, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/sc14266.doc.htm>.

¹⁰ Food4Humanity Foundation, Yemen's Food for Humanity Foundation: Humanity calls for an immediate cease fire to ensure an emergency medical response, 23 March 2020, <https://icanpeacework.org/2020/03/23/yemens-food-for-humanity-foundation-humanity-calls-for-an-immediate-cess-fire-to-ensure-an-emergency-medical-response/>.

obtain the draft of the ceasefire agreement in order to support these efforts were rebuffed under the pretext of safeguarding the fragile peace process. The draft was not even shared with the Yemeni Women's Technical Advisory Group.

We have heard all types of patriarchal excuses justifying women's exclusion — excuses that question our qualifications, our legitimacy, our ability to represent our constituencies, our agency and our very right to participate in public life. However, the most frustrating justification of all is that including women will upset the negotiating parties and disrupt a fragile peace process. When we point to Resolution 2451 (2018), which underlines the importance of women's full participation, or refer to Yemen's obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), we are told that ending war comes before fulfilling our human rights. We hear these excuses not only from our own government, but also from the UN and supportive Member States. As mediators, we understand the challenges involved in mediation. As activists dedicated to peace, we recognize the important efforts made and share the same goal of ending conflict. But to appease conflict parties who have shed blood to advance their narrow political gains over an inclusive peace process and women's rights, directly contradicts the fundamental premise of Resolution 1325 (2000). Without women, and without gender equality, peace is not an attainable goal.

In Yemen, we learned that exclusion from the UN-led peace process helped legitimize women's exclusion in other spaces. We also learned that a lack of political will combined with zero accountability meant that nobody could be held responsible for ensuring women's participation. We believe that the UN can play an important role in changing this unacceptable status quo not only in Yemen, but around the world, by using its influence and resources to make the peace processes it supports more inclusive. This would send a strong message to Member States, national governments and conflict parties that the UN's value of equality is not negotiable and will never be compromised for an expedient political solution.

An additional key challenge to women's participation in both Yemen and in other fragile countries today, such as Iraq, Libya or Afghanistan, is retaliation for participating in public and political life, for advocating for human rights or engaging in other activities contributing to peace. Today, the violations and abuses against women and girls in Yemen have reached a level never witnessed before.¹¹ As noted by the Group of Eminent Experts, sexual violence is used against women and girls by all parties to the conflict. The Houthis in particular have arbitrarily detained, tortured and repeatedly raped women and girls who oppose them.¹² Some of these women have been targeted simply for participating in demonstrations against hunger or calling for disbursement of their salaries. In November 2020, the Houthis also issued death sentences against 91 civilians,¹³ such as journalists and political leaders,¹⁴ including Dr. Nadia Al-Sakkaf,¹⁵ a member of the Women Solidarity Network.

Here, we thank the Security Council for including an individual responsible for, and I quote, a “policy of intimidation and use of systematic arrest, detention, torture, sexual violence and rape against politically active women” on the sanctions list last month.¹⁶ You have taken an important first step towards bringing justice to hundreds of Yemeni women and addressing a life-threatening obstacle to our ability to participate in defining the future of our country.

To build lasting peace in Yemen, we urge the Council to support an inclusive, transparent and accountable peace process ensuring multi-party participation, and ensure the meaningful participation of women, youth and civil society of all political backgrounds from all regions of Yemen, including the South, in all diplomatic tracks and

¹¹ See, for example, “A Pandemic of Impunity in a Tortured Land”, Situation of human rights in Yemen, including violations and abuses since September 2014, Report of the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen, UN Index: A/HRC/45/6, 28 September 2020, paragraph 80. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=26315&LangID=E>; and “Situation of human rights in Yemen, including violations and abuses since September 2014, Detailed findings of the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen”, UN Index : A/HRC/45/CRP.7, paragraph 331.

¹² See, for example, “Situation of human rights in Yemen, including violations and abuses since September 2014, Detailed findings of the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen”, UN Index: A/HRC/45/CRP.7, paragraphs 105, 173 –174, 205 – 213, 331.

¹³ Debriefer, Houthi group sentences 91 political, military opponents to death, 26 November, 2020, <https://debriefer.net/en/news-21407.html>.

¹⁴ Human Rights Watch, Yemen: Jailed Journalists Face Abuse, Death Penalty, 6 November 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/11/06/yemen-jailed-journalists-face-abuse-death-penalty>.

¹⁵ Women Solidarity Network, Solidarity Statement with Dr. Nadia Al-Sakkaf, 13 December 2020, <https://www.womensolidaritynetwork.org/news-statements-en/solidarity-statement-with-dr-nadia-al-sakkaf>.

¹⁶ UN Security Council, Resolution 2564, S/RES/2564 (2021), [https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2564\(2021\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2564(2021)).

stages of the peace process. We also urge the Council to support the protection of women, including women political leaders, and call for immediate release of those who have been arbitrarily detained.

But we need the UN and this Council to do much more. Our experience in Yemen, reflected in so many other countries mired in conflict, is clear evidence that women's participation cannot be left to negotiation or to the will of conflict parties — doing so is a guarantee that our rights will be demoted in favor of patriarchal philosophies of mediation that reward violence. The UN must defend the standard for women's participation. Women's participation must be direct, formal and substantive. We must have influence over the outcome, otherwise our participation is just superficial. Our participation is not free if we have to live with the constant fear of arrest, torture, rape or death sentences. And, above all, women's equal participation must be the norm in all peace processes the UN supports.

To mark the 20th anniversary of Resolution 1325 (2000) last year, over 500 civil society groups worldwide endorsed the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security's [open letter](#) calling for women's participation to be a requirement in UN-led peace processes. Today, you have an opportunity to heed our collective calls for action and make historic change to advance women's rights.

Let us not lose our fierceness in working for gender equality and justice and not compromise women's rights.

Thank you and I look forward to today's discussion.