

The Feminist Movement Role in Promoting Human Rights in Yemen

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Introduction:

We cannot find one agreed definition of the feminist movement or agree on a single written and specific date for its emergence, due to the varying perspectives on that matter. Some define the feminist movement as a movement advocating for equality and fighting for women's rights. And any action aimed at gender equality and achieving women's rights, both in the past and in the present, can be considered as a feminist action, even if it's not called that. Others view feminism as a more modern concept, closely tied to women's awareness of their rights and potential. Therefore, any movement cannot be called "feminist" as long as it does not call itself "feminist".

The diversity of perspectives regarding the meaning of the feminist movement has made it difficult to reach a consensus on the existence of a single written and specific date for its emergence. Attempting to link it to a specific historical period or confining it solely to the emergence of the term itself leads to varying narratives and ideologies. As well as, it undermines the contributions and efforts that aimed at achieving gender equality for women even before the term "feminist" came into common usage or before it was associated with a particular time frame.

Indeed, discussing the feminist movement in Yemen, it is more private and unique speech compared to the diverse history of the feminist movement worldwide. The development of the movement has experienced twists and turns influenced by political, regional, and sectarian factors that Yemen continues to grapple with as a geography of conflict. These factors impose difficult and harsh suffering on women.

Aim of study: understanding the role played by the feminist movement in Yemen in promoting human rights and the extent of its influence in fulfilling this role. The study relied on a descriptive analytical methodology, through which the researcher aimed to describe the prominent contributions of the feminist movement in promoting human rights, and the social and political challenges faced by the movement. The researcher used the interviews tool with 12 experts and specialists in gender, as well as political female activists, human rights female defenders and women's issues supporters. In addition to previous studies, international reports, and available statistics.

The importance of the study : highlighting the feminist movement role in Yemen and its ability to influence the promotion of human rights.

The Reality and Origins of the Feminist Movement

The feminist movement is an ideology that transcends borders and regulations, and its existence is standalone and enduring. It cannot be confined to a single regulation or specific framework, which means it exists everywhere in the world.¹

Talking about a feminist activism in Yemen is still at its beginning ".² One of the conditions of social movements is the existence of a State, an active civil society and a democratic political system that guarantees freedoms, foremost among which is freedom of opinion and expression. These three conditions are not currently available in Yemen. The State in Yemen is already collapsed and the de facto power is controlling the entities and authorities since the beginning of the war.³

One of its breakdowns was the absence of a legislative authority that the feminist movement can demand to reform laws related to women's rights. Civil society suffers from many distortions, and is not allowed to operate freely and independently in most regions of Yemen. All de facto authorities suppress freedoms, including freedom of opinion and expression, It is therefore not possible in these circumstances to talk about a feminist movement with specific goals . While there are timid individual voices of Yemeni civil activists emerging from within or outside, they cannot be described as a feminist movement. ⁴

Today, we cannot talk about a clearly defined or goal-oriented feminist movement in Yemen. The focus of this movement is on women rights and the political, economic, social, and cultural roles, without necessarily linking this effort to the issue of modernizing the state and society in Yemen , and without integrating Women's rights within the framework of societal rights, and seeking to provide guarantees of women's and men's rights by providing legislative guarantees, creating an enabling environment that provides practical guarantees for women's roles and rights in society that requires comprehensive modernization efforts. ⁵

The history of feminist movement in Yemen back to the 1950s, coinciding with the spread of girls' education during that time. ⁶ In Aden, some women's associations were formed, and both male and female voices advocating for women's rights emerged on

¹ Wameedh Shakir, Former Director of Gender Studies at Sana 'a Centre for Strategic Studies, a phone interview conducted with her by the researcher.

² Afra'a Hariri, a lawyer, consultant and human rights defender, a phone interview conducted with her by the researcher.

³ Dr. Adel Al-Sharjabi is a professor of sociology at Sana 'a University & a gender researcher, a phone interview conducted with him by the researcher.

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Dr. Mohammed Al-Mikhlaifi, former Minister of Secondary Affairs of the Government of Ba Sindwah, and Deputy Secretary-General of the Yemeni Socialist Party, a phone interview conducted with him by the researcher.

⁶ Hooria Mashhoor, the former Minister of Human Rights of the Government of Ba Sindwah, a phone interview conducted with him by the researcher.

the cultural scene. After the September 26 Revolution in the north, women's associations were also formed in Sana'a and Taiz, raising the same demands as the women's associations in Aden.⁷ Talking about the feminist movement in Yemen is closely linked to talking about the efforts of struggle, the achievement of justice, democracy, citizenship and human rights, and breaking away from male patriarchal dominance.⁸

Historically, the struggle for independence in South Yemen against British colonialism was closely tied to the national liberation movement. Women played a vital and integral role alongside men, and this partnership contributed to the achievement of independence. With independence came equal citizenship, as well as the removal of political and economic marginalization for women and social classes.⁹ The feminist movement in Yemen evolved during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, influenced by the growth of modern social forces and leftist socialist and nationalist political powers.¹⁰ These factors, despite the relatively small size of the movement, contributed to its effectiveness. The institutional framework of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, with its progressive state policies at the time, and the modern ideology adopted by the Yemeni Socialist Party, the ruling party in South Yemen, were among the factors that enhanced the effectiveness of the Yemeni feminist movement.¹¹

In addition to being one of the most progressive legislations in the Arab world, such as the Family Law of 1974, these laws served as a progressive framework that surpassed the barriers and constraints of traditional society and the backward economic structure. They played a significant role in pushing these traditional structures towards modernization.¹² The Yemeni feminist movement was also influenced by the broader Arab feminist movement, which in turn was influenced by the global wave of liberation. This interconnectedness contributed to the evolution of the feminist consciousness that serves the equality movement.¹³

In 1965, the first feminist association called the Yemeni Women's Association was established in Taiz, northern Yemen, under the leadership of Ms. Fatima Abu Bakr Al-Awlaqi, with the support of Egyptian women. Taiz was the capital of the Yemen Arab Republic after the revolution. The association played a role in women's awareness, establishing literacy classes, and promoting household management skills. Prior to that, "Atika Al-Shami" had formed a women's association in Sana'a. However, the feminist

⁷ Dr. Adel Al-Sharjabi , Ibid

⁸ Basem Alhaj , a politician and human rights defender exactly for women's issues, and First Secretary for the organization of the Socialist Party of Ta'izz governorate, an interview conducted with him by the researcher in /Cairo

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Dr. Adel Al-Sharjabi , Ibid

¹¹ Dr. Mohammed Al-Mikhlaifi , Ibid

¹² Ibid

¹³ Afra'a Al-Hariri , Ibid

movement in Taiz was particularly strong compared to other provinces in northern Yemen.¹⁴

However, the feminist movement in northern Yemen in the early 1980s faced a social movement that opposed women's rights, led by some activists from political Islamic groups, particularly Wahhabi political Islam, which began to infiltrate Yemen since 1979. As a result, women's rights fluctuated between progress and setbacks due to the conflict between modernizing forces and traditional forces led by tribal elders and Islamic political leaders. Perhaps the biggest achievement of the women's movement during that period was the recognition of women's political rights. Even in the elections for the Shura Council in the north in 1988, women were not allowed to run for office or even vote.¹⁵

The constitution of the Unified Yemen served as a guarantor of those achievements, despite some setbacks and challenges.¹⁶ The establishment of the Yemeni Republic and the aspirations of Yemenis for change played a significant role in revitalizing hopes and promoting a culture of progress and change. The constitutional recognition of women's political rights played a major role in enhancing the status of women and the effectiveness of the core women's movement, surpassing its magnitude by far.¹⁷

The establishment of the Yemeni Republic resulted in parliamentary elections in 1990, which saw a relative regression in legislation.¹⁸ However, the inhibiting social and economic factors continued to widen under the continued dominance of religious and tribal leaders. This dominance was reestablished in the south after the 1994 war. As a result of these inhibiting factors, the issuance of a family law at the same level as the law that was in effect in the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen before the unification was hindered.¹⁹

The traditional forces, led by religious and tribal leaders, as well as tribal military leadership, sought to undermine the achievements made for women. One of the main objectives of the constitutional changes was the cancellation of Article 27 of the prevailing constitution at that time, which stipulated equality before the law and equal treatment of citizens without discrimination based on any grounds, including sex, political status, economic status, social status, or any other reasons.²⁰

This counter-revolution succeeded in reinstating discrimination against women, specifically, and discrimination among citizens in general, primarily due to its dominance after the 1994 war. These forces manifested their intent to discriminate in the post-war constitution. As a result of the constitutional changes, discrimination was reflected in various legislations,²¹ followed by parliamentary elections in 1997 and 2003. These elections were accompanied by a tribal-military-religious alliance that completely eradicated all the gains made for women, human rights, and citizenship. This placed the Yemeni women's movement in the face of challenging obstacles. Additionally, there was an extremist religious discourse against women that interpreted

14 Soa'ad Al-Absi, the head of the Yemen Women Union , a phone interview conducted with him by the researcher.

15 Dr. Adel Al-Sharjabi , Ibid

16 Hooria Mashhoor, Ibid

17 Dr. Mohammed Al-Mikhlaifi , Ibid

18 Basem Alhaj, Ibid

19 Dr. Mohammed Al-Mikhlaifi , Ibid

20 Ibid

21 Ibid

religion in a male-centric manner,²² along with the traditional cultural heritage that confined women to the household and child-rearing, denying them even the slightest level of education, intellectual freedom, and the freedom to think, primarily due to the high levels of illiteracy among women in political and scientific matters.²³

The ongoing war has shattered the achievements and rolled back the rights that were granted and existed for women.²⁴ Today, Yemeni women endure multiple violations in terms of human rights, and freedoms, especially in northern regions where the frequency of violations against women is escalating.²⁵ The war has given rise to extremist religious groups throughout the country, which may differ politically, but all of them converge against women and their rights. Additionally, women have suffered during the war through displacement and shouldering family burdens, particularly as many men participated in the conflict, resulting in injuries or fatalities. Women bear the weight of these households, and their responsibilities have significantly increased due to the lack of security and the implementation of numerous laws in Houthi-controlled areas. Moreover, the imprisonment of women has been on the rise. All of these are challenges that have intensified throughout the war.²⁶

However, political transformations, whether violent or peaceful, including wars and disasters, create suitable environments for feminist activism because social roles change in crises. Regarding current humanitarian and activist work in Yemen, it is carried out by civil society organizations, with 4% of their leadership positions held by women. This includes peace activists and activities, a significant portion of which are carried out by women.²⁷ Despite variations and differences within the components of the feminist movement, some of which tend to hide behind their ideologies or the political ideologies of their components, there are general goals around which their work revolves. These include advocating for peace and defending women's rights. Notably, the Women's Solidarity Network is comprised of more than 250 women with expertise in various fields, community leaders, leaders of civil society organizations, and leaders of the branches of the Yemeni Women's Union.²⁸

Feminists have also worked to address the challenges they face during the ongoing war and conflict by forming feminist coalitions, building alliances, and partnerships with regional and international organizations involved in supporting feminist issues. They have demand support from the international community and exerted pressure on political authorities regarding women's issues. They have provided briefings on the situation in Yemen from various perspectives and acted as mediators to resolve community conflicts. Additionally, they have assisted in humanitarian and relief activities. Furthermore, they have employed advocacy campaign methods and prepared policy papers and studies on the status of women and the overall situation. They have

²² Basem Alhaj, Ibid

²³ Soa'ad Al-Absi , Ibid

²⁴ Afra'a Al-Hariri , Ibid

²⁵ Soa'ad Al-Absi , Ibid

²⁶ Rana Ghanim, a politician and human rights activist, an assistant Secretary-General of the Nasserist Unionist People's Organization .

²⁷ Wameedh Shakir, Ibid

²⁸ Hooria Mashhoor, Ibid

documented violations, and organized various events such as webinars , meetings, and conferences to address the challenges.²⁹

²⁹ Hooria Mashhoor, Afra'a Al-Hariri , Ibid

The Feminist Movement Role in Promoting Equality

Since the 1960s, the feminist movement in Yemen has been dedicated to promoting gender equality by demanding women's rights on par with men in all political, economic, social, and cultural spheres. The determination of women to break into all areas of work has been of great importance in identifying the obstacles and difficulties they face in achieving social justice and their right to be represented in decision-making positions, including political parties, legislative councils, ministerial positions, and Yemeni diplomacy.³⁰

Through Feminist organizations, the movement has sought to bring about constitutional and legal amendments and has succeeded in some partial amendments related to personal status law and nationality law. The feminist movement could have achieved amendments in a greater number of laws if it had sought amendments that eliminate actual discrimination. However, the exaggeration in dealing with proposing amendments to the laws has made the amendments extensive and requires a long time to amend all legislation.³¹

After the unification of Yemen, the feminist movement played a role in amending discriminatory texts, but it did not receive sufficient protection through the implementation of laws or their reflection in protection mechanisms and alignment of national legislation with international conventions. Women affiliated with political parties had more access and influence but failed, possibly because their parties absorbed and undermined their roles. On the other hand, civil society and independent activists had more presence and effectiveness, but that was not enough. They had to rely on pressure, advocacy, raising awareness, and the collaboration of media outlets and social media platforms. As well as , forming alliances among women from all spectrums and orientations and civil society to shape public opinion and express their perspectives on issues of violence and discrimination against Yemeni women. However, the political will was not secured in partnership and equality, which led to significant marginalization and exclusion of women. As a result, women's rights regressed, and the feminist movement struggled even to exert pressure for the creation of a law criminalizing violence against women and girls in Yemen, similar to many other Arab countries.³²

The feminist movement was unable to promote gender equality in Yemen because the issue of equality was merely symbolic, lacking a proper systematic approach in practical implementation that encompasses women's equality in all sectors throughout Yemen and across all age groups. Since Yemen's participation in the Beijing Conference in 1995, which obligates participating countries to implement a set of conference outcomes, the National Women's Committee was formed in 1996.

One of the outcomes of the Beijing Conference was to expand women's participation to 30%, which means that from that period until now, these outcomes have not been implemented. The government has only been satisfied with appointing a specific number of women, but these women have not achieved anything on behalf of women

³⁰ Huda Al-Sarari, human rights activist, award-winning of the Martin Ennals Award, a phone interview conducted with her by the researcher.

³¹ Dr. Mohammed Al-Mikhlaifi , Hooria Mashhoor, Ibid

³² Huda Al-Sarari, Ibid

in general. Their presence has been merely symbolic, and their ascent to power has been limited to being part of the ruling party.³³

However, at present, we cannot evaluate the role of the feminist movement in promoting human rights and the concept of equality within the framework of national laws and legislation. Under the feminist movement, which also requires protection from these weak laws and legislation³⁴ that fail to meet the minimum level of protection, Yemeni legislation contains numerous legal loopholes and ambiguous provisions that are detrimental to women. Perpetrators - whatever who is - have been able to evade justice and accountability when committing any violation or violence against women. These laws have granted them the right to absolve themselves and escape punishment.³⁵

However, the collaboration of the feminist movement in the National Dialogue Conference, as well as with political parties and civil society organizations, and their formation as a progressive and forward-thinking bloc, led to the embodiment of the principles of equality enshrined in international human rights treaties in the outcomes document of the National Dialogue Conference.³⁶ This was further reflected in the draft constitution, which brought about a revolution in women's rights. It affirmed gender equality and non-discrimination and established a quota system for women in all branches of government, with a minimum representation of 30%. It also prohibited marriage under the age of 18 for both genders. The credit for this achievement goes to the fact that it was formulated after a national dialogue that took place between 2013 and 2014, in which women participated in decisive numbers, with a participation rate of 29%. Their involvement made a significant difference in incorporating principles of equal citizenship, and four women participated alongside 14 men in the committee responsible for drafting the constitution.³⁷

The National Women's Committee has made diligent efforts to amend the draft Law of the Procedure and Civil Enforcement, which was submitted by the Justice and Endowments Committee of the Parliament. The law included Articles 371 and 372, which granted the husband the right to send back his wife to the "house of obedience" and imposed financial and moral penalties on the wife who defied this provision. Women's rights and human rights organizations appealed to the President of the Republic to intervene and suspend these articles after the issue gained media attention. President Ali Abdullah Saleh issued an order to cancel these articles from the Law of

³³ Dr. Asmahan Al-Alas is an Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Arts, University of Aden. She is an academic and activist specializing in women's studies. An interview conducted with her by the researcher in Cairo.

³⁴ Afra'a Al-Hariri , Ibid

³⁵ Huda Al-Sarari, Ibid

³⁶ Dr. Mohammed Al-Mikhlaifi , Ibid

³⁷ Shadow Report by the Non-Governmental Organizations Alliance on the Implementation Level of the CEDAW Convention in Yemen, November 5, 2020 (Page 5).

Procedure, which the National Women's Committee considered a historic victory in women's rights.³⁸

The Yemeni constitution contains several legislative provisions and laws that explicitly and clearly institutionalize discrimination. Article 41 of the Yemeni Constitution states that "all citizens are equal in rights and public duties," but this equality is conditional according to Article 31, which considers women as "the sisters of men" and stipulates that their rights and duties are determined and mandated by Sharia law and legislation. The formulation of Article 31 effectively undermines the provisions of Article 41 and undermines the guarantee of equality with men.³⁹

In legal procedures and judicial proceedings, a woman's testimony is considered half the testimony of a man, which clearly inequality and contradicts Article 26 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which states that "all individuals are equal before the law and are entitled to equal protection under the law without any discrimination."⁴⁰ This contradicts Yemen's obligations as a party to international human rights treaties, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and it should be consistent with them. The same applies to many provisions in the Personal Status Law, the Criminal Law, and various other laws that perpetuate discrimination in their provisions.

The ongoing war in Yemen for the past nine years has contributed to changing the traditional social and economic roles of women. It has exacerbated the gender inequality gap. In 2021, Yemen ranked 155 out of 156 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index published by the World Economic Forum.⁴¹ This ranking reflects the significant disparities between genders and paints a grim picture for the future.

Yemen recorded the lowest rate of years of formal education for women in the Africa and Middle East region in 2010. The 2005 National Family Survey revealed that 40% of girls aged 6-15 did not enroll in school, and only 1.1% of those who did enroll completed their university education. Additionally, only 25% of girls in rural areas received an education. The denial of the right to education for girls in Yemen is attributed to several factors, with one of the most significant being that the decision to allow girls to pursue education is controlled by male family members. Furthermore, challenging economic conditions for families and the distance between girls' homes and schools, especially in rural areas, contribute to the obstacles faced by girls in accessing education.⁴²

The percentage of child marriage in Yemen reached 9% for those who got married before the age of 15, and 32% before the age of 18. However, the rate has increased in areas hosting large numbers of displaced people, such as Al-Hodeidah, Hajjah, and Ibb. In these areas, approximately 72.5% of girls were married before the age of 18, and 44.5% were married before the age of 15, due to the escalation of armed conflict.

³⁸ The Feminist Movement in Yemen, its History and Reality - Anwer Qasim Al-Masri 2007, p. 75.

³⁹ Browsed at 08:00 pm, 01/15/2024 <https://www.hrw.org/ar/news/2013/09/17/251107>

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ Global Gender Gap Report 2021, The World Economic Forum <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2021/> Browsed at 10:00 pm, 01/15/2024

⁴² World Bank Report, The Status of Yemeni Women from Ambition to Opportunity, May 2014 (p. 9 _ 36)

Regarding female genital mutilation (FGM), the practice was reported to be at a rate of 19% in five governorates.⁴³

According to a study conducted by "CARE International", the percentage of women who have experienced violence since the beginning of the conflict in Yemen has reached approximately 63%. The study indicates that over 60,000 Yemeni women are at risk of physical and psychological violence and other forms of abuse due to changing traditional roles within the family. As a result, the mechanisms for protecting women are unable to improve these situations and provide adequate protection against violence.⁴⁴

Approximately 7.1 million women in Yemen are in urgent need of accessing services that prevent and address gender-based violence. However, these services are extremely limited and completely absent in some areas.⁴⁵

⁴³ Shadow NGO Alliance Report on the Level of Implementation of the CEDAW Convention in Yemen 5 November 2020 (p. 7)

⁴⁴ Browsed at 05:00 p.m. , 03/05/2024 <https://arabstates.unfpa.org/>
Violence against women and girls is rampant amid Yemen's ongoing bitter conflict

⁴⁵ Ibid

The Feminist Movement Role in Enhancing Women's Political Participation

During the days of British colonization, women's political rights in southern Yemen gradually evolved. Initially, women were denied political participation in the Legislative Council. However, in the subsequent stage, women were granted the right to vote but not the right to run for office. This situation persisted until the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Yemen in 1969, which introduced equal citizenship and equality between men and women.⁴⁶ This allowed women to become political and societal partners through their involvement in political positions, public service, membership in legislative and local councils, participation in the judiciary, and engagement in community service institutions. This nucleus of women's empowerment expanded throughout Yemen following the formation of the Yemeni Republic and the establishment of a nationwide women's movement.⁴⁷ In northern Yemen, women's political rights were recognized much later, with even the 1988 Al-Shura Council elections excluding women from candidacy and voting rights.⁴⁸

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women specifically requires states to "take all appropriate measures" to ensure that women have the right to vote in elections and referenda on an equal basis with men, to participate in public bodies, and to participate in the formulation of government policy.⁴⁹ However, the current effective constitution of Yemen uses gendered language. Article 107, which sets the conditions for presidential candidacy, states that the candidate must not be married to a foreigner, effectively excluding women from eligibility. This has sparked debates about whether women have the right to run for office according to this provision. Requests for women's candidacy were rejected in the 2006 presidential elections due to this provision.⁵⁰ Three female candidates failed to obtain the necessary support for their candidacy from the House of Representatives and the Shura Council. The initial indications from local council candidate nominations revealed the marginalized status of women in Yemen, as the nomination period closed at the end of August. Out of a total of 19,223 candidates competing for approximately six thousand seats, only 168 women were nominated for local elections. Political activists expressed their anger in a political demonstration prior to the nomination deadline.⁵¹

At that time, opposition parties agreed to enter the presidential and local elections on a joint electoral program on September 20, 2006. They promised to allocate 30% of their candidates for local councils to women. The General People's Congress Party pledged 15% of its candidates for women. The Yemeni Women's Union took on the coordination and communication with the parties and trained and prepared 200 female candidates affiliated with different parties and independent candidates. However, when the

⁴⁶ Dr. Asmahan Al-Alas , Ibid

⁴⁷ Dr. Mohammed Al-Mikhlaifi , Ibid

⁴⁸ Adel Al-Sharjabi , Ibid

⁴⁹ Browsed at 12:00 p.m. , 01/15/2024 <https://www.hrw.org/ar/news/2013/09/17/251107>

⁵⁰ Shadow NGO Alliance Report on the Level of Implementation of the CEDAW Convention in Yemen 5 November 2020 (p. 5)

⁵¹ Jamal Al-Ja'bi, women's political participation is hindered by a lack of will and an electoral system that does not support them (Yemen: Yemeni Parliament Observatory, 2007).

nomination process began, women affiliated with the parties were dismayed by the parties' failure to fulfill their promises.⁵²

There are three and a half million eligible women voters in Yemen, which is a significant number of mature women who have reached the age of eighteen and have the right to vote in the country. However, there are others who may be unable to exercise this right. This is a very progressive, civilized, and democratic scene that gives the impression that Yemeni women have the ability to participate in decision-making. However, this is only a part of the scene, and if you take it to this extent and say that Yemeni women are top-notch politicians, it is enough to take one look at the Parliament and see that the 5.3 million eligible women voters have not produced anything significant. Even the few elected women who have entered Parliament did so because of political dialogues between parties and candidates, not because of women's pressure or the power of the 5.3 million.⁵³

When we talk about women's representation in the Yemeni government during the era of the Saleh regime, we find that there were two female ministers, the Minister of Human Rights and the Minister of Social Affairs and Labor. There was only one female ambassador out of 57 positions.⁵⁴

Nevertheless, the Yemeni women's movement played a crucial role in bringing women to positions of decision-making and political centers. Without the struggle of Yemeni women, women would not have reached these positions despite the significant challenges they face.⁵⁵ Yemeni social formations, with their traditional cultural system, are primarily shaped by tribal affiliations, and the traditional culture has long been a barrier to women's participation in political work as voters and candidates. However, the February 2011 uprising witnessed broad and effective participation of women from various spectra of civil society, politics, parties, and women's coalitions. Women assumed prominent and pioneering roles in leading peaceful protests and organizing them, and they were present in protest tents, just like men.

The outcome of this revolution resulted in the National Dialogue Document. This historical document included many legal gains for women. However, the September 21, 2014 coup by the Houthi group, which is a sectarian, racist, and anti-equality group, represented a significant setback for the women's movement. This coup, with its legal, legislative, and ideological systems that oppose equal citizenship, undoubtedly caused a major regression. Yemenis noticed that the imposition of this regime led to the exclusion of women from political and civil work, the enforcement of a specific dress code for women, and an educational system that marginalizes women. On the other hand, with the intervention of the Arab coalition, support was given to religious Salafi movements and religious groups outside the authority of the Houthis. Thus, the war

⁵² Ibid

⁵³ From an interview with Dr. Rawafa Hassan conducted by the website Al-Motamar Net in March 2002.

⁵⁴ Women's political participation after the process of political change in Yemen, 01/12/2019

⁵⁵ Dr. Balqis Abu Ossba , an academic and researcher specializing in political issues and gender studies.

resulted in the rise of two religious powers that share an opposition to women's rights.
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After the 2015 war, there was a significant decline in women's access to decision-making positions and even in their participation in negotiations or peacebuilding.⁵⁷ Female representation in the government and decision-making circles declined significantly, and women's representation became virtually non-existent compared to men. The roles of women in political parties also became stagnant, as these parties betrayed women under the pretext of the country being in a state of war. The power-sharing arrangements, based on political quotas and loyalties, further limited women's participation and marginalized them in political work.⁵⁸

Political parties believe that women's issues are not a priority during times of war, and we have seen this clearly when the recent government was formed, which was a partisan government based on quotas between parties. For the first time since around 2001, a government was formed that had no women, which represents a significant setback and regression in promoting women's participation. Political parties do not nominate women as their representatives in the government or any positions that may be shared during the war period. From their perspective, the priority during times of war is given to men, whom the parties consider to be more politically astute and experienced, although this is not true. There are qualified and competent women who possess integrity and could contribute significantly to rectifying the situation.⁵⁹

The Yemeni feminist solidarity has succeeded in amplifying the voices of women not only at the national level but also internationally. Many women from the solidarity movement have gone to the Security Council and presented briefings, enabling them to convey the voices and concerns of women to international forums, including the Security Council, the United Nations, the European Union, and other venues. Women and the feminist movement have played a crucial role in advocating for women's rights and ensuring their voices are heard in politics.⁶⁰ The movement has been recognized for its achievements, including serving as advisors to the UN envoy and becoming more organized and engaged with other organizations and communities, despite facing internal marginalization. It has presented a comprehensive feminist peace roadmap in the areas of security, economy, military, and humanitarian issues. The movement has participated in numerous feminist initiatives and local mediations in Taiz and other regions, benefiting from Security Council Resolution 2000/1325 on women, peace, and security. The UN envoy has testified that the feminist movement has contributed more than military leaders, highlighting the important role that women and the feminist movement play in promoting peace and security.⁶¹

However, there is a reluctance among women themselves to engage in politics since the beginning of the war, and there is a concern and fear that women will participate or speak in the political arena. They believe that the war is for men, and women have no role in it. This has hindered women from coming out early to demand their right to

56 Basem Alhaj, Ibid

57 Dr. Balqis Abu Ossba , Ibid

58 Huda Al-Serari , Ibid

59 Rana Ghanim , Dr. Balqis Abu Ossba , Ibid

60 Dr. Balqis Abu Ossba , Ibid

61 Women's Movement Strategy Project June 2022 (p. 20)

participate. ⁶²The dilemma is that women who have demanded political participation have been limited to seeking positions for themselves only.

The government and political parties deny them because they are seen as independent. Government positions are limited to party quotas, and it was expected that the women's civil society would support and promote participation within political parties and representation of women within the government. ⁶³Because women within political parties prioritize party ideology, political affiliation, or religious beliefs over women's issues. ⁶⁴However, the presence of women within political parties has not reached sufficient numbers for them to become decision-makers within their parties. Therefore, their role within their parties is weak. In addition, they do not demand adequate representation in the party leadership structure. The presence of women in leadership positions greatly supports women's issues.⁶⁵

The political participation of women in general requires political will, and that is attributed to the parties managing the Yemeni crisis.⁶⁶ After the appointment of the Presidential Council, there have been several decisions that have benefited women, albeit to a limited extent. There are five women in the Consultation and Reconciliation Board, two women in the legal team, and one woman in the economic team. Additionally, a decision was issued to appoint a woman in the Supreme Judicial Council, and eight women judges were appointed in the Supreme Court. The issuance of these important decisions was due to the current voice of women.⁶⁷

⁶² Dr. Balqis Abu Ossba , Ibid

⁶³ Wameedh Shakir, Ibid

⁶⁴ Afra'a Al-Hariri , Ibid

⁶⁵ Dr. Balqis Abu Ossba , Ibid

⁶⁶ Dr. Shafiqa Abdu Saeed, Ibid

⁶⁷ Dr. Balqis Abu Ossba , Ibid

Recommendations

- 1 Forming a unified women's entity that includes all women's coalitions to unify the efforts of the women's movement and coordinate among them for the benefit of their demands.
- 2 Enhancing legal protection mechanisms to ensure that women are not subjected to gender-based violence.
- 3 Cancelling the discriminatory laws against women that incite violence against them.
- 4 Providing sufficient support to encourage girls' education, especially in rural areas.
- 5 Maintaining the age of marriage at 18 in the draft constitution and amending it in personal status laws.
- 6 Pressuring for the repeal of newly enacted decisions during the war that restrict women's freedom of movement.
- 7 Raising awareness in society about the importance of women's political participation and their presence in decision-making positions.
- 8 Establishing a women's league specifically for women in political parties to pressure their parties to ensure their access to leadership positions in higher party bodies and guarantee their inclusion in government quotas.
- 9 Activating the 30% quota principle within government institutions and political formations and adopting serious policies to involve women at all levels, according to the outcomes of the national dialogue.
- 10 Ensuring women's participation in the negotiation process and peace talks, with no less than 30% representation in all tracks related to the peacebuilding process.

About Us

Qarar Foundation for Media and Sustainable Development is a civil, non-governmental, non-profit organization, established in 2011 with license No. (424). Its foundation is the martyr journalist Muhammad Abdo Al-Absi. It is active in the field of human rights, enhancing the role of investigative journalism, promoting the values of social peace, and promoting sustainable development paths through... Empowering youth, supporting youth and women's initiatives, and advocating for humanitarian issues

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