



25 February 2021

**Statement to UN Human Rights Council 45th session (14 September – 7 October 2020)**

**Item 2. *Interactive dialogue on oral update of the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen***

## **Statement on Yemen**

This statement is supported by the Peace Track Initiative (PTI).

Yemen has always ranked last in the Gender Equality Gap Index. Discrimination against women is embedded in laws, institutions and traditional social norms. Grave violations and abuses against women and girls have reached a level that we have not witnessed before in the history of the country.

The war, coupled with the spread of COVID-19 and other fatal disease outbreaks as well as the floods that hit a number of governorates, have worsened the already catastrophic humanitarian crisis. This has disproportionately affected women and girls, put them at higher risk of gender-based violence and has increased the vulnerability of internally displaced women and girls, migrant and refugee women and girls, as well as women and girls from other marginalized groups.

In spite of the global call for a ceasefire, new battle fronts and hostilities opened and escalated, including in *Mareb, Taiz and Hodaida*. These have disproportionately affected women. The proliferation of arms within the region has increased,<sup>1</sup> also as a result of on-going supplies of weapons and military equipment to states involved in the conflict, including by several states parties to the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) and the United States, which is an ATT signatory.<sup>2</sup>

Sexual violence against women, men, girls and boys has been used as a weapon of war by all parties to the conflict. Since 2018, The Peace Track Initiative (PTI) has documented cases of kidnapping, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, torture, including rape and other forms of sexual violence, electrocution, and beating, against at least 30 women human rights defenders.<sup>3</sup> The majority of the cases were in Houthi controlled areas. Houthis have arbitrarily detained and

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, "Letter dated 22 January 2021 from the Panel of Experts on Yemen addressed to the President of the Security Council", UN index: S/2021/79, 25 January 2021. Available at:

[https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/S\\_2021\\_79.pdf](https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/S_2021_79.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, "Situation of human rights in Yemen, including violations and abuses since September 2014. Detailed findings of the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen, UN index: A/HRC/45/CRP.7, 29 September 2020, paragraphs 412–415. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/GEE-Yemen/A-HRC-45-CRP.7-en.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, "A Pandemic of Impunity in a Tortured Land", Situation of human rights in Yemen, including violations and abuses since September 2014, Report of the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen, UN Index: A/HRC/45/6, 28 September 2020, paragraph 80. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=26315&LangID=E>; and "Situation of human rights in Yemen, including violations and abuses since September 2014, Detailed findings of the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen", UN Index : A/HRC/45/CRP.7, paragraph 331.

tortured, including through rape, women and girls who oppose them.<sup>4</sup> Women were targeted for simply participating in demonstrations against hunger and were beaten in their homes for sharing videos calling for disbursement of salaries. The Houthis also issued death sentences against Dr. Nadia Al-Sakkaf, a woman leader and member of the Women Solidarity Network,<sup>5</sup> as well as against others, including politicians and journalists.

Women are largely excluded from the national and international peace and political processes. The government developed a *National Action Plan (NAP) for Women, Peace, and Security in 2020*.<sup>6</sup> However, while this NAP and the outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference<sup>7</sup> set a 30% quota for women representation, the recently formed government of Yemen excluded women completely<sup>8</sup>. Additionally, the UN led peace consultations on prisoner exchange entirely excluded women. We are also alarmed by the use by the Houthis of arbitrarily detained civilians in prisoner swaps, which amounts to hostage taking under international humanitarian law.<sup>9</sup>

We conclude with an urgent call for support to a permanent, comprehensive, and just peace for Yemen. We urge the Human Rights Council to:

- Call for diplomatic and political pressure to reach the immediate cessation of hostilities targeting Mareb and a nationwide ceasefire, and call for an immediate resumption of inclusive and accountable peace negotiations;
- Call for the immediate and unconditional release of all those arbitrarily detained by all parties;
- Denounce the Houthis' illegal and unfair trial procedures and death sentences targeting, among others, women political leaders, politicians and journalists;
- Denounce the use by the Houthis of arbitrarily detained civilians in prisoner exchanges, which amounts to hostage taking;
- Ensure that any resolution adopted by this Council on Yemen include specific calls for the equal and meaningful representation of women in the political and peace processes;
- Demand an immediate halt to all arms transfers to all parties involved in the conflict in Yemen.

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, "Situation of human rights in Yemen, including violations and abuses since September 2014, Detailed findings of the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen", UN Index : A/HRC/45/CRP.7, paragraphs 105, 173 –174, 205 – 213, 331.

<sup>5</sup> *Solidarity Statement with Dr. Nadia Al-Saqqaf*, Women Solidarity Network, available at:

<https://www.womensolidaritynetwork.org/news-statements-en/solidarity-statement-with-dr-nadia-al-saqqaf>

<sup>6</sup> Yemen WPS National Action Plan: Everything you need to know about Yemen's National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security, Peace Track Initiative, 2020. <https://www.peacetrackinitiative.org/publications#h.d2w6kritizjl>

<sup>7</sup> The National Dialogue Conference (NDC) was a transitional dialogue process held in Sana'a, Yemen from 18 March 2013 to 24 January 2014, as part of the Yemeni crisis reconciliation efforts.

<sup>8</sup> See Yemeni Women's statement on a government without women, 2020.

<https://sites.google.com/view/nowomennogovernment/press-البيانات-الإعلامية?authuser=0>

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, " Letter dated 22 January 2021 from the Panel of Experts on Yemen addressed to the President of the Security Council", UN index: S/2021/79, 25 January 2021, paragraphs 11 and 138.