

Muna Luqman
Statement to the UN Security Council
15th April 2019

Mr President, Your Excellencies,

Thank you for this opportunity to brief the Council on behalf of Food for Humanity and the Women Solidarity Network.

I am a survivor of the devastating war in Yemen. I was in Taiz, the third largest city. I recall vividly the terrifying air bombardment, indiscriminate shelling, the siege, and horrors perpetrated by all parties as they disregard international humanitarian lawⁱ. My own home in Taiz was partially demolished by a Saudi led-coalition airstrike that targeted a nearby school which was used by the Houthis as a military warehouse and prison. I woke up to what seemed to be a volcano erupting lighting up the sky, followed by what felt like an earthquake. Our neighbors - a family of five - perished under the rubble.

I also experienced the siege of Taiz, as the Houthis tightened their grip on the city, depriving civilians of food, water, and the necessities to live. This siege started three years ago and still continues until today. The Houthis and armed-resistance groups loyal to President Hadi are engaged in vicious hostilities in populated areasⁱⁱ.

I mediated the evacuation of children whose orphanage was stormed by Houthis to position snipers, and after successfully relocating them, a Saudi led Coalition airstrike hit a nearby building terrifying the children, many of whom sustained injuries when the windows shattered. I visited families trapped in the crossfire brought them food and supplies, and facilitated their evacuation mitigating the risks of being targeted by snipers or stepping on mines. Escaping death in Yemen is increasingly becoming difficult.

Mr President, Your Excellencies,

The Stockholm peace consultations have successfully brought parties together. However, it excluded women and also led to a gender blind agreement. The establishment of the mission to support the Hodiada agreement reflected the seriousness of the Council to bring peace to Yemen. However, we are yet to see the Stockholm Agreement enforced.

Four months after the Stockholm agreement, our team and members in Hodaida report to us that armed clashes continue and more families are displaced every day. People are collectively punished and deprived from basic necessities including food, medicine, fuel, and electricity. Roads leading to downtown Hodaida, where the main hospital is located, are blocked, many have lost their lives on the way to get there.

New fronts have opened in Hajjahⁱⁱⁱ leading to a catastrophic humanitarian displacement crisis and famine. The government forces continue to liberate locations, and the Houthis attacking opposing tribes, persecuting tribal leaders and their families, as well as, demolishing their homes. The Saudi led Coalition airstrikes continue to target civilian areas including in Sa'adah^{iv}.

A week ago, a devastating explosion in Sana'a nearby a girls' school, led to the death of 14 children, mostly girls, and injured dozens of civilians^v. The conflict parties blame each other for this horrific crime, and the victims' right to justice will be lost if no independent investigation takes place.

Humanitarian access remains restricted due to the overall blockade imposed by the Saudi led Coalition, and the Houthis resort to sieging areas and denying delivery of humanitarian aid into areas under their control. More recently, their prevention to delivery of badly needed Cholera vaccines^{vi}. Hunger is still used as a weapon of war. Thousands of Yemenis cannot afford to buy food because their salaries are suspended, diverted, or their livelihoods are lost. Girls are married off for dowry money and boys continue to be forced into becoming fighters.

Mr President, Your Excellencies,

The prisoners exchange agreement signed prior to Stockholm is yet to be implemented. The Mothers of Abductees Association shared concerns that arbitrarily detained civilians are tortured, treated badly, and denied a fair trial. The Stockholm agreement converts them to prisoners of war and suggests exiling released detainees to other governorates, therefore separating them from their families^{vii}. Additionally, women human rights defenders, journalists, and religious minorities such as Baha'is detained have no representatives in the current peace consultations to negotiate their release.

Space for civil society organisations is becoming more and more restricted, especially in areas under Houthis control. Women peacemakers are arbitrarily detained and forced to quit their work in peacebuilding and promoting women and human rights^{viii}. Apart from physical threats against women human rights defenders, accusations of immoral acts and defamation is another tool used against women^{ix}, to deter their activism.

Mr President, Your Excellencies,

Women are not passive victims of this war. They have been leading efforts to bring peace to Yemen and hold communities together with limited resources. In tribal areas, women contribute to mediation efforts because they are respected and trusted. The patriarchal society had already been challenged when the women went out to the streets demanding change and when they secured a 30% representation in the national dialogue.

We consulted with the only woman member in the government delegation to the peace consultations, Ms Rana Ghanem, who proposed increasing seats for women within delegations, which must remain vacant if no women are selected. We have also approached Houthi women, who express their readiness to participate in peace negotiations. It is not impossible to include Houthi women in the peace process because the Houthis had women representatives in the national dialogue. There is no excuse any longer for continuing to exclude women except a poorly designed peace process.

Other groups excluded in the peace process include the Southerners - who continue to demand a just solution for the South issue. Continuing to delay addressing their demands is a ticking bomb for another layer of conflict that could be just around the corner.

Today almost five years into this devastating war in Yemen. We, members of the Women Solidarity Network, have been working hard to fill the gap left by the State, providing internally displaced persons with food and lifesaving necessities, diverting youth away from fighting towards peacebuilding, mediating to release detainees, and end armed conflicts over water and land resources.

We are disappointed that all national, regional, and international parties are yet to take bold action to end the war and the suffering of the Yemeni people. We are frustrated because regardless of our continuous calls^x to include women^{xi}, women's role in peacebuilding continues to be ridiculed, and women who are the real peace makers, continue to be excluded in the ceasefire and peace process.

Mr President, Your Excellencies,

I invite you all to take a serious stand with us and to adapt a new bold approach to address the following:

1. End this devastating conflict and facilitate an immediate comprehensive ceasefire including the Saudi led Coalition air bombardment campaign and the Houthis missile and drone attacks within Yemen and cross-border, as well as, enforcing the Stockholm and prisoners exchange agreements and unconditionally releasing all arbitrarily detained civilians, and holding all the parties accountable, especially spoilers.
2. Establish mechanisms to implement previous UN Security Council resolutions focusing on aspects related to disarmament and demobilization of Houthis, as well as, humanitarian access starting with operationalizing medical evacuations through Sana'a airport, eventually lifting the aerial, naval, and land blockade.

3. Continue to adapt an approach to de-construct the conflict and localize the peace process, through creating local peace agreements in conflict areas, including in Taiz, that entails opening humanitarian corridors, as well as, withdrawal of fighters from the city and civilian institutions, and ensuring they are not redeployed to other fronts.
4. Support the restoration of government institutions to full functionality, starting with liberated areas, including service delivery institutions such as the Social Welfare Fund, and support the government to address core conflict issues and grievances in areas under its control.
5. Demand serious efforts to demilitarize liberated cities, ensuring the relocation of military depots and camps away from populated areas^{xii}, as well as, facilitate the development of professional security forces that are well trained including in human rights.
6. Urge for the disbursement of civil servants' salaries in Houthi controlled areas by ensuring the government's commitments based on 2014 civil servants' lists.
7. Demand that the negotiating parties include women in their delegations by no less than 50%, and the UN Special Envoy and Chair of the Redeployment Coordination Committee to consult regularly with women, and to ensure women's meaningful inclusion in all peace processes^{xiii}, as well as, ensuring the use of stronger language in the Council products that is legally binding to demand an inclusive peace process emphasising the inclusion of women, youth, southerners, and other marginalized social groups.

We hope that our recommendations will inform your decisions and lead to firm and decisive actions towards peace spoilers, as well as, contribute to ending this unnecessary suffering of millions of Yemenis.

ⁱ Joint UPR report (2018) https://wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/WILPF_Yemen-Publication_web.pdf

ⁱⁱ Ten Point Initiative for Peace in Taiz, the Women Solidarity Network: https://www.facebook.com/WomenSolidarityYe/posts/2559274894145117?_tn_ =K-R

^v The Women Solidarity Network Statement on Sana'a Explosion near a Girls' School: <https://www.facebook.com/WomenSolidarityYe/posts/2595659020506704>

^{vi} Associated Press: Vaccines blocked as deadly cholera raged across Yemen https://www.apnews.com/b821a9b1811d4b4d803fffd4fe132b4e?utm_medium=AP&utm_source=Twitter&utm_campaign=SocialFlow

^{vii} Mothers of Abductees Association Statement to UN Special Envoy: <https://www.facebook.com/505200403000985/posts/975524615968559/>

^{viii} #FreeAwfaa campaign <https://info861663.wixsite.com/freeawfaa>

^{ix} Red lines episode: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SRelANs-RI>

^x Rasha Jarhum UNSC Brief, November 2016: <https://peacetrack.files.wordpress.com/2018/11/unsc-statement-rasha-jarhum-final-engl22.pdf>

^{xi} The National Agenda for Women, Peace, and Security:

<https://peacetrack.files.wordpress.com/2018/01/wps-national-agenda-en.pdf>

^{xii} Aden Security, Economic, and Social Stability Framework, the Women Solidarity Network:

https://www.facebook.com/WomenSolidarityYe/posts/2584460544959885?_tn_=K-R

^{xiii} 10 Steps to Ensure Gender Responsive Processes & Ceasefire Agreements

<http://www.icanpeacework.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/ICAN-BPI-Steps-for-Inclusion-in-Ceasefire-Agreements.pdf>