

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Statement by Ms. Entesar Al-Qadhi to the UN Security Council 10 September 2021

Madam President, Excellencies,

My name is Entesar Al-Qadhi and I represent the Marib Girls Foundation, an organization that promotes peace and women's rights in Yemen. I'm grateful for the opportunity to brief you today about what's happening inside Yemen and, in particular, Marib.

You hear a lot about the cruelty of war, but we live it on a daily basis. The war in Yemen has already claimed more than 233,000 lives, yet it continues. The ongoing offensive on Marib is terrorizing civilians, disrupting humanitarian access and increasing the likelihood that fighting will open new fronts in neighboring governorates. I, myself, recently lost two of my nephews, both younger than 15 years old, in a Houthi attack that targeted our area. Loss of loved ones has become a norm for us people of Marib.

Madam President, we are facing a humanitarian crisis in Marib that will only worsen unless there is a ceasefire. This week alone, around 200 families from Rahba district fled from their homes to escape attack. Three of these families are my own relatives. More than a quarter of Yemen's displaced people now live in our governorate, 80% of whom are women and children. I visit them regularly through my work at Marib Girls Foundation and listen to their testimonies that weigh on my conscience. I have met many families who have been displaced more than once, sometimes up to five times. Even in the IDP camps, they risk death from drones and ballistic missiles every day. A woman mourning the loss of her son who was killed by a missile lamented: "We left everything, and the Houthis are still chasing us to the tents? When will they stop?"

Beyond the threat of missiles, the conditions in the IDP camps are dire, and we lack sufficient assistance and services. People are battered by winds, floods and heat of the desert without sufficient shelter. Public services in Marib have collapsed, depriving people of clean water, sanitation, enough latrines and healthcare, fostering a breeding ground for cholera and COVID-19. Al-Jufainah camp, the largest displacement site in the country, has 12 classrooms while hosting over 7,000 students — a number that keeps growing with the ongoing displacement. Many children have dropped out of school as a result of the insufficient services, as well as the pressure to economically support their families.

In the camps, women and girls face difficult conditions, such as a lack of hygiene supplies, risk of abuse when visiting the latrines, and a lack of services for pregnant mothers. Opportunities for employment are scarce or are not culturally acceptable for women. Most women earn barely enough to cover their needs making handicrafts. In addition, most girls are forced to stay at home to support their families or cannot afford school fees. Eight-year-old Amira recently told me, "I dream of a latrine that is not far from our shelter, where my family and I have some sense of privacy and feel safe." Now, girls we meet dream of safety instead of their future.

The Marib Girls Foundation is working to address protection concerns and harmful social norms through workshops with community members and authorities. We are also supporting women with creating new businesses, as women-headed households especially struggle to find employment. But our work is complicated by limited resources and the fact that people have to keep fleeing violence. From our perspective, expecting a better humanitarian situation before a nationwide ceasefire is impossible.

Madam President, women and girls continue to be disproportionately affected by the ongoing conflict and play a critical role in the struggle for peace, yet are excluded from representation in the government and decision-making processes. Yemeni women have played a critical role in the struggle for peace, negotiating directly with the conflict parties, acting as mediators, securing the release of prisoners, and keeping humanitarian corridors or critical roadways open. Yet we are not even consulted, never mind included, ensuring that our perspectives, contributions and concerns will continue to be ignored. Across the country, there is pushback against women's participation in public life. In the North, the Houthis have enshrined religious sectarianism in the educational

curriculum and are imposing segregation between sexes in public forums. Meanwhile, the newly formed government excluded women from positions for the first time in two decades, despite the 30% quota from the National Dialogue process. While the fight for gender equality marches on in other parts of the world, it is in retreat in Yemen, held hostage by decades of war.

Working with diverse and broad representatives from civil society, especially women and youth, will be critical to our new Special Envoy's success and to Yemen's future. I welcome Special Envoy Grundberg, and I urge him to use his mandate to prioritize the interests, concerns and experiences of all Yemenis, not only those of the conflict parties. Special Envoy Grundberg must prioritize and support an inclusive peace process, not one imposed by regional projects or international interests. He also must consult regularly and transparently with civil society, especially diverse women's groups, throughout the entirety of the peace process, and ensure that diverse women representatives directly participate in all steps — from shaping the agenda, to drafting a ceasefire agreement and engaging in negotiations.

In closing, Madam President, an immediate halt to the Houthi attacks on Marib is an economic, humanitarian and political necessity. This will only be achieved by joint calls of the international community to end the offensive. We know the conflict parties are giving pre-conditions for a ceasefire and for peace talks that focus on their interests, not on the needs of civilians. We know the strategic importance of our city. Marib is a major source of electricity for most Yemeni governorates, and produces about 80% of Yemen's gasoline needs, more than half of which goes to northern areas on a daily basis. But Marib is also home to over a million people. Is ending the bombardment on our lives less important than securing oil derivatives?

It is the right of the people of Marib, and of all Yemen civilians, to live and move freely, not to be sacrificed for political gains.

I therefore urge the UN Security Council to:

1. Take all necessary actions to demand the cessation of the Houthi attacks on Marib, including through the adoption of a resolution on a ceasefire that neither side can take advantage of. The Marib ceasefire should pave the way for a Yemen-wide ceasefire, that would support viable conditions for protecting civilians, especially women and girls, and lead to the resumption of peace negotiations. It must be clear that failure to do so will result in the imposition of additional targeted measures.
2. Call for and support an inclusive peace process and ensure the full, equal and meaningful participation of diverse women, youth and civil society — of all political backgrounds from all regions of Yemen — in all diplomatic tracks and stages of the peace process.
3. Call on conflict parties to allow full, unimpeded, sustained and secure humanitarian access for the principled passage of humanitarian relief for civilians in need.
4. Call on Member States to meet the \$1.9 billion funding gap for the UN Humanitarian Response Plan for Yemen, as well as initiate and coordinate with Member States the provision of a broader sustainable economic rescue package for Yemen that would help stabilize the economy and strengthen the financial system to prevent further food price rises and enhance living conditions.
5. Call for Member States to support women's civil society organizations through the provision of core, flexible and long-term funding.

Thank you, Madam President.