

# CHAPTER 5

## Yemeni Women in Peace Processes: From 2015 to Today

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### INTRODUCTION

The role of women in Yemen has transformed throughout the conflict period. For a country that consistently suffers to uphold and promote the rights of women, there are those individuals and groups who prevail. This chapter will explore the changing roles of women in Yemen, and how the perceptions of women in peacebuilding contexts have transformed between the time of the post-Arab Spring peace negotiations in the National Dialogue Council, into the role that women take in today's conflict.

Women were originally granted access to negotiations and were in fact represented through a mandate as part of the governmental structure. Unfortunately, women now struggle to find their voice in Yemen, as this representation no longer exists. Continually marginalized and targeted for trying to promote peace in Yemen, the role that women have in society gives them a unique set of opportunities in promoting peace. For the sake of this paper, women will refer especially to those who are peacebuilders, human rights activists, humanitarian workers, and all of those who choose to participate in

the promotion of women and their inclusion in bringing peace to Yemen. The discussion begins with a broad overview of women's roles in peace processes and conflict, and then is taken to the state level, where a comparison will be drawn between two different times of women as peacebuilders.

### THE WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA IN YEMEN

In the year 2000, the United Nations (UN) formed the Women, Peace and Security agenda, a series of eight Security Council resolutions which have been the framework for the implementation of women's full and equal representation and participation in peace processes and security efforts.<sup>1</sup> The first resolution, 1325, passed

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1 UN Women, "What We Do: Peace and Security," UN Women, accessed June 11, 2019, <http://www.unwomen.org/what-we-do/peace-and-security>. UN Women, accessed June 11, 2019, <http://www.unwomen.org/what-we-do/peace-and-security>."plainCitation": "UN Women, "What We Do: Peace and Security," UN Women, accessed June 11, 2019, <http://www.unwomen.org/what-we-do/peace-and-security>;"noteIndex": 1;"citationItems": [{"id": 343, "uris": ["http://zotero.org/users/local/6d-



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in 2000, was the first UN Security Council resolution which recognized how men and women experience conflict differently. One of the driving concepts of this agenda is to view conflict through the lens of power relations, and it calls on actors to address the root causes and drivers of conflict, gender inequality being one of these factors.<sup>2</sup> Another significant resolution worth noting, is Security Council Resolution 1889, which ensures that women's protection and empowerment is taken into account during post-conflict discussions.<sup>3</sup> This framework of resolutions has been the backbone of women's inclusion in peace processes, but it also faces criticism on international and local levels. The

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<sup>2</sup> Jessica Zimmerman, "Lessons from the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda," *The Diplomat*, November 2, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/11/lessons-from-the-uns-women-peace-and-security-agenda/>.

<sup>3</sup> "WPS SRES 1889.Pdf," accessed July 2, 2019, <http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF-CF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/WPS%20SRES%201889.pdf>.

four pillars of the agenda can be divided into prevention, participation, protection and finally relief and recovery. Within the context of Yemen, there are very few things that are being done to ensure that women are being included in these discussions, and that the three "pillars" of prevention, participation and protection are being upheld.

First and foremost, when discussing the Women, Peace and Security agenda within the context of Yemen, it is significant in noting that Yemen has not devised a National Action Plan for the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325, and the broader Women, Peace and Security agenda as a whole. If Yemeni women are to gain a position at the negotiating table, or to be involved in the peace processes in a post-conflict scenario within Yemen, it is unlikely to occur without a National Action Plan for women. Following the NDC in 2015 a group of women who were working on the negotiations formulated a National Agenda for Women, Peace and Security, yet the plan never came to fruition because of lack of support from women outside of the group.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Sanam Naraghi Anderlini et al., "Bringing Peace to Yemen by Having Women at the Table What the U.S. Must Do and Why It Matters" (U.S Civil Society Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, August 21, 2017), <http://>

The participation of women in peace processes in Yemen was seen in 2011-2015 but has not been as widely observed in today's conflict. Only two of the four "pillars" of this agenda are seen in Yemen: participation and prevention. Women are allowed to participate in many levels of government discussions, including peace negotiations, however the quotas that were used in the NDC are not being upheld, and a 30 percent mandate for women's involvement has not been seen in any of the peace talks or delegations since the end of the NDC. The preventative measure to ensure women's peace and security exists in Yemen through the structure of the laws. However, in practice this pillar of the Women, Peace and Security agenda lacks popular support and widespread implementation in Yemen.

The protection of women in conflict, and the understanding that women experience conflict in Yemen differently than men do, is not being addressed in Yemen. Women in Yemen continually face threats in public spaces for taking part in the conflict as peace builders and negotiators. Since the inception of the agenda at the turn of the century, and the escalations of conflict in Yemen in 2011 and again in 2015, there have been very few conferences held on

[www.icanpeacework.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/ICAN-US-CSWG-Policy-Brief-August-28-2017.pdf](http://www.icanpeacework.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/ICAN-US-CSWG-Policy-Brief-August-28-2017.pdf).

the topic of Yemeni women in conflict. Women gathered in Cyprus in October 2015 to discuss women's roles in the war 5 and last year, women gathered in Amman, Jordan with the help of UN Women to discuss women's roles as peacebuilders in Yemen. 6 The fact that there have only been these two major conferences that have focused on women's inclusion in peace negotiations is problematic within itself, but it is also noteworthy that women's roles in peace processes were not discussed in any capacity in 2016 or 2017. It is significant to note as well, there were likely similar discussions that were taking place, discussing women's roles in the peace processes in Yemen that were not held on an international level. This silence demonstrates the struggles that women continue to face in voicing their own concerns on a bringing peace to Yemen. In late 2018, with the UN-backed discussions that ultimately led to the formation of the Stockholm agreement, only one female delegate was included in these discussions. 7

5 Anderlini et al.

6 OSESGY, "Griffiths to Yemeni Women Conference: 'We Have to Walk an Uphill,'" OSESGY, March 27, 2019, <https://osesgy.unmissions.org/griffiths-yemeni-women-conference-%E2%80%9Cwe-have-walk-uphill%E2%80%9D>.

7 One Earth Future, "Yemeni Women Call for Inclusion in Peace Talks," Our Secure Future: Women Make the Difference, January 14, 2019, <https://oursecurefuture.org/blog/>



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The role of women in the conflict in Yemen has changed significantly since the start of the war in 2011, and this has been recognized both internally, and by the international community. The following sections will explore the role that women had in the National Dialogue Council (NDC) between 2013 and 2014 and the transformations of women's roles in peace processes in Yemen today.

### WOMEN'S ROLE IN THE NATIONAL DIALOGUE CONFERENCE 2011-2015

At the NDC, following the Arab Spring in 2011, Yemen went through a series of transitions and negotiations to try and reconcile groups from across the country, as well as to establish a power-sharing deal after the 33-year rule of Ali Abdallah Saleh.<sup>8</sup> During these negotiations, each political group that was represented at the table was required to have at least 30 percent women on each panel. This mandate created a large amount of momentum for women and their role in the peace processes. These women participated in a significant capacity throughout the two years of the NDC, making up 28 percent of the total participants of the conference.<sup>9</sup>

Women led three of the nine NDC workshops and

yemeni-women-peace. Our Secure Future: Women Make the Difference, January 14, 2019, <https://oursecurefuture.org/blog/yemeni-women-peace>.  
 Citation: "One Earth Future, "Yemeni Women Call for Inclusion in Peace Talks," Our Secure Future: Women Make the Difference, January 14, 2019, <https://oursecurefuture.org/blog/yemeni-women-peace>.  
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<sup>8</sup> Jessica Zimmerman, "Lessons from the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda," *The Diplomat*, November 2, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/11/lessons-from-the-uns-women-peace-and-security-agenda/>.

<sup>9</sup> Anderlini et al., "Bringing Peace to Yemen by Having Women at the Table What the U.S. Must Do and Why It Matters."

created an all women panel in order to voice their concerns to the council more strongly.<sup>10</sup> These statistics demonstrate clearly the importance that women had in the attempted government transition following the revolution in 2011. They played an integral part in the protests and negotiations, yet they faced scrutiny and many structural challenges along the way. Many of these challenges that women face in trying to participate more in the peace processes are systemic in nature, because many of the delegations and groups in Yemen still do not openly advocate for women's participation in an official capacity.

The women of the revolution worked to implement a mandatory 30 percent representation in parliament, however to this day that goal has still not been achieved. In fact, this goal is perhaps further from being achieved today in 2019, than it was after the NDC in 2015. Women in Yemen during the NDC fought to gain representation, noting particularly the importance that they place in the peace processes. Including women in the peace negotiations in Yemen in 2015 was advocated for at the United Nations in 2015, by the UN Special Envoy to Yemen, however there were few changes that were adopted to allow women more opportunities in the peace processes during the 2011-2015 transition at the international level.<sup>11</sup>

Following the ending of the NDC in 2014, women were used as representatives on certain committees, including the Constitution Drafting Commission and the National Authority for Monitoring the Implementation of the National Dialogue Conference amongst others. However, their presence was seen largely in a superficial manner, as these committees were required to fill quotas with women as participants.<sup>12</sup> The list of

<sup>10</sup> Anderlini et al.

<sup>11</sup> UN Women, "Yemeni Women Call for Their Inclusion in Peace Efforts," UN Women, October 27, 2015, <http://www.unwomen.org/news/stories/2015/10/yemeni-women-call-for-their-inclusion-in-peace-efforts>.

<sup>12</sup> "Women in Peace and Transition Processes: Yemen (2011-2015) | Inclusive Peace & Transition Initiative," Inclusive Peace, April 2018, <https://www.inclusivepeace.org>.



actions that women took following the end of the NDC, through 2015 is extensive. However, after this time period ended, many of the women's groups were dismantled due to the onset of the conflict in 2015. The inability of the government of Yemen and local actors to support women's roles in peace processes following end of the NDC has ultimately affected the role that they play in peace processes today, as their continuous role in peace processes cannot be guaranteed.

While actions such as these are important to the transition of involving more women in peace processes, if women are not directly involved in the discussion, and are only included as a point of discussion, there will be no change. This is what is still being seen today, as women have been increasingly marginalized throughout the war, since 2015, and face even more challenges today than they did four years ago.

In the next section, some of these challenges will be addressed, as well as a brief comparison of the steps that have been taken to include women in peace processes in the current conflict. Ultimately, Yemeni men and women, international organizations and high-level representatives must be the one to take actions to advocate for women and their role in the peace processes. While women are fighting to play a part in the post-conflict peace negotiations, the changes must be seen as beneficial to all groups, otherwise women will only continue to be marginalized.

<http://www.sddirect.org/content/women-peace-and-transition-processes-yemen-2011-2015>.

## TODAY IN YEMEN: THE TRANSFORMATION OF WOMEN'S ROLES

In the ongoing civil war today, women have been disproportionately affected by the conflict. The economic impact of the war effects a variety of sectors and groups in Yemen, arguable, the group that is most affected by the conflict is family households. Families in Yemen can no longer rely on men to provide for the household and the number of women that have become the head of the household during the war has increased to over 30 percent.<sup>13</sup>

This shift in women's roles is significant because of the existing societal stigmas that prevent women from being more active within the public sphere. There are many risk that women face being at the frontline of sustaining families and communities, while simultaneously trying to adapt to new ways to address the effects of the conflict.<sup>14</sup> These risks that women face, including verbal and physical threats, harassment and slander, must be acknowledged, particularly as women face challenges in public spaces in Yemen.

The role that women have taken on since the conflict began in 2015 varies drastically from

<sup>13</sup> Anderlini et al., "Bringing Peace to Yemen by Having Women at the Table What the U.S. Must Do and Why It Matters."

<sup>14</sup> Marie-Christine Heinze and Sophie Stevens, "Women as Peacebuilders in Yemen" (Social Development Direct, June 2018), [http://www.sddirect.org.uk/media/1571/sdd\\_yemenreport\\_full\\_v5.pdf](http://www.sddirect.org.uk/media/1571/sdd_yemenreport_full_v5.pdf).

their roles following the Arab Spring. In today's conflict, women have taken the responsibility upon themselves to fight for the end of the war, as well as fighting for their representation within negotiations and potential post-conflict resolutions. Similarly to the position in 2011, women have taken to the streets and demanded a role in the peace processes. However, as the conflict is still ongoing there is unlikely to be a comparable post-conflict dialogue, like the NDC, that would allow for women to play a direct role in the peace processes, at this current stage. The political situation in Yemen, and the parties' unwillingness to negotiate, or implement peace deals is problematic when looking for opportunities for women's participation in peace processes.

In March of 2019, over 100 Yemeni women gathered in Jordan to discuss the role that women can have in the formal consultations, in local groups and their inclusion in the peace negotiations in Yemen. <sup>15</sup> While the Special Envoy of the Secretary General of Yemen, Martin Griffiths acknowledged women's roles in the peace processes, the conference itself had no women speakers on the first day, and only when reporters were not allowed in the discussions, were women allowed to speak at the conference, hosted by UN Women. <sup>16</sup> While events like these are imperative to promoting the discussion on women's rights, their role in the conflict, and potential steps towards peace, inclusivity in these conferences is still lacking. Women from around Yemen should be at the forefront of the discussions, not just the topic itself. Within Yemen, women are engaged in conflict resolution on multiple levels by promoting peace and providing security when possible. <sup>17</sup>

In a post-conflict scenario, the women of Yemen must be a group that is represented in the

peace-processes. Significantly, the women of Yemen comprise a diverse display of interests and regions, and by having a small proportion of women involved in the peace processes, the diversity of opinions of women in Yemen will not be considered seriously. In order to implement a strategy where women are represented in the peace processes in Yemen, the government with support from local, national and international actors, must draft and apply a National Action Plan for the Women, Peace and Security agenda. Furthermore, while women from diverse areas and demographics within Yemen should be represented in such discussions in order to represent the diverse needs and opinions of Yemeni women, there must also be structural changes within Yemen that allow for greater, long-term participation of women.

### LOOKING FORWARD: THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN PEACE PROCESSES

The role that women have played in past peace processes has stagnated in the current conflict, although women have taken on different roles in Yemen today. The conflict has disproportionately affected women throughout Yemen. Mirroring the post-conflict period and the NDC in 2011-2015, women played an integral role in promoting peace on local, state and international levels. In 2019, women are fighting to play a more active role in the conflict, as peace keepers, peace builders, and negotiators, however they have largely failed in this notion, as women's inclusion in peace processes is seen less often today, than in 2015. Women in Yemen are struggling to find their voice in the negotiations, as they are not being allowed a seat at the negotiating table. Involving women in the peace processes in Yemen is vital to the stability of the country and promoting practices that could ensure a lasting peace. Measures must be taken to ensure that women are being included in the peace processes in Yemen, including the implementation of a National Action Plan for Yemen.

Women in Yemen have a unique opportunity to promote peace, but their security and safety

<sup>15</sup> OSESGY, "Griffiths to Yemeni Women Conference."

<sup>16</sup> AP Archive, *Yemeni Women Underrepresented in Peace Talks*, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IRDn-rdRzTK8>.

<sup>17</sup> Heinze and Stevens, "Women as Peacebuilders in Yemen."

must be recognized as a priority. While women in Yemen are at the forefront of individual peacebuilding, they do not have a large enough platform to speak for themselves.

The international community must support women's roles in peace processes by assisting at both a local and international level to allow women from all over Yemen to play an active part in the discussions. Similar to the NDC, women should have larger representation in

peace negotiations than what is currently seen, as many opinions from women are not heard. Including women in peace processes, demanding safety and representation for women must be a priority if Yemen hopes to achieve a lasting peace following the conflict. Without women's involvement in every step of the peace processes, this goal will not be achieved. ■



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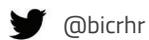
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