



Security Council

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Letter dated 27 March 2024 from the Permanent Representatives of Sierra Leone, Switzerland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Sierra Leone and Switzerland, as Co-Chairs of the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council and in close cooperation with the United Kingdom, would like to share the summary note of the following meeting of the Informal Expert Group on the situation in Yemen (see annex).

We would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

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Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council

Summary of the meeting on the situation in Yemen held on 26 February 2024

On 26 February 2024, the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security convened a meeting on the situation in Yemen. The members were given a briefing by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, Hans Grundberg, and the Deputy Head of the United Nations Mission to Support the Hudaydah Agreement (UNMHA), Vivian van de Perre. After a briefing by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, the meeting concluded with an overview of key recommendations provided by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women).

Questions from Security Council members

Members of the Security Council asked questions relating to women's participation in peace processes, local mediation efforts led by women, including on water-related conflicts, and women's inclusion in the negotiated road map, including how the Special Envoy engages with consultative platforms and mechanisms for women. There were also multiple questions regarding women's access to humanitarian aid and the role of women in the delivery of humanitarian aid given the existing *mahram* requirements, how these requirements are affecting the ability of the United Nations to do its work and what the United Nations and the international community can do to change this situation. Council members also asked questions about challenges to women's political participation, including how to tackle disinformation and online harassment of women human rights defenders and women in politics. There were also questions about conflict-related sexual violence, including support for survivors and women's access to reproductive health services. Lastly, Council members asked about quick impact projects undertaken by UNMHA, women's role in demining operations and the specific challenges that women and girls encounter in accessing water and education.

Main points raised in the meeting

Impact of the conflict on women

- During the past nine years, the conflict in Yemen has disproportionately impacted women, aggravating existing gender inequalities and structural barriers to women's access to education and health care. Grave women's rights violations persist, with ongoing reports of arbitrary detention, disappearances and violence specifically targeting women peacebuilders and human rights defenders. Women unequivocally say that their condition has become progressively more restrictive since the outbreak of the war, and they fear that the situation will continue to get worse.
- Restrictions on women's freedom of movement, including through enforced *mahram* requirements, further curtail women's agency and impact aspects of their daily lives such as access to health care and education. In the areas under Houthi control, women encounter even more difficulties, including in relation

to their freedom of movement. This also impacts the Yemeni women working for the United Nations.

- The United Nations continues to call for the de facto authorities in Sana'a to lift the restrictions on movement and other constraints.
- The situation in Yemen is as much a women's rights crisis as it is a peace and security crisis or a humanitarian crisis. In Houthi-controlled areas, the use of terminology related to gender or rape is discouraged. For example, the UNMHA gender adviser's visa has been denied by Sana'a-based authorities, and attempts by UNMHA to solicit quick impact project proposals as a potential entry point to promote initiatives targeting women and girls have at times been unanswered or ultimately blocked, including one project that was aimed at supporting women prisoners.
- Despite the broader trend of women's rights restrictions, there is no United Nations mechanism to investigate and report on the human rights situation in Yemen since the termination of the mandate of the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts in 2021.

Women's participation in decision-making and peace processes

- The United Nations-brokered truce from April to September 2022 brought the longest period of calm and enabled critical discussions between parties on a more long-term solution. While the truce was not formally extended beyond 2 October 2022, the military situation within Yemen has remained largely stable. Local women mediators and civil society members played a pivotal role in the consultations, mediation and implementation of the truce. For instance, during the road-opening negotiations in 2022 in Amman, women took the role of observers to the plenary sessions with the parties for the first time.
- In late 2023, the parties made significant commitments to a new ceasefire, measures to improve living conditions and the eventual launch of a political process. The United Nations is advocating and setting out different strategies for women's participation in the road map to support the implementation of these commitments.
- Women's participation in decision-making and negotiations has diminished since the armed conflict broke out in 2014. There were no women in the parties' delegations in the rounds of negotiations on road openings but local women mediators and civil society members, who participated as observers, provided advisory support during the negotiations. There are also no women from either of the parties in the Redeployment Coordination Committee, the de-escalation mechanism mandated by the Stockholm Agreement.
- As part of a multitrack peace process, the Special Envoy has consulted with a diverse group of actors, including Yemeni women, and systematically encouraged all parties to ensure the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in the peace process in Yemen, underscoring the importance of upholding the commitment in the outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference, as recalled by the Security Council in resolution [2624 \(2022\)](#), to a minimum of 30 per cent participation of women. The parties have not implemented this commitment to date.
- In March 2022, the Special Envoy initiated a round of comprehensive consultations with Yemeni political parties and components, where they were strongly encouraged to ensure that the delegations were made up of at least 30 per cent women.

- In UNMHA interactions with the Government authorities, senior women in the Government structures have emphasized that women must have a voice and a seat at the table and that women's participation should be normalized at all levels and in different fields, including in political decision-making, the private sector and security forces. They have noted that external pressure is essential in accomplishing this.
- Consistent messaging by the international community and, in particular, the Security Council, on the importance of women's inclusion in all peace processes to both the conflict parties and the Special Envoy, is crucial.

Work of the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen to support Yemeni women and gender equality

- The Office of the Special Envoy has developed a gender inclusion strategy, which forms the foundation for the Office's coordinated efforts to empower women as equal partners in the mediation process. The strategy was developed in consultation with more than 150 Yemeni women across different communities to identify gaps in past approaches, lessons learned and best practices. The strategy contains proposals for processes for regularly consulting women and diverse local stakeholders on priorities and establishes mechanisms to oversee the implementation of commitments emerging from these consultations. The strategy was shared at the 2023 Feminist Summit in Aden, which convened over 200 Yemeni women.
- Since November 2023, the Office of the Special Envoy, in partnership with UN-Women, has organized a series of consultations on an inclusive peace process in Aden, Cairo and Amman, bringing together 300 participants, who represent a diverse range of local stakeholders from most governorates in Yemen. The participants included women political leaders, women human rights defenders and women civil society activists, as well as youth, tribal leaders, local mediators, local security experts, marginalized groups and individuals with special needs. The aim of the consultations was to prioritize the voices and experiences of local women and Yemeni actors in shaping the country's political future and to integrate gender perspectives throughout the peace process to address women and girls' special needs, priorities and rights. The recommendations call for inclusive mechanisms and a comprehensive agenda prioritizing local community needs. The consultations have created spaces for forming advocacy alliances and networks across communities. During the consultations, several political leaders who are men pledged to integrate women in their negotiating delegations.
- The Office of the Special Envoy has a Senior Gender Officer funded by the United Nations regular budget, and the Office will hold its fourth internal high-level strategy session on women's participation in the peace processes in the coming months.
- Consistent messaging by the international community and, in particular, the Security Council, on the importance of gender perspectives, women's rights and inclusion in all political and peace processes to the Special Envoy is crucial to integrating the women and peace and security agenda in his Office's work and mandate.

United Nations Mission to Support the Hudaydah Agreement quick impact projects

- The quick impact projects represent an important tool for UNMHA to engage with local authorities and communities in need. In 2023, with total funding of \$200,000, UNMHA delivered 256 double chairs and desks to schools for girls

in Khawkhah and Hays, provided capacity-building and skills training for women in Khawkhah and Hays, including in the fisheries sector, and it supports two ongoing projects, which target a school and a health clinic for women.

- UNMHA received \$300,000 to implement quick impact projects in 2024. The Mission aims to allocate the funding evenly between the south and north of Hudaydah Governorate.

Women and mine action

- Incidents caused by landmines and explosive remnants of war continue to be the main cause of civilian casualties in Hudaydah. In 2023, there were 104 landmine and explosive remnants of war-related incidents, with 161 casualties, including 10 women and 59 children. The broader impact of explosive remnants of war-related incidents on communities is particularly severe when women victims are heads of households and in view of the restrictions that women experience on working outside the family home without a *mahram*.
- UNMHA continues to advocate for women's participation in national demining efforts, including through its implementing partners, and has a woman coordination officer working actively on demining with both parties.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made by UN-Women, as the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group.¹

In upcoming deliberations and decisions on Yemen, the Security Council should consider:

(a) Demanding women's full, equal and meaningful participation at all stages of all diplomatic efforts to find peace, recalling the 30 per cent quota agreed to in the National Dialogue Conference and urging the United Nations and Member States facilitating talks to put in place enhanced and targeted measures to achieve this, including in intra-Yemeni talks and in the committees set up to implement the Hudaydah Agreement, in line with the Secretary-General's commitment to advocating for and supporting an initial minimum target that one third of participants in mediation and peace processes be women, while aiming for an increase towards parity in political and peace electoral processes;

(b) Encouraging the inclusive participation of women from diverse backgrounds in the implementation of the national action plan on women and peace and security;

(c) Requesting that provisions on the prevention and response to conflict-related sexual violence and gross violations of women's rights be included in any future truce, ceasefire or peace agreement;

(d) Demanding that movement restrictions on women be lifted to facilitate humanitarian access throughout the country;

(e) Calling for the release of women detainees and condemning reprisals against women for the promotion of human rights and political violence against women;

¹ These recommendations are suggestions from United Nations participants in the meeting or the background note prepared by the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group ahead of the meeting, and not recommendations from the Informal Expert Group as a whole or Council members.

(f) Recalling the Secretary-General's commitment, welcomed by the Council in resolution 2467 (2019) (para. 11), to ensure the availability of gender expertise in the panels of experts of the sanctions committees;

(g) Requesting the authorities to provide the United Nations with unrestricted access to detention facilities;

(h) Holding a dedicated meeting of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 2140 (2014) on the situation of women detainees and consider listing other individuals responsible for repression of politically active women;

(i) Calling for international partners to provide long-term, predictable and flexible funding to women-led and women's rights organizations in Yemen and material support for the protection of women human right defenders;

(j) Supporting the deployment of gender advisers and women protection advisers and the work of the United Nations country team, including UN-Women, to ensure that the United Nations has sufficient capacity to implement women and peace and security commitments;

(k) Recalling Member States' obligations under the Arms Trade Treaty and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and calling on Member States to engage with women's groups and experts on their implementation of Treaty obligations;

(l) Emphasizing the urgent need for the provision of humanitarian assistance in Yemen to fully integrate gender considerations and prioritize the expertise and resources needed to meet the needs of women and girls and address the increased risks of sexual and gender-based violence, including among the internally displaced and refugee populations in Yemen and including by working with women's groups.
