

The President of the Security Council presents her compliments to the members of the Council and has the honour to transmit herewith, for their information, a copy of a **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, and its enclosure.

This letter and its enclosure will be issued as a document of the Security Council under the symbol S/2021/264.

17 March 2021



New York, March 17, 2021

Excellency,

Ireland and Mexico, as co-chairs of the Security Council's Informal Experts Group on Women, Peace and Security and in close cooperation with the United Kingdom, would like to share the summary note of the following meeting of the Informal Experts Group:

- The situation in Yemen

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

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Handwritten signature of Geraldine Byrne Nason in black ink.

Geraldine Byrne Nason
Permanent Representative
of Ireland
to the Security Council

Handwritten signature of Juan Ramón de la Fuente Ramírez in black ink.

Juan Ramón de la Fuente Ramírez
Permanent Representative
of Mexico
to the United Nations

Handwritten signature of Barbara Woodward in black ink.

Barbara Woodward
Permanent Representative
of the United Kingdom
to the United Nations

H.E. Mr. António Guterres
Secretary-General
United Nations
New York





SECURITY COUNCIL INFORMAL EXPERTS GROUP ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY

Summary of the meeting on Yemen held on March 2nd, 2021

On 2 March 2021, the Informal Experts Group on Women, Peace and Security (IEG) convened a meeting on the situation in Yemen. The members were briefed by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, alongside the Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator of the United Nations in Yemen and other representatives of the United Nations Country Team, and the head of the UN Mission to Support the Hudaydah Agreement (UNMHA). The meeting concluded with an overview of key recommendations provided by UN Women and additional observations shared by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

Questions from Council Members:

Members of the Security Council asked about the **UN's plans to ensure greater inclusion** of women in the political process and peace negotiations, including for a potential ceasefire, and what else the Council should do to change the current dynamic of exclusion and under-representation. They raised questions about the impact that the **pandemic** and the **economic devastation** brought about by the conflict is having on women and girls and whether this is being effectively addressed by international partners and taken into account in recovery planning; about **attacks against politically active women and women human rights defenders**, as well as accountability for violence against women and girls and **conflict-related sexual violence**; an assessment of the feasibility of implementation and localization of the recently adopted **National Action Plan** on women, peace and security; or trends in the situation of displaced women and girls and those affected by the **escalation of hostilities in Marib**. Council Members also asked about **women's socioeconomic situation, labor force participation, food security, health, and education**, and how these factors affect their participation in public life and decision-making. Finally, Council Members wanted to know whether the **gender-responsiveness of humanitarian aid** planning and delivery in Yemen is adequate, as well as the general availability of **services for survivors of gender-based violence and those in need of mental health and psychosocial support**.

Main points raised in the meeting:

- The level of **exclusion and under-representation of Yemeni women** from decision-making, political talks, and peace negotiations has not improved since the last meeting of this Informal Experts Group. As an example, in five rounds of face-to-face negotiations for prisoner exchanges and release organized by the UN and the International Commission of the Red Cross, the conflict parties did not include a single woman in any of the delegations, in spite of the very active advocacy of women's groups and networks on this issue, including the Abductees' Mothers Association.
- **The recently formed government did not include a single woman** among its 24 ministers, something that had not happened over the last two decades. Due to 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 deputy minister was killed in an attack against the new cabinet on December 30th in Aden airport.

- In April 2020, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and OSESGY held a virtual, internal **high-level strategy meeting** to support and deepen women's and gender inclusion in the peace process. Commitments were made across all OSESGY sections to accelerate efforts; progress with implementation was subsequently reviewed in December 2020, and new commitments for 2021 were set predicated on all OSESGY personnel bearing responsibility to fully implement the women, peace and security agenda.
- In October 2020, the Special Envoy publicly committed to **reserved, non-transferable seats for women in any upcoming talks**.
- In addition, the Office of the Special Envoy has commissioned gender analysis expert papers and studies from leading Yemeni analysts, broadened and increased its regular engagement with Yemeni women, youth and civil society at multiple levels, including via 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 2022 regular budget.
- Apart from the 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 women's representation in all dialogues and the integration of gender-related issues in outcome documents, reports and recommendations.
- The UN is currently working to negotiate a nationwide ceasefire, the opening of the Hudaydah port and the Sana'a airport, and the resumption of the political process. OSESGY 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 they play in community safety as well as bolstering them in advance of any ceasefire so that they are better prepared to contribute to sustaining and strengthening a ceasefire once an agreement is brokered.
- **Women from six political parties** have formed a caucus and have asked that the international community engage regularly with them, in addition to the engagement with women from civil society organizations.
- **Implementation of the National Action Plan** on women, peace and security will be challenging due to the limited capacity and resources for implementation. However, in response to the Government's request, a national and an international expert are being recruited with donor support to be based in Aden and support NAP implementation.
- **In northern Yemen**, there are growing **restrictions and risks involved in working on gender- and peace-related issues**, including the harassment of UN staff and their implementing partners, who often have to risk their lives to continue to work.
- **UNFPA-supported services** on gender-based violence and reproductive health were reduced by 40 percent due to lack of funding, and there are no indications that the resources pledged in the recent donor conference will be sufficient to reopen them. Support for **women's economic empowerment programmes** is in high demand by local authorities, but the scale of the UN's work is limited.
- **The UN's humanitarian response** targets the most vulnerable, and this includes: multi-purpose cash assistance for **female-headed households**, especially in IDP sites; mental

health and psychosocial support for women and girls; safe spaces and community centers; and legal support for family issues related to property, inheritance, housing, and land, as well as taking into account how gender inequality and gender discrimination, including within households, affect food insecurity. The Humanitarian Country Team is currently discussing options to scale up in Marib 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 Marib, including reports of sexual enslavement, is particularly worrisome, and no officials have been held accountable for tolerating or profiting from trafficking.

- In June, the experts will have an opportunity to review the 7th and 8th combined report from Yemen to the **Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women**, and Member States should raise the issues discussed in this meeting 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 LGBTI persons have also been reported. Sexual violence was also recorded in camps for internally-displaced people, 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 and the dire humanitarian situation and increased risks of conflict-related sexual violence and the 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 under-reporting impedes 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 “**honor killings,**” **repression of politically active women**, the withdrawal of women and girls from public life or education, and suicide of women and girls as a result of unaddressed trauma. Services for survivors of gender-based violence remain insufficiently available. The Office welcomed resolution 2564 and the addition of an individual to the **sanctions** list on Yemen, including for sexual violence and rape against politically active women, as well as the disappearance of women.

Recommendations:

The following recommendations were made either by UN Women, as the secretariat of the IEG or the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, or the Special Envoy.¹

- 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.

¹ These recommendations are suggestions from UN participants in this meeting or the background note prepared by the secretariat of the Informal Experts Group ahead of the meeting, and not recommendations from the Informal Experts Group as a whole or Council Members.

- Ahead of the resumption of a formal political process, Council Members and other international partners could coordinate with the UN on joint messaging to advocate for women's direct representation that is based on the minimum 30 percent target agreed on in the 2013 National Dialogue.
- Council Members could request the Office of the Special Envoy -and other UN entities working in Yemen- to share a written summary of plans and commitments to enhancing women's inclusion and gender mainstreaming in 2021.
- When renewing the mandate of UNMHA, the Security Council should call on the mission to ensure that it is systematically engaging with diverse women's organizations in all areas of its work and to report on the outcomes of such outreach.
- 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 on the parties to undertake commitments against conflict-related sexual violence.
- The Security Council should stress the need for a nationwide ceasefire and insist on explicit references to the protection needs and perspectives of civilians, particularly those in the most vulnerable situations, such as internally-displaced people, sexual and gender minorities, and women and girls. Council Members should call for women's participation in sustaining and strengthening ceasefire implementation once an agreement is reached.
- Council members should remind the international community to prioritize funding to support women's local peacebuilding initiatives at the track II and track III level, and 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 these efforts.
- In the 2140 Sanctions Committee, Council members should continue to consider the listing of additional individuals identified by the Panel of Experts responsible for the repression of women, including the use of conflict-related sexual violence.
- Council members should support the deployment of women protection advisors 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 partners for the provision of multi-sectoral services, facilitating survivors' socioeconomic reintegration, enhancing accountability for perpetrators, and engaging with conflict parties in prevention efforts.
- Council members should promote full adherence to Member State obligations under the Arms Trade Treaty.
- Council members should support, in close cooperation with civil society, the implementation and resourcing of the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, including through supporting and funding diverse women's rights groups at sub-national and local levels and their inclusion in the peace process.
- Council Members should emphasize the urgent need for 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 increased risks of sexual and gender-based violence, including among the internally-displaced and refugee populations in Yemen, as well as engaging with men and boys to support the inclusion and empowerment of women and girls in vital household and community decisions.

- Council members should encourage the international community and all relevant UN entities to prioritize flexible funding to support women's local peacebuilding initiatives, including by supporting the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund and making this more available to organizations in Yemen, alongside requesting international and national-level NGOs and research institutes to demonstrate ongoing integration of the WPS agenda into their day-to-day work.

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