

Update on women, peace and security in Yemen November 22nd 2017

The Informal Expert Group of the Security Council on Women, Peace and Security met in March ([S/2017/627](#)) to discuss the situation in Yemen, and decided to reconvene once more during 2017 to follow up and review progress and challenges. This note summarizes relevant developments on women, peace and security in Yemen over the last eight months.

The Security Council

In **June**, the Security Council adopted a **presidential statement** focused on the humanitarian crisis. It concluded with the following paragraph; “The Security Council emphasises that the conflict in Yemen will only be resolved through the resumption of an inclusive political process, and calls upon all parties to the conflict to engage constructively and in good faith to overcome obstacles and find a peaceful solution. The Security Council calls upon the parties to ensure **at least 30 percent representation of women in peace negotiations**, and calls upon **the UN to regularly report on consultations with women leaders and women’s organisations** in line with resolution 2122 (2013).” Two months later, in **August**, the Council adopted a **presidential statement** on the risk of famine affecting Yemen, South Sudan, Somalia, and northern Nigeria, and noted the link between **food scarcity and increased vulnerability of women**.

The Council has been briefed on Yemen several times since the IEG’s meeting in March, and several gender issues have been raised by the Special Envoy, the Emergency Relief Coordinator, and Member States. These include maternal mortality, child marriage, the numbers of pregnant women that are malnourished, deep-rooted discrimination against women exacerbating the impact of the conflict, references to women casualties in specific attacks, the UN Special Envoy’s work with the Yemeni Women’s Pact for Peace and Security, reminders to the warring parties of their responsibilities under international humanitarian law and human rights law, including sexual and gender-based violence, calls to the government to establish national monitoring and reporting mechanisms to document violations of the human rights of women and ensure accountability for those responsible, women’s organizations mobilization for both peace and accountability, and specific Member States’ efforts to mobilize Yemeni civil society and political leaders to discuss women’s vision of a future transition.

The Council was also briefed for the first time by a woman from Yemeni civil society, Radhya al-Mutawakel from the Mwatana Organization for Human Rights. Her statement included passages like this: “The war is taking the greatest toll on Yemeni women, who have become prime civilian targets for all warring parties. They have lost their breadwinners, forcing them to suffer an even greater level of poverty than was evident before the conflict. Women are living an increasingly dangerous and insecure situation that restricts their movement and ability to fight poverty. Scenes of mothers, wives and daughters running from one prison to another in hope of hearing something about their detained and forcibly disappeared loved ones has been one of the hardest things to witness in this war.”

The largest humanitarian crisis in the world

The humanitarian crisis and security situation have only worsened since the meeting in March. There are now close to 21 million people (80 percent of the population) in need of humanitarian assistance and seven million of them are facing famine-like conditions, relying completely on food aid to survive. Close

to 400,000 children suffer from severe malnutrition and require therapeutic treatment to stay alive. This has been compounded by the largest single-year outbreak of cholera ever recorded - one million cases expected by the end of the year in a country where only 45 percent of health facilities are functioning - and the blockade of Yemen put in place by the Saudi-led coalition after Houthi rebels fired a ballistic missile aimed at Riyadh earlier this month. **The UN, humanitarian partners, and women's organizations have condemned this blockade** and repeatedly warned that it can bring about the largest famine the world has seen in decades. The price of food and cooking gas have increased sharply, which particularly impacts female-headed households and women in general as they struggle to feed their children.

In spite of the complexity of the situation, 133 humanitarian partners have been able to reach seven million Yemenis this year. The humanitarian response plan is 55 percent funded, with 1.3 billion out of the 2.3 billion required to reach 12 million people. According to UNFPA, this includes **2.5 million women and girls at risk of gender-based violence, 2.2 million women and girls of reproductive age, 1.1 million pregnant women that are malnourished, and 52,800 pregnant women at risk of developing complications during child birth.** More than half of reported cases of cholera are women and girls, and they often face greater difficulties for early detection or access to cholera treatment centers due to gender inequalities.

As of September, humanitarian actors had reached:

- 1.1 million women (compared to close to 550,000 men) and more than 700,000 girls (compared to close to 900,000 boys) with health assistance.
- 111,000 pregnant or lactating women, 336,000 boys, and 360,000 girls with lifesaving nutrition assistance and infant and young child feeding and counseling.
- 105,000 women and 274,000 girls (compared to 108,000 men and 316,000 boys) with protection assistance, including psychosocial support, legal assistance, protection cash, clinical care for survivors and safe spaces for women, men, girls, and boys, mine risk education, and support to community-based protection networks and community centers serving the needs of IDPs and conflict-affected populations. The protection cluster, however, has only received 27 percent of the 72 million dollars of funding requirements for this year.
- 150,000 women and 145,000 girls (compared to almost the exact number of men and boys) with shelter and non-food items.
- 80,000 women and 32,000 girls (compared to 78,000 men and 47,000 boys) with emergency employment and community rehabilitation.
- 45,000 women and 18,000 girls (compared to similar numbers for men and boys) with refugee and migrant multi-sector assistance, including monitoring and providing assistance for unaccompanied minors and survivors of gender-based violence among migrants and refugees crossing the Red and Arabian seas.

At a **donor conference in late April**, hosted by Sweden and Switzerland, there were references to gender equality and the situation of women in the opening statements of the Secretary-General and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sweden, but the pledges by Member States were accompanied by short statements and did not contain details.

A stalled peace process

In spite of significant efforts by the UN, the Secretary-General's Special Envoy, and civil society organizations, the parties have not made progress in reaching a political solution. The Special Envoy's proposals, including for the urgent initiatives of keeping continuous access in Hodeidah Port, opening Sanaa airport, ending the armed conflict in Taiz, and resuming salary payments to all civil servants with the

support of the international community, have yet to gain traction with the parties. These proposed confidence-building measures would pave the path to a full comprehensive peaceful solution based on the political and security components that were discussed during the Kuwait Talks in 2016.

In May 2017, the **Yemeni Women's Pact for Peace and Security** met again with the Special Envoy during his visit to Sanaa, and called for a resumption of peace negotiations and requested all parties to reach a political settlement to end the war. The Yemeni Women's Pact continues to work closely and liaise with the Office of the Special Envoy as an advisory body. **Women remain very active at the local level**, negotiating local ceasefires, the release of detainees, humanitarian access for convoys, and security arrangements, as well as addressing recruitment of child soldiers, youth radicalization, and community recovery. The Peacebuilding Fund recently approved an initiative to empower women in local mediation over access to water and land resources.

International accountability

On September 29, the **Human Rights Council** adopted resolution 36/31 supporting the Yemen National Inquiry and establishing a group of "**Eminent International and Regional Experts**" to examine the alleged violations and abuses of international human rights since September 2014 and provide recommendations on means to protect and promote human rights and enforce justice. UN Women has already been requested to deploy a technical expert on investigation and documentation of gender-based crimes, is part of its partnership with Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and Justice Rapid Response. The decision of the Human Rights Council came after more than two years of advocacy by civil society organizations, including women's groups.

The conflict has only intensified in 2017. During the first half of 2017, the number of airstrikes had already exceeded the total number of airstrikes the previous year, and a similar increase in armed clashes on the ground has been reported. Women and girls are subjected to specific violations, from sexual violence to assaults on women human rights defenders, relief workers, journalists, protesters, and restriction of mobility and arbitrary detention of women politicians. The latest annual report of the Secretary-General on **conflict-related sexual violence** refers to the rise of negative survival strategies, such as child marriage and forced prostitution in relation to the massive internal displacement in Yemen. There are concerns about possible linkages between migration, trafficking and conflict-related sexual violence by armed groups, including violent extremist groups which echo the issues raised by the Security Council Resolution 2331. However, such incidents are challenging to document as sexual violence in general is vastly underreported owing to shame, stigma and fear of retaliation, lack of service coverage, and the requirement that service providers refer cases to the police.

The annual report of the Secretary-General on **children and armed conflict** included in its annexed list of parties that commit grave violations against children the Yemeni Armed Forces, the forces of Ansar Allah, Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula, pro-government militias, including the Salafists and popular committees, and the coalition to restore legitimacy in Yemen, led by Saudi Arabia.

Recommendations

The Council's call for women's meaningful participation in peace negotiations, with a minimum of 30 percent of women in the negotiating delegations, and for the UN to report on their consultations and engagement with women leaders and women organizations was a welcome development.

Several recommendations put forward in March still need to be implemented. Some refer to subsidiary bodies, such as requesting the Counter-terrorism Committee to ensure that all its assessments,

technical assistance, and recommendations with regards to Yemen are aligned with resolutions 2242 and 2331, and suggesting, in future negotiations about the mandate of the Panel of Experts for the Yemen Sanctions Committee, that the clause “including sexual and gender-based violence” be added to violations of applicable international human rights law as part of the listing criteria, and supporting additional capacity in the Panel of Experts on gender-related issues, currently covered by one expert in the team that is responsible for many other areas. **Others relate to Council language**, such as condemning all attacks on women’s rights activists and women human rights defenders, calling for monitoring and reporting mechanisms that enable women activists to safely report concerns about their security, and recalling existing obligations under the Arms Trade Treaty and call for the cessation of weapons transfer to parties where there is a substantial risk that they will commit or facilitate serious violations of international humanitarian law – a recommendation that has been repeated multiple times by women’s organizations in their reports from or about Yemen.

Other recommendations relate to the UN and its partners: ensuring sustainable funding for capacity building and mentoring on women, peace and security in the Office of the Special Envoy; establishing monitoring, analysis, and reporting arrangements for conflict-related sexual violence, with special emphasis on the risk of sexual violence in the context of smuggling and trafficking; and ensuring that gender expertise is systematically available to humanitarian actors and that gender analyses and assessments are routine.

In addition, the UN and the humanitarian community must be constantly reminded of the urgency of **lifesaving services for women’s protection and reproductive health**, including rape kits, clinical management of rape, treatment of sexually transmitted infections, psychosocial support, legal aid, access to safe houses, dignity kits, community awareness and information management on GBV, livelihood opportunities, obstetric care medicines and equipment, emergency reproductive health kits, family planning methods, and mobile medical teams and clinics with midwives and nutrition services for pregnant women and cholera prevention targeting women and girls among other services. The Peacebuilding Fund’s new initiative to support women’s negotiation efforts at the local level for access to water and land is a welcome development, and more needs to be done to empower women’s engagement in all forms of negotiation and dialogue at the local and national levels.

Finally, **two additional recommendations** for consideration by the IEG: that the Council and its members support the group of international and regional experts and ensure that its mandate, staffing, expertise, and reporting will adequately cover gender-based crimes, and that the Security Council hold an Arria Formula meeting in 2018 devoted to listening from a diverse representation of women’s civil society experts from Yemen.