

**Security Council**

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**Letter dated 17 March 2021 from the Permanent Representatives of Ireland, Mexico and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General**

Ireland and Mexico, 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.

*(Signed)* **Geraldine Byrne Nason**  
Permanent Representative of Ireland to the Security Council

*(Signed)* **Juan Ramón de la Fuente Ramírez**  
Permanent Representative of Mexico to the United Nations

*(Signed)* **Barbara Woodward**  
Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the United Nations



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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 2 March 2021**

On 2 March 2021, the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council convened a meeting on the situation in Yemen. The members received a briefing from the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen. Other representatives, including the United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Yemen, other representatives of the United Nations country team and the head of the United Nations Mission to Support the Hudaydah Agreement (UNMHA), provided additional information in the discussion that followed the briefing. The meeting concluded with an overview of key recommendations, delivered by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), and additional observations shared by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

**Questions from Security Council members**

Members of the Security Council asked about the plans of the United Nations to ensure greater inclusion of women in the political process and peace negotiations, including with regard to a potential ceasefire, and about what else the Council should do to change the current dynamic of exclusion and underrepresentation of women. They asked questions about the following topics: the impact that the pandemic and the economic devastation brought about by the conflict was having on women and girls and whether that impact was being effectively addressed by international partners and taken into account in recovery planning; attacks against politically active women and women human rights defenders; accountability in cases of violence against women and girls and conflict-related sexual violence; a potential assessment of the feasibility of the implementation and localization of the recently adopted national action plan on women and peace and security; and trends in the situation of displaced women and girls and those affected by the escalation of hostilities in Ma'rib. Council members also asked about the socioeconomic situation of women, their participation in the labour force, the challenges for women in terms of food security, health and education, and how those factors affected their participation in public life and decision-making. Lastly, Council members asked whether the gender responsiveness of humanitarian aid planning and delivery in Yemen was adequate, and whether services for survivors of gender-based violence and those in need of mental health and psychosocial support were generally available.

**Main points raised in the meeting**

- The level of exclusion and underrepresentation of Yemeni women with regard to decision-making, political talks and peace negotiations has not improved since the previous meeting of the Informal Expert Group. As an example, in five rounds of face-to-face negotiations on the exchange and release of prisoners organized by the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross, the parties to the conflict did not include a single woman in any of their delegations, in spite of the very active advocacy of women's groups and networks, including the Abductees' Mothers Association, on this issue.

- The recently formed Government did not include a single woman among its 24 ministers, creating a situation that had not occurred for two decades. As a result of pressure from Yemeni civil society and international partners, the Government has announced that it will consider appointing more women as deputy ministers. Tragically, one of the few women who had already been appointed as a deputy minister was killed in an attack targeting the new Cabinet, carried out at Aden airport on 30 December 2020.
- In April 2020, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and the Office of the Special Envoy held a virtual internal high-level strategy meeting to support and deepen the inclusion of women and gender issues and perspectives in the peace process. Commitments were made across all sections of the Office to accelerate efforts in that regard. Progress on implementation was subsequently reviewed in December 2020, and new commitments for 2021, predicated on all personnel of the Office of the Special Envoy bearing responsibility for the full implementation of the women and peace and security agenda, were established.
- In October 2020, the Special Envoy made a public commitment concerning reserved, non-transferable seats for women in any upcoming talks.
- In addition, the Office of the Special Envoy has commissioned leading Yemeni analysts to prepare expert papers and studies concerning gender analysis; broadened and increased its regular engagement with Yemeni women, youth and civil society at multiple levels, including through digital forums and consultations; and will bolster the capacity of the Office of the Special Envoy, with the support of donors, ahead of including a request for gender advisory capacity in the regular budget for 2022.
- In addition to its regular engagement with the Yemeni Women's Technical Advisory Group, the Office of the Special Envoy convenes monthly meetings with international non-governmental organizations that design and organize dialogues in support of the Yemeni peace process. The aim of these meetings is to promote greater inclusiveness and representation of women in all dialogues and the integration of gender-related issues in outcome documents, reports and recommendations.
- The United Nations is currently working to negotiate a nationwide ceasefire, the opening of Hudaydah port and Sana'a airport and the resumption of the political process. The Office of the Special Envoy regularly engages with and supports Yemeni women community safety actors engaged in various local initiatives. This engagement has the strategic goal of enhancing the crucial roles that they play in community safety as well as bolstering them in advance of a potential ceasefire, so that they will be better prepared to contribute to sustaining and strengthening a ceasefire once an agreement has been brokered.
- Women from six political parties have formed a caucus and have asked that the international community engage regularly with them, in addition to engaging with women from civil society organizations.
- Implementation of the national action plan on women and peace and security will be challenging, owing to limited capacity and resources for implementation. However, in response to the Government's request, a national expert and an international expert are being recruited, with donor support, to be based in Aden and support the implementation of the plan.
- In northern Yemen, there are growing restrictions and risks involved in working on gender- and peace-related issues. United Nations staff and their

implementing partners face harassment and often have to risk their lives to continue to work.

- Services supported by the United Nations Population Fund concerning gender-based violence and reproductive health were reduced by 40 per cent owing to a lack of funding, and there are no indications that the resources pledged at the recent donor conference will be sufficient to enable the services that have been suspended to resume. Support for women's economic empowerment programmes is in high demand among local authorities, but the scale of the work of the United Nations is limited.
- The United Nations humanitarian response targets the most vulnerable. It includes multi-purpose cash assistance for female-headed households, especially in internally displaced person sites; mental health and psychosocial support for women and girls; safe spaces and community centres; legal support for the resolution of family issues related to property, inheritance, housing and land; and efforts to take into account the ways in which gender inequality and gender discrimination, including within households, affect food insecurity. The humanitarian country team is currently discussing options for scaling up interventions in Ma'rib and will be looking at ways of addressing the needs of women and girls in that region. The situation of Ethiopian women and girls trafficked into Ma'rib, including reports of sexual enslavement, is particularly worrisome, and no officials have been held accountable for tolerating or profiting from trafficking.
- In June 2021, the experts of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women will have an opportunity to review the seventh and eighth combined report of Yemen. Member States should raise the issues discussed in the meeting of the Informal Expert Group and support the shadow reports from civil society that will also be presented.
- The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict has been monitoring the situation in Yemen for six years, noting that conflict-related sexual violence has been committed by all parties, and that none have yet undertaken a commitment to prevent it or taken any kind of remedial action. Reports have included incidents of sexual violence in detention and custodial settings, particularly against women and girls. Cases against men, boys and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons have also been reported. Sexual violence has also been recorded in camps for internally displaced persons, in the context of kidnappings and hostage-taking for extortion, and in connection with criminal networks of smugglers. Pre-existing gender discrimination is exacerbated by the conflict, the dire humanitarian situation, the increased risk of conflict-related sexual violence and recourse to harmful coping mechanisms. The large-scale destruction of essential infrastructure, such as hospitals, limits the capacity of service providers to respond to the most urgent needs of the population, including survivors of sexual violence. While underreporting makes it difficult to get a full picture, some estimates point to a significant increase in gender-based violence and child marriage since 2015, as well as the persistent threat of "honour killings", the repression of politically active women, the withdrawal of women and girls from public life or education and suicide by women and girls as a result of unaddressed trauma. Services for survivors of gender-based violence remain insufficiently available. The Office welcomed the adoption of Security Council resolution [2564 \(2021\)](#) and the addition of an individual to the sanctions list of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution [2140 \(2014\)](#), including for involvement in sexual violence and rape against politically active women and the disappearance of women.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations were made either by UN-Women, as the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict or the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen:<sup>1</sup>

(a) Council members should continue to invite Yemeni women from civil society to brief the Security Council during its meetings on Yemen and take into consideration the written submissions and letters from Yemeni women's networks;

(b) Ahead of the resumption of a formal political process, Council members and other international partners could coordinate with the United Nations on joint messaging to advocate women's direct representation based on the minimum target of 30 per cent agreed on in the National Dialogue of 2013;

(c) Council members could request the Office of the Special Envoy and other United Nations entities working in Yemen to share a written summary of their plans and commitments with regard to enhancing the inclusion of women and gender mainstreaming in 2021;

(d) When renewing the mandate of UNMHA, the Security Council should call upon the Mission to ensure that it is systematically engaging with a diverse range of women's organizations in all areas of its work and to report on the outcomes of such outreach;

(e) The Security Council should publicly condemn political violence against women and threats and attacks against women human rights defenders in Yemen, encourage Member States to provide material support for their protection and access to legal support and essential services, and call upon the parties to undertake commitments to address conflict-related sexual violence;

(f) The Security Council should stress the need for a nationwide ceasefire and insist on explicit references in the ceasefire agreement to the protection needs and perspectives of civilians, particularly those in the most vulnerable situations, such as internally displaced persons, sexual and gender minorities, and women and girls. Council members should call for women's participation in sustaining and strengthening the implementation of the ceasefire, once a ceasefire agreement has been reached;

(g) Council members should remind the international community to prioritize funding to support women's local peacebuilding initiatives at the track-two and track-three levels and should emphasize the importance of the full, equal and meaningful participation of women, the inclusion of gender perspectives and the need for protection strategies for women participating in such efforts;

(h) In the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution [2140 \(2014\)](#), Council members should continue to consider listing additional individuals identified by the Panel of Experts as being responsible for the repression of women, including through the use of conflict-related sexual violence;

(i) Council members should support the deployment of women protection advisers and dedicated capacity to coordinate activities related to the prevention and response to conflict-related sexual violence, including the implementation of monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements, coordination with humanitarian

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

partners for the provision of multisectoral services, the facilitation of socioeconomic reintegration for survivors, the enhancement of accountability for perpetrators, and engagement with parties to the conflict in prevention efforts;

(j) Council members should promote full adherence to the obligations of Member States under the Arms Trade Treaty;

(k) Council members should, in close cooperation with civil society, support the implementation and resourcing of the national action plan on women and peace and security, including through supporting and funding a diverse range of women's rights groups at the subnational and local levels and their inclusion in the peace process;

(l) Council members should emphasize 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 to engage with men and boys with a view to supporting the inclusion and empowerment of women and girls in vital household and community decisions;

(m) Council members should encourage the international community and all relevant United Nations entities to prioritize flexible funding to support women's local peacebuilding initiatives, including by supporting the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund, and making such funding more available to organizations in Yemen and by requesting international and national-level non-governmental organizations and research institutes to demonstrate ongoing integration of the women and peace and security agenda in their day-to-day work.

The Co-Chairs thanked the Special Envoy and all participants and committed themselves to following up on the important issues raised at the meeting.

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