

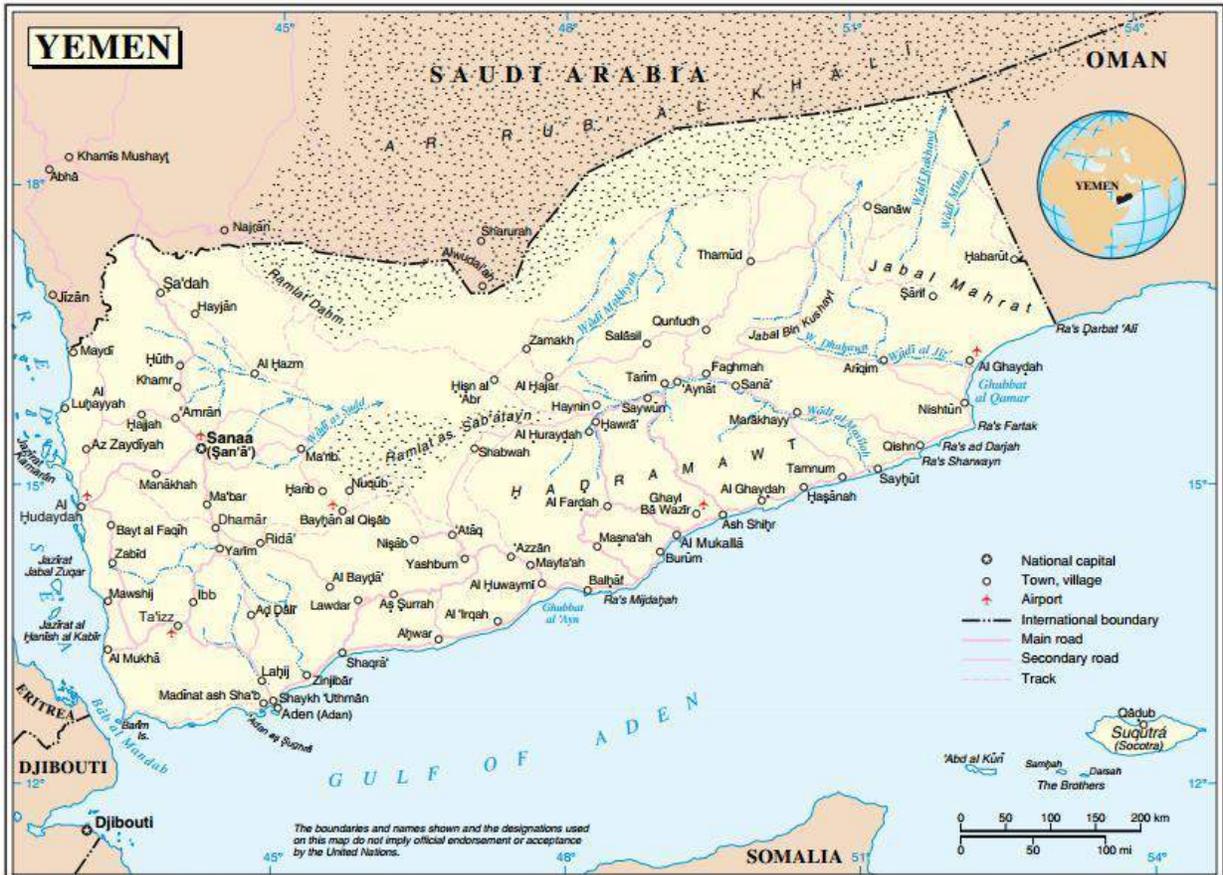
SECURITY COUNCIL INFORMAL EXPERTS GROUP
ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY



YEMEN
March 23rd 2017

Security Council Resolution 2242 (2015):

OP 5. Recognizes the ongoing need for greater integration of resolution 1325 (2000) in its own work in alignment with resolution 2122 (2013), including the need to address challenges linked to the provision of specific information and recommendations on the gender dimensions of situations on the Council's agenda, to inform and help strengthen the Council's decisions, and therefore in addition to elements set out in resolution 2122 (2013), and in accordance with established practice and procedure: (a) Expresses its intention to convene meetings of relevant Security Council experts as part of an Informal Experts Group on Women, Peace and Security to facilitate a more systematic approach to Women, Peace and Security within its own work and enable greater oversight and coordination of implementation efforts.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Suggestions for a new Security Council resolution or other product by the Council or its members

Women's organizations have repeatedly called for an immediate ceasefire, rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian aid, resumption of comprehensive peace negotiations on the basis of inclusiveness and the outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference, the primacy of political over military solutions, accountability for violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, and 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. Specifically, a new Council product could:

- Urge all parties to the conflict to ensure at least 30 percent representation of women in all peace negotiations; and/or include an independent all-women cross-party delegation, ensuring regional balance.
- Call on relevant regional and international actors to support a broader engagement of national stakeholders in a political dialogue that builds on the outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference.
- Call on the Special Envoy to regularly report on consultations with women leaders and women's organizations and efforts to include women in efforts to find a political solution to end the protracted conflict.
- Support women's meaningful participation in donor conferences, including in the preparatory stages, to ensure that interventions appropriately target the needs of women affected by conflict.
- Welcome the Yemeni government's endorsement of the 30 percent quota for women in official bodies, and call for its implementation at all levels.
- Call on the United Nations and its donors to ensure that gender expertise is available to humanitarian actors and that gender analyses and assessments are routine.
- Call on the United Nations and national counterparts to support the documentation of the impact of the conflict on women and girls. For example, resolution 2140 outlining the listing criteria for the Yemen Sanctions Committee notes: "Planning, directing, or committing acts that violate applicable international human rights law, or acts that constitute human rights abuses in Yemen." The clause "including sexual and gender-based violence" could be added.
- Condemn all attacks on women's rights activists and women human rights defenders, and call for monitoring and reporting mechanisms and protection programmes that enable women activists to safely report concerns about their security and relocate if necessary.
- Recall 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.
- Request the Counter-terrorism Committee to ensure that gender equality considerations inform all its assessments, technical assistance, and recommendations with regards to Yemen, as per resolution 2242 and 2331.

Other recommendations for the international community

The Secretary-General will chair an international ministerial-level pledging conference hosted by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs together with the Foreign Ministers of Sweden and Switzerland in Geneva on 25 April 2017. In addition to urging the unhindered access of humanitarian aid and pledging financial resources to the relief efforts, the international community could specifically use this opportunity to:

- Ensure that Yemeni women's voices are well represented at the conference and advocate for their ability to do so in other international forums.

- Fully fund the Humanitarian Response Plan, including the funding request of the GBV sub-cluster and provisions to mainstream gender equality across the whole humanitarian response.
- Elevate maternal health, family planning, and GBV services as priorities in the emergency response on par with other lifesaving interventions. Specific interventions could include universal, free access to family planning services, widespread availability of the Minimum Initial Service Package for reproductive health in emergencies and clinical management of rape, emergency obstetric care, safe houses, rent subsidies, and material support to displaced households headed by women and girls, and support to national NGOs that work on GBV documentation and services, as well as community peacebuilding and women's economic empowerment.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Introduction

In March 2017, Yemen's destructive civil war will enter its third year. Despite UN efforts to facilitate a comprehensive negotiated political settlement, fighting involving the Government of Yemen (GoY) supported by the Saudi Arabia-led Coalition, on one side, and an alliance between the Houthi movement and the General People's Congress (GPC) affiliated with former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, on the other, has intensified steadily since the start of the conflict in 2015. The Security Council has asserted repeatedly that there is no military solution to the conflict. Absent a breakthrough, the most likely scenario for 2017 is continued low-to-medium intensity hostilities in the country (particularly along the Red Sea coast, including Hudaydah) and along the Saudi Arabia-Yemen border; and a steadily worsening humanitarian and socio-economic situation that could include famine.

While much attention has been paid, rightly, to the direct impact of the war on civilians through ground fighting, indiscriminate artillery shelling and airstrikes, along with the use of landmines and cluster munitions, the present conflict also has had a devastating effect on the economy and functioning of state institutions. Yemen is in the midst of a deeply complex humanitarian and economic crisis that will not be resolved by a formal end to hostilities, and which threatens the prospects of millions of Yemenis for decades to come.

The world is facing the largest humanitarian crisis since the creation of the United Nations and Yemen is the largest humanitarian crisis in the world. Nearly 20 million people, two thirds of the population, are in need of humanitarian or protection assistance. Humanitarian delivery and access has been constrained by a de facto naval blockade, the closure of Sana'a airport, the politicization of aid by local militias and other national and regional actors, a collapse in the wider economy, and by frontline fighting, particularly in Taiz city. The ability of traders and other businessmen to import basic goods like food and fuel has been constrained by a combination of naval interdictions of cargo ships Yemeni waters, damaged infrastructure, and issues in the domestic and international banking sectors. These constraints have helped cultivate black and grey markets that directly benefit the key armed groups fighting the war. Yemen's public sector, already overstretched at the beginning of the war, has been strained to breaking point, particularly the health ministry. The politicization of state institutions has served to further damage their effectiveness.

Before the outbreak of conflict in March 2015, Yemen had been ranked last for many years in the Global Gender Gap Index and the Gender Inequality Index. In the last two years, rates of violence against women, child marriage, female-headed households, and women suffering moderate or acute malnutrition have rapidly increased, while the gains made by women's robust participation in the National Dialogue Conference in 2013 and 2014 have been stalled or reversed. And yet, this is the only mention of women or gender equality in Security Council resolution 2216 (2015) on Yemen: "Further requests the Secretary-

General to intensify his good offices role in order to enable a resumption of a peaceful, inclusive, orderly and Yemeni-led political transition process that meets the legitimate demands and aspirations of the Yemeni people, *including women*, for peaceful change and meaningful political, economic and social reform (...).”

The impact of the conflict on women and girls

For years, experts have maintained that conflict increases all types of violence against women and girls, but rarely has it been measured so rapidly and clearly as in Yemen, where 70 percent more incidents of gender-based violence were recorded in September 2015 than at the start of the conflict six months before that. But the effect of the conflict can be seen immediately across different indicators:

- More than 17,000 incidents of gender-based violence, including rape, sexual harassment, child marriage, and other forms of GBV, have been reported since the conflict escalated. The UN estimates that three million women and girls of reproductive age are currently at risk of GBV. In 2016, only one-quarter of the nine million dollars requested by the GBV sub-cluster was funded.
- Although child marriage has long been prevalent in Yemen, rates have increased from 32 per cent to 52 per cent in recent years, as dowries have plummeted and families use early marriage as a coping mechanism, with a significant minority of girls being married before they are 15 years old.
- Over 800,000 girls are unable to access education. Girls represent 63 per cent of the children who drop out of school, and they are the worst affected by the destruction or closure of schools. Before the current surge in conflict, 43 per cent of females and 21 per cent of males had never attended school. Only 12 per cent of females reached secondary school or higher, compared with 23 per cent of males. Between 1997 and 2013, the proportion of those aged six and over with no education had declined from 67 per cent to 43 per cent for females, and from 33 per cent to 21 per cent for males. However, the conflict has reversed most of these gains. In 2015, the percentage of Yemeni women who are illiterate was projected to again reach 66 per cent, up from 50 per cent a few years ago.
- The rate of households with pregnant and lactating women has increased from 23.4 per cent before March 2015 to 44.3 per cent, compounded by lack of contraceptives and community leaders reportedly encouraging women to reproduce because the country needs offspring to recover after the war. Yemen already had a high maternal mortality rate – estimated as 148 deaths per 100,000 live births, and more than half of deliveries were not attended by skilled medical professionals, due in large part to a lack of female skilled birth attendants in rural areas. More than half-a-million women are currently estimated to be pregnant in Yemen – nearly 80,000 of whom are expected to face complications in delivery.
- Only 45 per cent of health facilities are functioning. There are few medical professionals trained to respond to sexual violence and no national guidelines on the clinical management of rape.
- In some areas, as much as 30 per cent of displaced households are headed by women, a notable increase from nine per cent before the current crisis. These households have more food insecurity and a significantly lower monthly income.
- Since 2015, the Social Welfare Fund suspended its support to 1.5 million beneficiaries, 43 per cent of whom are women.

The massive internal displacement has given rise to negative survival strategies, in both displaced and host communities, such as child marriage, survival sex, and forced prostitution. Internally displaced women and girls, as well as migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers, are acutely vulnerable to sexual violence. Daily threats to their safety, including sexual harassment, restrict women’s mobility for conducting livelihood tasks. There are concerns about possible linkages between migration, trafficking, and conflict-related sexual violence by armed groups, including violent extremist groups, operating in Yemen. However, such

incidents are challenging to document as sexual violence in general is vastly underreported due to shame, stigma and fear of retaliation, lack of service coverage, and the requirement that service-providers refer cases to the police. The risk of “honour” crimes or “tribal solutions” to rape perpetuates the silence and underreporting. As a positive development, the Gender-based Violence sub-cluster, led by UNFPA and INTERSOS and consisting of 30 organizations, has now an operational presence in 19 of 22 governorates and coordinators in Sana’a, Al Hudayah in the north and Aden in the South.

Humanitarian aid is mainly collected by male adults (88 per cent in urban areas and 74 per cent in rural areas), compared to female adults (nine per cent in urban areas and 14 per cent in rural areas). This is compounded by gender norms affecting women’s freedom of movement and lack of official papers, which make it difficult to register for food assistance. The requirement of being accompanied by a male relative, especially in areas controlled by conservative Islamic groups, has become more prevalent in the last two years. In Abyan, which had the highest number of women working in hospitals and schools, this is particularly problematic. The Humanitarian Country Team has begun to track restrictions limiting direct access to or engagement with conflict-affected women, as an additional element of its Access Monitoring and Reporting Framework. In 2015 and 2016, humanitarian country teams improved the gender-sensitivity of their assessments and their projects, and begun to collect more sex and disaggregated data across most humanitarian clusters. One of the strategic objectives of the 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan is to integrate protection and gender-related concerns across the response.

Although men represent the highest number of direct fatalities due to the conflict, all parties have been repeatedly accused of violating international humanitarian law. A high percentage of the people killed by military airstrikes are civilians. In 2016, the Panel of Experts investigated ten airstrikes that killed 292 civilians, including over 100 women and children. The highest perceived threat to the security of women and girls depends on the area, from airstrikes in some to ‘kidnapping’ for forced marriage in others. Women also reported mines, indiscriminate shelling, arbitrary detention, home raids, forced disappearances, increased recruitment of women by the militias, and the spread of small arms as security threats in different locations. Even before the escalation of the conflict, Yemen ranked second out of 178 countries in number of privately owned firearms per 100 people. In 2015, Action on Armed Violence (AOAV) recorded more civilian deaths and injuries reported from explosive weapons in Yemen than in any other country around the world.

Attacks and threats against women leaders and activists are also on the rise, including killings inspired by fatwas from religious authorities. On 25 December 2016, a well-known activist and charity worker who campaigned for female emancipation and literacy was murdered in Taiz by drive-by shooters on a busy street in the city center, following a September fatwa by Abdullah al-Odaini banning women activists from mixing with men. There has been very little follow-up on this story, largely because local journalists are afraid of retribution. Media coverage on Yemen has been particularly limited since the closure of Sana’a airport to commercial flights in August 2016, preventing amongst others journalists from entering large parts of the country, and government obstruction to the UN transporting journalists aboard their flights.

Women’s participation in peace talks and political dialogue

Much has been written about women’s participation in the 2011 revolution, and in the National Dialogue Conference (NDC) throughout 2013 and 2014, but the conflict has brought back and aggravated women’s political marginalization and exclusion since then.

At the NDC, women represented 28 per cent of participants (161 out of 565 delegates) and were able to achieve important gains – including the 30 per cent quota for women’s political participation and setting 18 as the minimum age for marriage in the draft constitution. Overall, in spite of the vehement objections

of conservative and religious actors – and at times the threats and physical attacks against female delegates – there were more than 173 articles and outcomes related to women. These included universities and other higher education institutions to reserve 30 per cent of seats for the admission of female students, a proposal for a law allowing independent candidates with only 5,000 signatures to stand for election, which was believed would allow independent female candidates to enter the political arena, recommendations about women’s right to work and right to education, paid maternity leave, and criminalization of violence against women and sex trafficking. Many of them were not included in the draft constitution or were reflected in vaguer terms, including the fact that only four women took part in the 17-member drafting committee instead of the 30 percent proposed by the NDC, but this draft constitution was never promulgated, as conflict erupted again.

In 2014, in resolution 2140 (2014), the Council had stressed that “the best solution to the situation in Yemen is through a peaceful, inclusive, orderly, and Yemeni-led political transition (...) as set out in the outcomes of the comprehensive National Dialogue Conference”; welcomed “Yemen’s efforts to strengthen women’s participation in political and public life, including through measures to ensure at least 30 per cent women candidates for national legislative elections and elected councils”; and encouraged “all constituencies in the country, including the youth movements, women’s groups, in all regions in Yemen, to continue their active and constructive engagement in the political transition and to continue the spirit of consensus to implement the subsequent steps in the transition process and the recommendations of the National Dialogue Conference (...).” This language was not reiterated a year later in resolution 2216 (2015).

Since the NDC, women’s participation in different rounds of peace talks has been minimal. Only one signatory of the UN-facilitated Implementation Mechanism of the GCC Initiative was a woman, and this agreement merely specifies that women’s representation in the transitional government should be “adequate.” Only two Yemeni women, one from each side, were officially included as delegates in the peace talks held in Geneva in December 2015, and only after much lobbying by the UN and international partners. In November 2015, Dr. Shafiq Al-Wahsh, the Chairperson of the Women’s National Committee in Yemen, was barred by the Houthis from traveling to preparatory meetings. In May 2016 there were only three women out of 26 members of the negotiating delegations, and their role is reportedly limited during diplomatic exchanges outside of formal rounds of talks.

In response, around 50 Yemeni women from across the political spectrum regrouped in October 2015 in Cyprus to form the Yemeni Women Pact for Peace and Security, which meets with the Office of the Special Envoy periodically for consultations. In May 2016, seven of these women went to the peace talks being mediated by the UN in Kuwait to present common messages to the warring parties, but could only hold side-meetings with the parties, the G18 ambassadors, including the GCC, the EU, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, and the Special Envoy and his team.

Women’s organizations and women leaders from Yemen have written letters to the Secretary-General, the Special Envoy, and the sponsors of the peace talks, objecting to their marginalization: “We would also like to share our disappointment (...). While the UN played a key role in supporting women’s participation during the transitional period, we see a hesitation when it comes to calls for a fair representation of women now.”

Women held 0.3 per cent of the seats in the former national parliament (one woman out of 301 seats in total). Female representation on local government councils was limited as well with females occupying less than one percent of all seats. The transitional government has named only three women ministers: the minister of social affairs, minister of human rights and minister of state.

At the local level, women's leadership in governance has declined further with the arrival of armed groups, and is now more visible in community committees supported by international NGOs and providing relief and humanitarian aid. However, it is estimated that only two per cent of registered civil society organizations are either women-led or mainly targeting women beneficiaries, as most civil society organizations are Islamist and politically-based. Women who are advocating for human rights and political activism are often subject to violence, arbitrary detention, travel bans and mobility restrictions, and lack laws that protect them specifically.