

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

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Statement to the UN Security Council
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Mr. President, Your Excellencies,

Thank you for providing me with this opportunity to brief the Council on behalf of the Peace Track Initiative and the Women's Solidarity Network, a coalition of 250 Yemeni women and women-led organizations working on the protection of women and peacebuilding in Yemen.

Yemen has been spiraling into a devastating war for over four years. In our country, there is a bleeding wound in every home, and a story of continuing loss and despair. Dying children scream "don't bury me" as the conflict ragesⁱ, but their cries go unnoticed.

The use of explosive weapons by the forces affiliated with the internationally recognized government and its allies in the Arab coalition, as well as by the Houthi armed group, has resulted in many civilian casualties. The warring parties continue to disregard international humanitarian law with virtual impunity – in Hodeida, in Taiz, and across the country. Meanwhile, actors directly or indirectly involved in the conflict are disregarding the main principles of the Arms Trade Treaty. The extensive use of landmines by the Houthisⁱⁱ has resulted in hundreds of deaths and injuriesⁱⁱⁱ, and is a direct impediment to accessing aid. Future generations will pay the price.

Mr. President, Your Excellencies,

As we prepare for the upcoming international day for the elimination of violence against women. I would like to remind you that Yemeni women were already suffering from legal, institutional and social violence. As a result, they now bear the burden of the multidimensional insecurities of this war. Documented cases of gender-based violence, including rape, rose by 70%^{iv} in the first five months of the war. Child marriages increased by 66%^v.

The women in the besieged city of Taiz spend long hours walking through rough terrain or traversing areas controlled by armed groups, where they are repeatedly harassed. They do this to provide their families with basic life necessities, and to protect their men from forced recruitment, abduction, detention and torture^{vi}. Young women, including Sana'a University students, have been subjected to violent repression by Houthi armed groups, including by Houthi women thugs known as Al-Zainabiyat. Some young women were beaten, electrocuted, arrested and released on the condition to refrain from engaging in activism. Others had male family members detained on their behalf.

We have supported many women human rights defenders in providing safe exit to neighboring countries, assisting in filing for asylum, and seeking resettlement in third countries. Unfortunately, none of these cases have resulted in resettlement. Although the Yemen refugee crisis does not in numbers amount to the Syrian one, it is still a problem affecting hundreds of thousands of Yemenis. Policies such as the Dublin Regulations of the EU^{vii}, the US Executive Order to ban seven nationalities, including

Yemen^{viii}, from entering the US, and the Saudi recent policies to deport Yemenis^{ix}, have contributed to separating families.

On the situation of the south, we echo the voices of the southern Yemeni women on the importance of reaching a just solution to the southern cause, and realize their right to self-determination. Today, the three-decade southern grievances still have not been addressed. We also see total exclusion of the southerners and their cause from the current peace framework and negotiations, justified usually by the limitations of UN Security Council (UNSC) resolution 2216 (2015), which is interpreted to limit negotiations to two sides.

Mr. President, Your Excellencies,

We, as women, have the highest stake in peace. Members of the Women's Solidarity Network relentlessly work to end bloody conflicts over water and land resources, to evacuate schools from armed groups, to restore the rights of our sons and daughters to education, and risk our lives on a daily basis to rescue families trapped in conflict zones. Many network members play leading roles in alleviating the suffering of citizens through conducting relief projects and negotiating the opening of humanitarian corridors.

We are particularly proud to share that the Association of the Mothers of Abductees Sons – who regularly demonstrate and call for the release of their sons, while enduring risks and abuse – were able to release 336 detainees. This is compared to zero detainees released through the UN-sponsored process. Other members of the network are actively working to stop the recruitment of children as combatants. They do so despite limited means to help these children. Meanwhile, the United Nations suspended^x, since 2016, its own programmes on disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration targeting children, citing security concerns and waiting for a political solution.

Mr. President, Your Excellencies,

The comprehensive National Dialogue Conference, organized under the auspices of the United Nations and supported by this Council, was an important milestone in the country's history. Yemeni women participated effectively to produce a landmark framework and charter for rights and freedoms. This was later reflected in the draft Constitution of 2015 and should remain fundamental in moving forward with any political resolution in Yemen.

Although women continue to play a leading role in peacebuilding, and the Council's Presidential Statement in 2017^{xi} explicitly calls for women's meaningful inclusion, women are still largely excluded from the peace negotiation process^{xii}. We attribute this to the patriarchal philosophy of peace mediation, which rewards violence by granting space at the negotiation table only to holders of weapons, rather to the real peacemakers.

We welcome the recent efforts of the Special Envoy to support the engagement of women, starting with the expansion of his gender team, and the establishment of the Women's Technical Advisory Group.

However, we emphasize that women’s engagement must not be restricted to an advisory role to the mediation effort: women must be meaningfully represented, present at the table, and engaged in decision-making.

Mr. President, Your Excellencies,

We join the many voices calling for a ceasefire and the resumption of the peace process. We affirm that there is no just and sustainable peace without an inclusive process. As you move forward in your discussions, resolutions, or other action, we strongly urge you to adopt the following recommendations:

A. Adopt Appropriate Security Measures:

1. Demand an immediate ceasefire, starting by ending the air bombardments led by the internationally recognized government and its allies in the Arab Coalition, and pursuing confidence-building measures towards restoring state institutions;
2. Call on the disarmament of all outlaw armed groups, demanding the relocation of military camps and depots outside of cities, and requesting the revival of the local security apparatus;
3. Enforce a ban on the Houthi use of landmines, urge them to submit landmines maps, request commencement of de-mining operations, and call for supporting landmine victims;
4. Call for the prevention of the transfer and use of arms in Yemen;
5. Demand lifting of restrictions on ports, as well as normalizing air traffic in all governorates, allowing commercial aviation to operate;
6. Enforce a ban on child recruitment, and request immediate revival of the demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration programmes for child combatants;
7. Call on the release of all arbitrarily detained and forcibly disappeared persons, particularly civilians, politicians, journalists, activists, and Baha’i minorities, and demand refraining from issuing death penalties;
8. Send peacekeepers to Yemen from neutral states that have not engaged in any way in the conflict in Yemen.

B. Revive the Political Process:

9. Call for immediate action to address the “logistical” challenges preventing the peace negotiations from happening, urging for a comprehensive and inclusive process, guided by the representation mechanism in the National Dialogue Conference^{xiii};
10. Adopt all papers submitted during the National Dialogue Conference, including the final document and visions submitted by all groups to inform the framework for a political solution in Yemen;
11. Demand the establishment of an international fund for reconstruction of Yemen, in a transparent manner, to be co-financed by the Arab coalition countries and the international community;
12. Enact measures to support economic stability, reconstruction and restoration of social services, while urging for the establishment of anti-corruption mechanisms;
13. Recognize the right of southerners in a just solution that speaks to the demands of southern people;
14. Demand a local ceasefire in Taiz governorate. and support our five-point initiative to protect civilians in Hodaidah^{xiv};

15. Demand initiation of resettlement programmes and asylum facilities to address the situation of Yemenis abroad;
16. Request a gender audit of ongoing relief operations, demand a solution for humanitarian diversions, and reiterate importance of integrating gender into humanitarian response plans;
17. Demand the establishment of a mechanism to hold perpetrators accountable within a wider context of transitional justice and reparations; impose individual targeted sanctions against warlords and those who obstruct the peace process; and request the Sanctions Committee include gender expertise and gender responsive reporting mechanisms.

C. Strengthen Engagement with Women Policymakers and Civil Society:

18. Recognize the priorities of women identified in the National Agenda for Women, Peace and Security^{xv}, submitted in 2016 to guide the peace process, and call on the government to report to the CEDAW committee;
19. Explicitly refer to Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security and subsequent resolutions in any forthcoming resolution or Presidential Statement on Yemen, in addition, clearly demand no less than 30 per cent of women participating in delegations and all related ceasefire and peace processes, and impose vacant seats if women are not included;
20. Mandate an independent women's delegation at the negotiating table;
21. Urge the Special Envoy to ensure that women have equal representation in the peace consultations process, and to address our demands sent to him in our letter March 2018^{xvi};
22. Call for the establishment of a mechanism to hear the voices of rural women as well as women victims and survivors of war, and to ensure that their priorities are integrated into the negotiation process and the political solution;
23. Demand support for women peacemakers, and urge allocation of funding directly and flexibly to grassroots women activists and women movements in order to support their efforts;
24. Call on the establishment of a clear mechanism to protect women and women human rights defenders, and to address their integrated protection needs, including physical, psychological, digital, and collective security.

We hope that these recommendations will be adopted, and that they will make a significant contribution to ending the conflict in Yemen. The lack of action on these recommendations is an immoral failure that contributes to the continued suffering of over 27 million Yemenis.

Thank you.

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- ⁱ Story of Farid: <https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-34572137>
- ⁱⁱ Conflict Arm (2018), Mines and IEDs employed by Houthi forces on Yemen's west coast: <http://www.conflictarm.com/dispatches/mines-and-ieds-employed-by-houthi-forces-on-yemens-west-coast/>
- ⁱⁱⁱ YCMHRV (2018), Victims of landmines in Yemen (September 2014-June 2018), The Yemeni Coalition for Monitoring Human Rights Violations.
- ^{iv} Care International (2016), No Future for Yemen Without Women and Girls
- ^v OCHA (2018), Humanitarian Needs Overview.
- ^{vi} The Association of Mothers of Abductees Sons (2018), "When Death is a wish"
- ^{vii} Story of Journalist Hind Al-Eryani: <https://www.thelocal.se/20181105/the-image-of-a-victim-is-not-what-i-want>
- ^{viii} NILC (2018), Trumps ban as experienced by Yemeni Americans <https://www.nilc.org/2018/04/25/trumps-ban-as-experienced-by-yemeni-americans/>
- ^{ix} UN Urges Saudi Arabia Not to Deport Yemeni Migrants to War Zone <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-saudi-migrants/u-n-urges-saudi-arabia-not-to-deport-yemeni-migrants-to-war-zone-idUSKBN1IA1F7>
- ^x The Humanitarian Response Plan 2016: https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/2016_hrp_yemen_20160217_0.pdf, page 36.
- ^{xi} Security Council Issues Presidential Statement Calling on Parties in Yemen to Engage Constructively in Good-Faith Effort for Conflict Resolution: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2017/sc12873.doc.htm>
- ^{xii} Letter from women to the UN Special Envoy <https://yemenwomenvoices.wordpress.com>
- ^{xiii} NDC quota: 30% women, 50% from the South (of which 75% is allocated for Hirak representatives), and 20% for young people. NDC final paper.
- ^{xiv} The Women Solidarity Network (2018), the five-point Initiative to protect civilians in Hodeida <https://www.facebook.com/1798620420210572/posts/1986690291403583/>
- ^{xv} The Women Solidarity Network (2016), The National Agenda on Women, Peace, and Security. <https://peacetrack.files.wordpress.com/2018/01/wps-national-agenda-en.pdf>
- ^{xvi} Letter from women to the UN Special Envoy <https://yemenwomenvoices.wordpress.com>