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**Joint submission to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Pre-sessional Working Group, 67th session (October 2020)**

**Review of Yemen**

**Submitted on 10 August 2020**

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# I. Introduction

Peace Track Initiative and the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom made the enclosed submission to the CEDAW Pre-sessional working group, 77th session (March 2020), which covers the following issues: humanitarian needs and social services, including in relation to the impacts of the loss of livelihoods and income; internal displacement; the impacts of famine, cholera outbreaks, and obstacles in access to healthcare; deterioration in education services; gender-based violence; arbitrary detention and enforced disappearances; impacts of arms proliferation and explosive weapons, including in relation of economic, social and cultural rights (ESCRs); child recruitment; women’s participation in public and political life.

Since many of the issues addressed in our submission to the CEDAW pre-session are relevant to the review by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) of Yemen’s third periodic report, our organisations are bringing it to the attention of the Committee’s 67th Pre-Sessional Working Group in connection with its preparation of the List of issues for Yemen. Our organisations would have liked to update the information in that submission in order to provide the CESCR Pre-Sessional Working Group with recent developments but were unable to do so by the deadline set for submissions. Nonetheless, we will be pleased to provide updates orally and to respond to questions from Committee members on the above-mentioned issues in the upcoming pre-sessional working group meeting with NGOs.

In addition to the issues already included in our submission to the CEDAW pre-session, our organisations wish to bring to the attention of the CESCR pre-sessional working group the following information relating to 1) water scarcity and 2) environmental degradation.

# II. Water scarcity

Yemen is currently experiencing severe water scarcity. Even before the start of the armed conflict, the country was already facing a very serious water shortage. The conflict has greatly exacerbated the situation including due to the increase in arbitrary and indiscriminate pumping of groundwater and the collapse of governmental water institutions.

While a law was issued prohibiting the indiscriminate drilling of underground wells with its implementation monitored by the security forces and local councils, Law (41) of 2006 amending the law 33 of year 2002, requires that permits must be obtained before drilling any well. However, the turmoil in the country has affected the enforcement of the law and a large number of underground wells have been randomly dug in several regions.

Even prior to 2015, the burden of provision of water fell on women and girls who would fetch water from long distances. This could expose them to sexual harassment, drowning in open water reservoirs, and suffering from miscarriages caused by carrying heavy water containers. In addition, open water sources (often rainwater pools) are usually contaminated, which poses a high risk of illnesses transmitted through water.

Rural societies in Yemen rely heavily on women in agriculture and livestock. Despite this role, rural women are deprived of many opportunities and rights. They have limited rights of ownership or control of assets, and their participation in social and political life is restricted. The number of women-headed households in rural areas has increased as many men have migrated in search of livelihood. These households are more at risk of food insecurity. Moreover, when food is scarce, women are the first family members to eat less as a coping mechanism, even though they continue to do hard labour, such as working in the fields.

Women are generally excluded from economic transactions in the local markets. The “Yemen, Plan of Action, 2018–2020” of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) reports that “Less than 1 percent of agricultural landholders in Yemen are female. However, women have a major role in agriculture, providing 60 % of labour in crop farming, 90 percent in livestock rearing and 10 percent of wage labour.”

Information collected by PTI indicates that there are parents who prevent their daughters from studying as they are, instead, supposed to be fetching water, firewood, or doing housework at home. This impacts on their education and is also linked to an increase in child marriage. Some of the people interviewed by PTI also indicated the situation affects boys too, as children have become responsible for bringing water to their homes from very far places, with some dropping out of school in order to work full-time to help their mothers fetch water, firewood and graze sheep.

Among the solutions that have been indicated to address the situation are: establishing water projects for rural areas, or at least to build roads that are paved, so, that water can be brought through cars in sufficient quantities.

Very low public awareness about the value of the environment impedes effective planning of natural resources management as well as social responsibility towards the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources. Such public awareness is poor primarily due to a lack of awareness and communication strategy, along with a weak ability of the Environmental Protection Agency to produce and distribute environmental information and awareness-raising materials.

# III. Environmental degradation

A Yemen Environmental System Assessment Study was conducted with the objectives of doing an ecosystem and climate change evaluation with the aim to integrate ecosystem services into National planning and Accounting. The key ecosystems included in the assignment were forests, wetlands, marines (coral, mangroves, sea grass) and rangelands.

However, it should be noted that the evaluation tends to be biased because it does not include a wide range of ecosystems such as groundwater basins, seagrass beds, salt marshes, lakes and bays, sandy and rocky beaches, terraces, irrigated valleys, nesting turtles, feeding sites and breeding grounds for seabirds, coral reef. There is an urgent need for further work to map the classification of the ecosystem in the country. However, the EIA study concluded that the total value of the groundwater and marine fishing systems are used at no cost which leads to unsustainable harvesting of these resources.

A review of available national indicators shows that water, forest and marine habitats continue to be degraded as a result of destructive, polluting and hazardous production methods such as antiquated technologies and inappropriate methods, and an excessive and uncontrolled consumption of raw materials as input as well as natural resources such as groundwater, firewood and fish stock . In addition, the report also refers to “main causal factors contributing to the existence of current production patterns across all production sectors” . Those are attributed to the “destructive methods applied in materials consumption and production; excessive disposal of wastes, effluents and pollutants into the natural environment, inappropriate practices, excessive use of none green or antiquated technologies, overconsumption of raw materials as production inputs, inadequate application of recycled and recyclable products and extensive use fossil fuel with high carbon contents” . There is also a lack of an effective waste management and recycling system . This means that the country is unlikely to achieve the intended national target by 2025 unless a firm policy shift is made towards integrating biodiversity values into national development strategies, sectoral plans, local land-use plans and reducing the breadth of poverty.

According to the 2019 Yemen’s Sixth National Report on its implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity, “owing to progressive population growth, increased poverty, and unchecked urbanization over the period 2093 to 2009, pressures on marginal lands have increased, accelerating the over-exploitation of woodlands resources, leading to reduction in area covered by woodlands and shrublands.” The report also recalls a survey indicating that “fuelwood consumed of the aggregated households of urban and rural areas increased drastically between 2014 and 2017. This increase was attributable to an increasing number of households accessing fuelwood under lack of mitigation action combined with escalating war. In addition, the carbon stocks of Yemen forest for the period of 2012 to 2017 remained at the same level as direct result of unchanged forest area because of the lack of plantation and the continuing wood removal for meeting households’ energy.”

According to the same source, “livestock are a primary source of income for smallholder farmers under a mixed farming system, particularly sheep, goats, cattle, camels and poultry”. The ongoing conflict has impacted the livestock at many levels. For instance, several livestock herds have been decimated. In addition, the dire socio-economic situation and the several sieges and blockades hinder access to veterinary services and -already costly- animal vaccines and drugs causing the spread of endemic diseases. Furthermore, the conflict led to soaring prices of animal feed which has led to poor livestock productivity with high levels of animal mortality, especially in the poultry sector.

# IV. Annex: Joint submission to the UN CEDAW Committee

# Pre-sessional working group, 77th session (March 2020)

# I. Introduction

This submission is primarily based on a UPR submission developed by the Peace Track Initiative and a group of Yemeni women-led organisations (members of the Women Solidarity Network in Yemen) and supported by the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) in 2018[[1]](#footnote-1) and which sheds light on the gender-specific impacts of the ongoing conflict, particularly on women, especially after the escalation of violence in 2014. A copy of the UPR submission is provided as an annex.

The ongoing armed conflict has led to widespread poverty and resulted in social and economic insecurity that forces large sections of the population to rely on livelihood assistance. Social and economic insecurity, deterioration of the rule of law and displacement have increased women’s vulnerability to violence, abuse and exploitation. Moreover, the conflict has exacerbated the need for women to take on leading roles in supporting their families in addition to their gendered unpaid roles in care and domestic work.

Since the conflict escalated in Yemen in 2015 and despite security challenges, displacement and increasing multifaceted patterns of violence inflicted upon them, Yemeni women have devised new kinds of communal and inclusive resistance to tyranny and militarised environments. Not only are they at the forefront of the humanitarian response, they are also extensively mitigating the impact of the conflict by being involved in local mediation efforts, creating peacebuilding initiatives and sustaining their communities and families.

Despite all this and being visibly present and active during the uprisings of 2011, Yemeni women have not been meaningfully included in the discussions on how to resolve the conflict within the country even though they are disproportionately affected by it, including by the use of explosive weapons, indiscriminate shelling and mine detonations.

# II. Humanitarian Needs and Social Services

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the humanitarian crisis in Yemen remains the worst in the world; 80% of population in Yemen, that is 24.1 million out of 29.3 million need, humanitarian aid or protection assistance, including 14.3 who are in acute need.[[2]](#footnote-2) The number of food-insecure people has increased to 20 million, with 9.6 million of them on the verge of famine. There are more than 17.8 million people who cannot access safe drinking water and 19.7 million are in need of health assistance. An estimated 7.4 million people require services to treat or prevent malnutrition, including 4.4 million who are in acute need. This includes 3.2 million people who require treatment for acute malnutrition: 2 million children under 5 and 1.14 million pregnant or lactating women. [[3]](#footnote-3)

## Impacts of the loss of livelihoods and income

The dire economic situation is due, to a large extent, to the conflict-related imposition of sieges, blockades and restrictions on movement, the reduction in government expenditure and the suspension or significant delay in the payment of salaries for government employees since September 2016. In addition, the breakdown of government’s social welfare programs and shifting gender roles due to the impacts of the conflict on men and boys (e.g. as victims of forced recruitment, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance[[4]](#footnote-4)) – who are the traditional breadwinners in Yemeni households – has increased burdens on women to secure livelihoods for their families in addition to carrying out their unpaid roles of care and domestic work.

The Women Solidarity Network[[5]](#footnote-5) has also documented cases of takeover of properties and women’s land in the south of Yemen, particularly in Aden. The cases documented link those violations to unresolved grievances of previous conflicts related to mass land claims that occurred in the South of Yemen following the confiscation of lands by the Saleh regime since 1990.[[6]](#footnote-6) Additional land confiscations were carried out by Southern non-State armed groups as they took control of those areas after the start of the current armed conflict.

## Internal displacement

In December 2017, OCHA estimated that 76% of the over three million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Yemen were women and children.[[7]](#footnote-7) The displaced face devastating circumstances, including hunger and disease, with women facing additional risks and protection challenges. Displacement increases the risk of sexual and gender-based violence and other violations that disproportionately affect women; this is due to a number of factors, including entrenched gender discrimination that makes them dependent on others for help and safe passage.

Displacement also pushes women to take a leading role in supporting their families while continuing their unpaid roles of care and domestic work; a 2016 report by several INGOs around gender conflict analysis in Yemen refers to 30% of displaced women “may be heading their families.”[[8]](#footnote-8) The breakdown of formal and informal protection mechanisms, together with large-scale displacement, has given rise to negative coping strategies, such as child marriage.[[9]](#footnote-9) In 2016, the United Nations Population Fund reported that “current trends in the coping strategies for bridging income, access to basic needs, services gap adopted by vulnerable IDPs and at risk groups include, child marriage, survival sex, sex for rent, begging, forced/coerced prostitution, begging, child labour, sexual harassment and assault, eating less, borrowing, thus exposing them to exploitation. According to the UNFPA managed GBV Information Management System, the perpetrators are close family members; including fathers, brothers and husbands and extended family members.”[[10]](#footnote-10)

The response to displacement has been inadequate and has not incorporated a sustainable or a gender-sensitive approach. For example, displaced women have identified the need to secure livelihoods as one of the priorities, while Humanitarian Response plans continued to allocate less than 3% on livelihoods activities.[[11]](#footnote-11) Usually, IDPs find themselves relocated in schools and informal settlements, which do not offer adequate levels of privacy and safety for women.

## Impacts of famine, cholera outbreaks, and obstacles in access to healthcare

Cases of famine have been documented both in areas under Houthi control and under government control. Famine, malnutrition, and the scarce availability of food adversely affect the health of breastfeeding women and lead to numerous health complications, including (but not limited to) anaemia, infant mortality or foetal malformations. UNFPA has warned that two million Yemeni women are at risk of famine and that 1.1 million mothers are already suffering from acute malnutrition.[[12]](#footnote-12) It has also reported that “females are the first family members to eat less as a coping mechanism” because of their role of caregivers which implies that it is their first and foremost duty to prepare food for the family.[[13]](#footnote-13)

Before the conflict, an average of eight women died during childbirth every day.[[14]](#footnote-14) With the escalation of conflict, health services are on the brink of collapsing. In April 2017, UNFPA reported that “the risk of famine and rising food shortages has left an estimated 1.1 million pregnant women malnourished, with dire consequences on new-borns. This situation is threatening the lives of 52,800 women who risk developing complications during childbirth. Furthermore, the health of an estimated 2.2 million women of childbearing age and girls may be at risk of harm.”[[15]](#footnote-15) Even those who can afford to seek medical treatment outside Yemen are facing difficulties. According to several grassroots Yemeni activists, programmes offering medical care abroad, such as those run by the government with the support of the King Salman Center, often lack transparency and gender responsiveness, and are said to give priority to injured military personnel rather than civilians. Seeking medical services outside Yemen is also a difficult journey because of the blockade imposed on airports and the limited flight routes.[[16]](#footnote-16) Among those at particular risk are women lacking access to reproductive health services including antenatal care, midwifery services, postnatal care, emergency obstetric and new-born care.According to a Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) report of April 2019, lack of access to medical care of pregnant women and new mothers in Yemen, including antenatal and new-born medical care, leads to more deadly complications.[[17]](#footnote-17)

Moreover, the collapse of the health system – with severe shortages in medicines, equipment and staff – together with the increasing lack of adequate access to clean water, sanitation and hygiene, has led to catastrophic consequences, including the outbreak of diseases such as cholera and dengue. The impact of cholera is not gender neutral. As indicated in the Protection Guidance for Cholera Response in Yemen, “the domestic roles of women and girls in taking care of sick family members, cleaning latrines, fetching and handling untreated water, and preparing food, means that women and girls are at heightened risk.”[[18]](#footnote-18) Yet, their lower status in terms of decision-making and control over household resources means “they may be less able to seek medical care when they fall sick.”[[19]](#footnote-19) In addition, UNFPA has documented that pregnant and breastfeeding women are especially vulnerable to malnutrition become more prone to infections, including cholera, leading to a higher risk of developing dangerous or even fatal complications.[[20]](#footnote-20)

## Deterioration in education services

Yemen had high school dropout rates already before the armed conflict. Recent estimates by UNICEF[[21]](#footnote-21) show an increase in the numbers of out-of-school children to two million, including almost half a million who dropped out since the conflict escalated in March 2015. UNICEF has also indicated that “the education of another 3.7 million children now hangs in the balance as teachers’ salaries have not been paid in over two years.” [[22]](#footnote-22) Increased drop-out means that girls are at a much higher risk of child marriage and boys of child recruitment.

### Questions

* **What steps has the government taken to ensure an immediate lift of all sieges and blockades and an immediate and unimpeded access to humanitarian aid?**
* **What steps has the government taken or plans to take to address naval and aerial blockades, including of the Sanaa airport, so that persons seeking medical care abroad can get access to that without restrictions?**
* **What measures has the government to ensure that IDPs are provided with adequate shelter, access to health, education, social protection and legal assistance, including access to legal documentation?**
* **Which plan does Yemen have in plan to seek to ensure that gender-sensitive health services, psychological and social support be provided, including targeted support for women and girls, with specific attention to the needs of IDPs?**
* **Does Yemen plan to update the 2013 National Policy the on Internal Displacement to address the humanitarian situation and to develop sustainable and gendered solutions to it? How will it proceed to undertake such a review? What steps have been taken to ensure that access to basic social services such as health, education and social protection, including through payment of public sector salaries arrears, be restored?**
* **What measures have been taken to address the shortcomings of the Social Welfare Fund**[[23]](#footnote-23) **in terms of governance, accountability, gender-sensitiveness and transparency?**
* **What immediate measures will be taken to foster economic empowerment and livelihoods, specifically through supporting women-led private sector initiatives, small-scale industries and social entrepreneurship?**

# III. Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

Gender-based violence was already a serious concern before the conflict. Discrimination against women and girls in Yemen was prevalent, both in law and in practice. Gender inequalities have been further aggravated by the armed conflict and subsequent mass displacement. For instance, women typically depend on a husband, father or brother, who needs to give them permission to study, travel abroad or contract marriage. In conflict situations, these discriminatory practices have amplified negative repercussions on the health and safety of women and girls.

## Documented increase in gender-based violence due to the conflict

Only five months into the armed conflict, there were reports that gender-based violence had increased by 70%.[[24]](#footnote-24) In 2016, the UNFPA estimated that around three million women and girls of reproductive age were at risk of gender-based violence,[[25]](#footnote-25) as well as 61,000 women and girls at risk of sexual violence, including rape.[[26]](#footnote-26) In September 2019, the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen (hereinafter the GEE) reported that “new vulnerabilities to gender-based violence have emerged from displacement, poverty, and indiscriminate violence. The already limited support against such violence afforded by the criminal justice system has collapsed further in 2019.”[[27]](#footnote-27)

The Gender-Based Violence Information Management System (GBVIMS) recorded 8,031 incidents between January and September 2016 alone.[[28]](#footnote-28) However, it stressed that the true extent is certainly far greater in light of social norms that discourage reporting.

In a Gender-Based Violence Trend Analysis of 2015, UNFPA and Intersos reported that 1,608 gender-based violence incidents were registered – 88% by women and girls – in eight governorates where the analysis was conducted.[[29]](#footnote-29)The reported incidents were predominantly of physical assaults, psychological and emotional abuse and denial of resources, as well as sexual assault, forced marriage and rape. Moreover, 17% of them involved survivors under the age of 18, and 11% of rape survivors were under the age of nine. The report noted that “most of the survivors prefer not to go for other services or sectors. Out of 1608 cases only 196 cases were referred to other sectors mostly health. It is mostly because of the cultural barriers and stigma in the community; but also due to a lack of access and availability of referral pathways.”[[30]](#footnote-30)

## Root causes of the increase in gender-based violence

The loss of livelihoods as a result of the crisis has led to coping strategies by women IDPs and at-risk groups which range, for example, from “child marriage, survival sex, sex for rent, begging, [to] forced/coerced prostitution and begging” [[31]](#footnote-31) that put women in a position of extreme vulnerability.

Although Yemen was making relative progress in reducing child marriages before the conflict, child marriages have increased drastically since. A humanitarian needs overview conducted by OCHA in 2017 reflects an increase in child marriage with 66% of girls under 18 years of age marrying in 2017 against 52% in 2016.[[32]](#footnote-32) Despite attempts to amend laws and to raise the minimum age for marriage to 18, the Yemeni parliament removed an article from the draft Safe Motherhood Law of 2014 that sought to set the age of 18 as the minimum age of marriage. With families increasingly resorting to child marriage as a coping mechanism to address poverty and the deprivation of economic opportunities, it is extremely urgent to set the age of marriage at 18 years without exception. In September 2019, the GEE reported that child, early and forced marriage has increased during the conflict period and that it is a widespread practice in Yemen, driven largely by poverty and exacerbated by the armed conflict.[[33]](#footnote-33)

The change of traditional roles within the families because of the conflict, with men losing their jobs and remaining at home while women take over breadwinning roles, has also increased social tensions and exposed women to domestic violence, with perpetrators being close family members, including fathers, brothers and husbands and extended family members.[[34]](#footnote-34) In addition, although rape is criminalised in Yemen, national legislation does not criminalise marital rape, nor does the government provide services for survivors of marital rape; this leaves women survivors exposed to long-term physical and psychological traumas, and allows perpetrators to go unpunished.

## Lack of accountability

The increase in gender-based violence and lack of accountability for these violations is partly due to the fact that the country currently does not have a system in place to address either domestic violence or gender-based violence more generally. While conflict has been a driving factor in the increase of cases of gender-based violence, such violence is rooted in the pre-existing severe discrimination against women in the Yemeni legal system. Many laws, including the Personal Status Law and the Penal Code, indeed contain discriminatory provisions against women. Discriminatory legal provisions coupled with the collapse of the legal system have contributed to the deterioration of the protection of women. This is compounded by the lack of support structures for survivors of gender-based violence, with shelters available in only four governorates.[[35]](#footnote-35)

The National Commission to Investigate Alleged Violations of Human Rights established by the government in 2015 produce reports that are usually gender blind and the team does not include any gender expert, which reflects a need for them to have a stronger gender mainstreaming.[[36]](#footnote-36)

No concrete reparation programme has been established yet. It is essential to ensure that any transitional justice and reparation measures are not based on existing discriminatory laws against women (such as in inheritance matters, where women inherit half as much as men), in order to make sure that compensation measures reach women effectively and do not further entrench discriminatory practices.

In 2014 the National Dialogue Conference,[[37]](#footnote-37) led by both women and men in Yemen, made recommendations to overturn many of these discriminatory customs and laws. However, these remain unimplemented.

### Questions

* **What steps is the government taking to ensure a ban on child marriage and that the minimum age of marriage be set at 18**?
* **What steps have been taken towards amending discriminatory domestic laws against women, such as the Personal Status Law and the Penal code, especially with regard to male guardianship and control over women, in order to bring them in line with CEDAW?**
* **When will the President issue special presidential decrees to protect and safeguard women’s rights based on the National Dialogue Conference outcomes and in line with CEDAW?**
* **What steps have been taken to ensure that reparation programmes and transitional justice mechanisms for all survivors of sexual and gender-based violence be developed without delay, and that survivors are fully involved in their design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation?**
* **Provide information on plans to put in place a comprehensive gender-based violence response programme comprising support to survivors, such as health services, shelters, psychosocial support, financial and legal aid, and ensure the availability and accessibility of these services in all regions.**
* **When and how will the government ensure the appointment of gender experts on the National Mechanism for Investigating Alleged Human Rights Violations and gender-sensitive reporting by this body?**
* **What steps have been taken for Yemen to become party to the Optional Protocol to CEDAW?**

# IV. Arbitrary Detention and Enforced Disappearance

Arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance have become commonly used as a tactic of war by all parties. The Association of Mothers of Abductees (AMA) – a group of mothers who organised themselves in 2016 with a common goal to release their loved ones documented over the years the following numbers:

In 2016: 3449 cases of arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance.

In 2017: 6068 cases of arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance cases[[38]](#footnote-38).

In 2018: 1496 cases of kidnapping and arbitrary detention (including 114 cases of kidnapping of women) and 294 cases of enforced disappearance.[[39]](#footnote-39)

The security forces are not following legal standards on detention, with many long-term detentions without prosecution and with reports of torture.[[40]](#footnote-40) Young women whose names had been mentioned during interrogations by security forces had to flee Aden to seek asylum outside of the country. The security commanders and personnel perpetrating those violations still remain in their positions without any accountability.

Women human rights defenders, political activists and women belonging to certain minorities, such as the Baha’is, have experienced arbitrary detentions and enforced disappearances, mostly in Houthi-controlled areas. The Women Alliance for Peace in Yemen documented 288 cases of arbitrary detention of women by the Houthis.[[41]](#footnote-41) These were women who were politically affiliated to the General’s People’s Congress party, women journalists and human rights defenders, women humanitarian workers, and women working to promote peacebuilding. Similarly, the GEE has found evidence that all parties to the conflict, during the period extending from 20016 to 2019, have used sexual violence in detention “to torture, physically harm, traumatise, humiliate, and subjugate detainees.”[[42]](#footnote-42) The GEE has also referred to unverified reports – requiring further investigation -- of “wider detention-related violations against women in detention facilities under the control of all parties to the conflict, including sexual violence in detention.”[[43]](#footnote-43) Documenting these violations remains a major challenge since many victims and their families are reluctant, out of fear of retaliation, to report their missing relatives and disclose information about cases of arbitrary detention, abduction and enforced disappearance. Nevertheless, local women’s movements are still taking action to demand the release of the disappeared and the arbitrarily detained.

### Questions

* **How will the Yemeni government facilitate thorough and impartial investigations without delay of the allegations against all parties to the conflict of enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrests and arbitrary detention?**
* **What steps have been taken towards allowing immediate and unconditional access to all places of detention by independent monitors and, at a minimum, by humanitarian organisations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross?**
* **Describe plans to reveal the fate and location of victims of enforced disappearances and of arbitrarily detained persons, including provisions of official statistics on the number of detainees and the places of detention. How will the government facilitate the establishment of inquiry centres across the country?**
* **What steps have been taken to ensure that any person deprived of liberty is held in a recognised place of detention and has the right to challenge his or her detention before an independent and impartial body?**
* **What measures have been taken to ensure that enhanced protection mechanisms for women human rights defenders and women political activists be put in place to respond to the specific challenges they face?**
* **What are the measures that the state is taking/will take in order to protect the families of detainees, and identify and address the gendered and disproportionate impact of detention on women relatives?**
* **How will the State ensure that families of the disappeared or arbitrarily detained be included in any transitional justice process?**

# V. Arms Proliferation and Explosive Weapons

Before the outbreak of the conflict in Yemen, the proliferation of arms had always been an issue of utmost concern. In 2010, it was estimated that there were between eight and 11.5 million weapons owned by civilians.[[44]](#footnote-44) In 2007, Yemen ranked tenth out of 178 countries for privately owned firearms and second for privately owned firearms per 100 people, with about 54.8 firearms per 100 people.[[45]](#footnote-45)

The proliferation of arms has increased due to the conflict. As of August 2016, 19 Arms Trade Treaty State Parties and three signatories have either authorised or delivered arms transfers to Saudi Arabia, the country that is leading the coalition supporting the Hadi government.[[46]](#footnote-46) Arms transfers to other coalition members have also continued.[[47]](#footnote-47) The GEE is among of the UN human rights mechanisms to have expressed very serious concerns about the continued transfers of weapons to parties to the conflict.[[48]](#footnote-48)

Human rights violations, abuses and violations of international humanitarian law have been committed by all parties to the conflict. The Saudi-led coalition airstrikes have targeted schools, hospitals, markets, weddings and funerals, and continue to be the leading cause of civilian casualties.[[49]](#footnote-49) According to the GEE, “shelling and airstrikes hit people going about their daily lives, often without warning in areas where there is no active combat ongoing, creating the sense that there is no safe place to hide from the fighting.”[[50]](#footnote-50) While the coalition has formed the Joint Incident Assessment Team (JIAT) to investigate unlawful airstrikes in 2017, civil society groups have reported the continued targeting of civilians and the disproportionate repercussions inflicted on women. One of JIAT’s objectives is to refer cases to reparation services, but it is not clear how to access the reparation services and whether these services are gender responsive. The JIAT has also pointed out that the targeting process is provided by Yemeni informants affiliated to the government.[[51]](#footnote-51)

## Military depots and mines

Most military depots and camps are located within populated areas, therefore placing civilians at huge risk. Women interviewed in different governorates by the Women Solidarity Network, including areas recaptured by government forces, have demanded the removal of military depots and camps from residential areas, starting with the areas recaptured from the Houthis. While the recent Riyadh agreement signed by the internationally recognised government and the South Transitional Council included as a condition the removal of military camps from Aden within 30 days of signing, this still has not been implemented two months after the signature.[[52]](#footnote-52)

The government is not putting enough resources to support the process of demining or to support the victims of mines including access to health care.

### Questions

* **What steps has the government taken to ensure the ceasing of indiscriminate attacks on and targeting of civilians and to put pressure on the Saudi-led Coalition to halt airstrikes in highly populated residential areas?**
* **What steps has the government taken to remove military camps and depots from populated areas?**
* **What steps have been taken to ensure that urgent assistance, appropriate compensation and support be provided to those wounded and their families, or to the families of those killed?**
* **How will the state contribute to ensuring that maps of areas affected by landmines and explosive devices be developed as part of confidence-building measures in the context of peace negotiations?**
* **What urgent measures will be taken to remove landmines and other explosive devices, as well as to develop gender sensitive programmes to protect civilians and to care for survivors of mines?**

# VI. Child recruitment

Children have been recruited and used in hostilities by all parties to the conflict. Although the Houthis are the main recruiters of child soldiers, other parties, such as government-affiliated forces and their allies, also do so.[[53]](#footnote-53)

The GEE has indicated that “Yemen has passed a corresponding national law that includes a ban on recruiting and using children under the age of 18 as soldiers. However, Yemeni law does not criminalize the recruitment and use in hostilities of children under the age of 18.”[[54]](#footnote-54) This in spite of Yemen’s obligations, including under the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, and of a specific recommendation made by the Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2014 in this regard.[[55]](#footnote-55)

Child recruitment and child abuse remained largely underreported because of security threats, the fear of retribution against monitors and communities and stigmatization[[56]](#footnote-56). The children recruited for the conflict in Yemen are not only Yemenis. There are reports that Sudanese children have joined the conflict in Yemen to fight on behalf of Saudi Arabia pushed by families impoverished by a conflict in their own country.[[57]](#footnote-57) The UN Panel of Experts on Yemen has reported that food scarcity and economic insecurity “are linked directly to child recruitment by armed groups.” In addition, the families are “receiving financial incentives for their child’s involvement; orphans are particularly vulnerable to recruitment owing to a lack of food, safety and security.”[[58]](#footnote-58) A report by the UN Secretary General also indicates that increased school-dropout rates as a result of the conflict facilitated recruitment of children.[[59]](#footnote-59) In July 2019, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict reported that the UN had verified, for the first time, “the recruitment of 16 girls between the ages of 15 and 17 by the Houthis in Sa‘dah. The girls were used to encourage male members of their families to join the Houthis and to mobilize other women and girls to do the same. Some were also trained in the use of weapons. Boys were recruited and used as combatants and in various support roles, including as porters, guards, for patrolling and to assist in intelligence gathering.”[[60]](#footnote-60)

The National Action Plan to end the recruitment of child soldiers signed between the government and the UN in 2014 has not been implemented.[[61]](#footnote-61) The UN suspended the demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration programmes (DDR) relating to children in 2016 on the basis that it is risky to run such programmes until a political settlement can be achieved.[[62]](#footnote-62) The King Salman Center funded a civil society organisation in Mareb to run rehabilitation centre for children combatants captured. However, these efforts fall short in addressing this concern.

### Questions

* **What steps have been taken to implement the CRC’s recommendation to criminalise the recruitment or use in hostilities of children under the age of 18 by the armed forces and non-State armed groups? [[63]](#footnote-63)**
* **When will the state request the resumption of the demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration (DDR) programmes as a matter of priority? Describe plans to ensure DDR programmes be gender responsive.**
* **How will the state ensure that humanitarian response plans, DDR programmes and peace negotiations effectively comprise mechanisms to support the reintegration of child combatants and ensure gender responsiveness?**
* **What steps have been taken or planned to remove military camps and depots from populated areas?**

# VII. Women’s Meaningful Participation in Political and Public Life

Despite the fact that Yemen accepted recommendations to pursue efforts to ensure the representation of women at all levels of the political process and their participation in public life without discrimination or intimidation in its last 2019 Universal Periodic Review (UPR),[[64]](#footnote-64) women’s political participation remains very limited. Women constitute less than 1% in the parliament and local councils.[[65]](#footnote-65) The representation within the government has deteriorated, with only two women as ministers in the current cabinet and three women as ambassadors. The Riyadh agreement signed on 5 November 2019 between the internationally recognised government and the South Transitional Council stipulates, *inter alia,* the forming of a new government cabinet and appointing governors for Southerner governorates.[[66]](#footnote-66) There have been delays in forming the government. Women groups have demanded that women be included by no less than 30% as per outcomes of the 2014 National Dialogue conference.

## No plans to advance women’s political participation

The Women’s National Committee (WNC), the mechanism established by the government to develop policies to advance the status of women, has not been able to operate fully since the conflict started.[[67]](#footnote-67) The main headquarters in Sana’a is under Houthi control and the WNC branches in areas recaptured by the government, including Aden, remain neglected. Moreover, while the government has begun to develop a National Action Plan for UN Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), women groups are concerned that it has not taken enough steps to ensure a consultative process in the drafting of the NAP.

## Women’s virtual absence from negotiation delegations

UN Security Council Resolution 2451 (2018) clearly called for full and meaningful participation of women in peace process; a UN Security Council presidential statement of June 2017 called for women’s participation in the negotiation delegations to be a minimum of 30%.[[68]](#footnote-68) President Hadi announced similar commitments during the 2017 celebration of International Women’s Day; however, these are yet to be implemented.

Despite Yemen also accepting recommendations in the latest UPR to continue its efforts to protect and promote women’s rights, including by giving due consideration to the application of a quota system in all State bodies as put forward by the National Conference for Women,[[69]](#footnote-69) the representation of women in all negotiation delegations, including the government delegation, has met the minimum 30% quota recommended under the National Dialogue Conference outcomes. Out of 28 delegates, only three were women and two advisers were in the government delegation in the Yemen peace negotiations held in Kuwait in 2016. In the Yemen peace consultations held in Stockholm in 2018, out of 24 members in delegations, only one woman representing the government delegation participated.

The absence of women in negotiations has resulted in the peace agenda overlooking certain priorities outlined by many Yemeni women, including demands to end child recruitment and calls for self-determination in the South.

## Lack of adequate protection for women in the security sector

Women in the security sector within state institutions are also facing challenges such as marginalisation and obstacles to career advancement due to their gender. For instance, women working in the security sector in Aden have indicated that they have not been provided with uniforms or equipment, have faced suspension of salaries[[70]](#footnote-70) and are assigned to conduct raids without additional protection units. They also raised the need for capacity-building for women working in the security field.

### Questions

* **What steps have been taken to ensure the effective implementation of a minimum quota of 30% of women in the public and political spheres in accordance with the outcomes of the 2014 National Dialogue Conference, including in ambassadorial and other high-level governmental positions?**
* **How will the state, in the implementation of the 30% minimum quota, ensure that women from diverse backgrounds are equitably represented in all State institutions, including 50% for women from the South (including those with self-determination demands) and 20% for young women, as per the outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference?**
* **What steps have been or will be taken to contribute to effectively implement a 30% minimum quota of women in peace negotiations, including in the negotiation delegation, advisory team and in all committees developed as result of the peace negotiations and political processes during the transitional period, as well as in the current and future governments?**
* **What measures have been or will be taken in order to ensure that the peace agenda is gender responsive? How many gender experts have been included in peace negotiating delegations? How has the government formally consulted or plans to consult women in the negotiation process, including rural women and women survivors of the conflict and to ensure that their priorities are addressed in any political settlement?**
* **What measures have been taken to meaningfully include civil society in the development of a 1325 National Action Plan and to ensure that the NAP be provided with adequate and sustainable financial and human resources for its implementation?**
* **What measures have been taken to address discriminatory practices against women in the security sector and ensure they are provided with the necessary protection?**

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10. UNFPA (2016). *Humanitarian Crisis in Yemen: Preventing Gender-based Violence & Strengthening the Response, October* 2016. Available at:<http://yemen.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/Final%20-GBV%20Sub-Cluster-%20Yemen%20Crisis-Preventing%20GBV%20and%20Strenthening%20the%20Response.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. This figure was calculated based on data in the HRP from 2018 (page 29). Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/20180120_HRP_YEMEN_Final.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
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16. See, for example, *Situation of human rights in Yemen, including violations and abuses since September 2014, Report of the detailed findings of the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen.* A/HRC/42/CRP. 13, (September 2019), paragraph 770; and *Situation of human rights in Yemen, including violations and abuses since September 2014. Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*, UN Index: A/HRC/36/33, (September 2017) paragraph 45 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
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    Two footnotes in this paragraph indicate that “According to Article 149 of Yemen’s Law No. 45 (2002) on Child Rights, “The State shall abide by the internal law applicable to it in armed conflict that are related to the children and their protection though the following: a. Prohibition of children carrying weapons; b. Protection of children from effects of armed conflict; c. Protection of children that suffer from revenge/vendetta issues; d. (d) not involving children directly in war and, e. not recruiting any person who is not above 18 year-old.” Text available in Arabic at <http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/arabic/Yemeni_Laws/Yemeni_Laws29.pdf>.” and that “the 1988 Yemeni Military Penal Code, article 21 provides that “An individual subject to the provisions of this law who committed during the war any act that causes harm to individuals and protected properties as per the international agreements to which Yemen is a consignee, shall be liable to imprisonment for a term of no longer than 10 years or penalized fittingly with the crime results.” The article then lists the ‘punishable acts’, however it does not include the recruitment and use of children under 15 or 18 year-old.” [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. “31. The Committee is concerned that the State party’s domestic legislation does not prohibit and criminalize the recruitment or use in hostilities of children under the age of 18 years by non-State armed groups under any circumstances. It regrets that the State party’s legislation does not contain an explicit provision criminalizing the recruitment and use of children under 18 years in the national Armed Forces in wartime or peacetime.

    32. The Committee recommends that the State party ensure that the package of amendments to its legislation on military matters, including the Criminal Code, explicitly prohibit and criminalize the recruitment or use in hostilities of children under the age of 18 by the Armed Forces and non-State armed groups. It urges the State party to expedite the adoption and implementation of such amendments. It also recommends that the State party ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.” Concluding observations on the report submitted by Yemen under article 8, paragraph 1, of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, CRC/C/OPAC/YEM/CO/1, 26 February 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
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63. See footnote 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
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