

STRATEGIZING BEYOND THE WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY (WPS) AGENDA IN YEMEN: THE IMPORTANCE OF CEDAW



By
JOKE BURINGA

STRATEGIZING BEYOND THE WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY (WPS) AGENDA IN YEMEN: THE IMPORTANCE OF CEDAW

By
JOKE BURINGA

August 23, 2021

COVER PHOTO: A woman vender in the Yemeni capital Sana'a on August 13, 2007 //
Source: Scott Wallace / World Bank / Flickr



This paper was produced by the Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, as part of the Leveraging Innovative Technology for Ceasefire Monitoring, Civilian Protection and Accountability in Yemen project.

It is funded by the German Federal Government, the Government of Canada and the European Union.



Federal Foreign Office

Canada

the European Union



Note: This document has been produced with the financial assistance of the German Federal Government, the Government of Canada and the European Union. The content and recommendations expressed within this document are the personal opinions of the author(s) only, and do not represent the views of the Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies or Hala Systems, or any other persons or organizations with whom the participants may be otherwise affiliated. The contents of this document can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the positions of the German Federal Government, the Government of Canada or the European Union.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	4
Background	6
The Women, Peace and Security Framework	6
The UN Security Council on WPS in Yemen	8
OESGY	11
UN Implementation of the WPS Agenda in Yemen	11
UN Women	14
A View from the Ground	15
Strategizing Beyond the WPS Agenda	18
Sustainable Development Requires Gender Equality	19
Sustainable Peace Requires Gender Equality	20
CEDAW	21
Conclusion	22
Recommendations	23

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Seven years into the war in Yemen, there is considerable and growing resistance within the internationally recognized Yemeni government, Houthi authorities, the Southern Transitional Council (STC), local authorities and armed groups toward the promotion of gender equality and women's role in peacebuilding. At the invitation of the UN special envoy for Yemen, women were present in peace negotiations in Kuwait (2016), Geneva (2018) and Stockholm (2018), but their participation was not accepted by the delegations. The text of the Stockholm Agreement was assessed to be "genderblind", and ignoring women's rights. There are no women in the current cabinet of Yemen's internationally recognized government.

During Yemen's National Dialogue Conference (NDC) in 2013-14, Yemeni women negotiated a 30 percent quota in elected bodies and governmental institutions. With reference to the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, women expected support from the international community, especially the United Nations, for their demands to be included in mediation and peacebuilding efforts.^[1] The WPS agenda focuses on two themes: the use of sexual and gender-based violence as a war strategy; and women's participation in peace and security processes.

Implementation of the WPS agenda in Yemen by the international community has been haphazard and superficial. In establishing the Yemeni Women's Pact for Peace and Security (known as "Tawafuq"), the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary General to Yemen (OSESGY) and UN Women bypassed existing Yemeni women's networks, such as the Yemeni Women's Union, which had 4 million members nationwide in 2020, and the Women's National Committee, which has branches in every governorate. Selection criteria for Tawafuq were opaque; the group was later sidelined by the Yemeni women's Technical Advisory Group (TAG), whose members were handpicked by the OSESGY's gender advisor, again without transparently communicated processes.

1) "Yemeni women call for their inclusion in peace efforts," UN Women, October 27, 2015, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2015/10/yemeni-women-call-for-their-inclusion-in-peace-efforts>; "High Level Virtual Convening on Feminist Peace in Yemen, June 28 - July 2, 2021," Peace Track Initiative/Women's International League for Peace and Freedom/Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <https://www.peacetrackinitiative.org/convening2021>

In the meantime, women's needs and inputs on the ground have been overlooked by the international community, for whom it is easier to talk to well-educated, anglophone women in the diaspora. Many women inside Yemen, who do not speak English and lack easy access to the donor community, do not feel heard.

In its resolutions and presidential statements, the UN Security Council has addressed WPS issues only sparingly. A narrow interpretation of the WPS agenda in Yemen has limited the focus to women's participation in the future Track 1 peace process. This has led to competition between UN staff and increased divisions among Yemeni women. As a result, Yemeni women have been unable to define their participation in the UN-led negotiation process on their own terms.

Meanwhile, women's political participation is not a panacea for Yemen's lack of gender equality: The "add women and stir" approach has serious shortcomings. It fails to address lopsided power relations between men and women and runs a risk of cooptation by the warring parties and status quo actors. A quota approach unsupported by additional safeguards and policies is unlikely to result in transformative change.

A key, although so far overlooked, instrument for the implementation of WPS in the Yemeni peace process is the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women^[2] (CEDAW), which Yemen ratified in 1984. CEDAW provides a legal basis for implementation of the WPS agenda. In addition, CEDAW presents a normative framework for the realization of gender equality, which is essential for sustainable peace and development. Violence and discrimination against women have a direct link to state security, while gender equality speeds up economic growth and the achievement of other development goals.

Yemen's combined 7th and 8th periodic report will be discussed during the 80th session of the CEDAW Monitoring Committee, scheduled for October 18-November 5, 2021. It provides an excellent opportunity to put gender equality back at the top of the agenda for Yemen's future. Its importance cannot be underestimated; sustainable peace and the achievement of development goals in Yemen depend on it.

2) Full text of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), United Nations General Assembly, December 18, 1979, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cedaw.aspx>

THE WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY FRAMEWORK

In 2000, the UN Security Council adopted UNSC Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.^[3] It rests on four pillars: prevention; protection; participation; and relief and recovery. Following Resolution 1325, nine other resolutions were added by the Security Council between 2000 and 2019 to clarify, expand and reiterate the main message of 1325. Together they make up the WPS agenda, with a normative framework, policies and procedures to address the needs and expertise of women before, during and after conflict. The WPS agenda has two recurring themes. The first concerns the use of sexual and gender-based violence as a war strategy.^[4] The second focuses on women's participation in peace and security processes. Women's full participation in conflict mediation and peacebuilding is important to guarantee their full enjoyment of human rights. Research has shown that women's participation leads to more sustainable peace agreements.^[5]

The 10th and latest resolution, 2493, was adopted by the UNSC on October 29, 2019, on the eve of the 20th anniversary of Resolution 1325. In its preamble, the Council referred to obligations of state parties under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which include the full and equal participation of women in matters of peace and security. This reference was not accidental. CEDAW is *the* treaty to guarantee women's rights. In its General Recommendation No. 30 of 2013, the CEDAW Committee outlined how state parties are to implement CEDAW before, during and after conflict, clearly linking CEDAW to the WPS agenda.^[6]

3) Full text of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security," UN Security Council, October 31, 2000, [https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/1325\(2000\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/1325(2000))

4) Full text of the ten women, peace and security resolutions can be found here: <https://www.peacewomen.org/resolutions-texts-and-translations>

5) Krause J. Krause W., & Bränfors,, "Women's Participation in Peace Negotiations and the Durability of Peace," *International Interactions*", 2018, 44 (6), 985-1016, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03050629.2018.1492386>

6) "General Recommendation No. 30 on Women in Conflict Prevention, Conflict and Post-Conflict Situations," Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, October 18, 2013, <https://www.ohchr.org/documents/hrbodies/cedaw/gcomments/cedaw.c.cg.30.pdf>

In Resolution 2493, member states were reminded to develop a 1325 National Action Plan. The council requested UN organizations to develop “context-specific approaches for women’s participation in all UN-supported peace talks, including country specific situations, in order to contribute to full, equal and meaningful participation of women in peace and security, to ensure more inclusive participation.”^[7]

While Yemen ratified CEDAW in 1984, in December 2020 the internationally recognized Yemeni government established a cabinet without female ministers, contrary to both CEDAW and the outcomes of the 2013-2014 National Dialogue Conference (NDC.) Limited support from the UN system to prioritize gender equality in Yemen has not helped.

7) UNSC Resolution 2493, October 29, 2019, paragraph 9a, <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/2493>

THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL ON WPS IN YEMEN

The UN Security Council (UNSC) has been tasked with maintaining international peace and security under the UN Charter. It can investigate disputes and threats that could jeopardize peace, decide on possible sanctions or necessary (military) actions and regulate arms transfers. Its leading role in the formulation and adoption of the WPS agenda enables it to take the lead in guiding and monitoring its implementation globally.

Between April 2015 and May 2021, the UNSC adopted 11 resolutions pertaining to Yemen.^[8] The use of WPS language has been minimal; just three resolutions include the words “women” and/or “gender”.^[9] In February 2021, the UNSC added a Yemeni national to its sanctions list for disappearing women and subjecting them to sexual abuse in Resolution 2564.^[10]

During the same period, four presidential statements were issued.^[11] They all included a reference to women. The two most recent statements^[12] specifically call for a 30 percent quota for women’s participation in the peace process. They were drafted following input by the Informal Expert Group (IEG) on WPS, which was appointed by the UNSC in 2015 to give country specific advice.^[13] In March 2017, the IEG issued a report including ten concrete suggestions to the Security Council for inclusion in a new resolution or presidential statement.^[14] Only two of the group’s suggestions were included in the 2017 Presidential Statement.^[15]

8) Full text of the 11 Security Council resolutions on Yemen between 2015 and 2021, Security Council Reports, https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un_documents_type/security-council-resolutions/?ctype=Yemen&cbtype=yemen

9) Resolution 2216 dated April 14, 2015 (para 13); Resolution 2451 dated December 21, 2018 (para 4 and para 13); and Resolution 2564 dated February 25, 2021 (preamble and annex)

10) Full Text of UNSC Resolution 2564, February 25, 2021, [https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2564\(2021\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2564(2021))

11) A Security Council Resolution is based on a vote. A Presidential Statement is discussed but not finalized through voting.

12) S/PRST/2017/7 dated June 15, 2017; and S/PRST/2019/9 dated September 29, 2019

13) Full text of IEG background notes and summaries of 2017, 2019 and 2021, UN Women, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/peace-and-security/un-security-council> (scroll to bottom)

14) “Letter dated 18 July 2017 from the Permanent Representatives of Sweden, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Uruguay to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General,” UN Security Council, <https://undocs.org/S/2017/627>

15) “Statement by the President of the Security Council,” UN Security Council, June 15, 2017, <https://undocs.org/en/S/PRST/2017/7>

On November 16, 2018, Rasha Jarhum, from the Peace Track Initiative (PTI),^[16] presented a statement^[17] to the UNSC based on input from the Women’s Solidarity Network (WSN).^[18] Jarhum’s briefing included 24 actionable recommendations, grouped in three clusters: security measures; the peace process; and dialogue with women. It was meant to provide input to the UNSC for a new resolution. The only tangible influence of Jarhum’s briefing was a mention by the Council of the importance of “meaningful” participation by women in UNSC Resolution 2451 (dated December 21, 2018).

On March 4, 2019, the IEG released an update on its 2017 Yemen report to the UNSC. It noted that earlier recommendations had not been followed up by either Yemeni or international partners. The text of the Stockholm Agreement was assessed to be “genderblind”, and ignoring women’s rights. New guidance was also added to the IEG’s earlier recommendations.

Muna Luqman from Yemen’s Food4Humanity Foundation^[19] addressed the UNSC on April 14, 2019.^[20] A lack of concrete actions with tangible results by national, regional and international stakeholders to end the war had left women disheartened, she said. However, the extensive input provided by the IEG/WPS, Jarhum and Luqman did not result in a noticeable increase in WPS language in the next presidential statement on Yemen, released on August 29, 2019.^[21]

The IEG discussed Yemen for a third time on March 2, 2021.^[22] Its findings and recommendations were discussed with heads of UN agencies and missions on March 17, 2021. The IEG noted that the absence of women in political talks and peace negotiations continued to be a matter of great concern, while threats to women peace activists and human rights defenders have increased, particularly in the north. Sexual and gender-based violence is prevalent while, simultaneously,

16) The PTI was established in Geneva in 2017 by Yemeni women inside and outside Yemen. It is hosted at the Human Rights Research and Education Center at Ottawa University in Canada, and has an office in Aden.

17) Rasha Jarhum, “Statement at the UNSC,” Peace Women, November 16, 2018, <https://www.peacewomen.org/resource/rasha-jarhum-statement-unsc>

18) The WSN was established in 2013 and currently consists of 270 activists and civil society organizations.

19) Food4Humanity was established in 2015 to alleviate hunger and support health workers.

20) Muna Luqman, “Statement to the UN Security Council,” April 15, 2019, <https://peacetrack.files.wordpress.com/2019/04/muna-luqman-unsc-statement-final-15-april-2019.pdf>

21) “Statement by the President of the Security Council,” Security Council, August 29, 2019, https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/S_PRST_2019_9.pdf

22) Background notes are not yet available online at the time of writing.

funding for UN Population Fund-supported services to GBV survivors and to address women's reproductive health needs has been reduced by 40 percent, the IEG reported.^[23]

Between March 2015 and December 2020, the NGO Working Group on WPS (NWGWPS), a global network of civil society organizations and networks, submitted 19 Monthly Action Points (MAP) on Yemen to the Security Council. In 2018, the NWGWPS referred to the internationally recognized Yemeni government's obligations under CEDAW to include women in the political process and meet their humanitarian needs. In early January 2020, the NWGWPS stated that "the Security Council's discussions on the situation in Yemen have historically failed to reflect important gender dimensions of the situation, despite multiple meetings of the Informal Expert Group on WPS ... and briefings by civil society in 2017, 2018 and 2019." This sentence was repeated in subsequent MAPs.^[24]

23) "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," March 17, 2021, https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2021/264

24) Full Text of Monthly Action Points concerning Yemen, NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security (NWGWPS), NWGWPS, Monthly Action Points, https://www.womenpeacesecurity.org/region/yemen/?wpv_view_count=22941-CATTRddc63b447e696fed14c5dddc1f0aa8e&wpv-pub-year=2021&wpv_aux_current_post_id=25951&wpv_aux_parent_post_id=22939

UN IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WPS AGENDA IN YEMEN

The two major UN organizations responsible for implementation of the WPS agenda in Yemen are the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary General to Yemen (OSESGY) and UN Women. OSESGY and UN Women Yemen have complementary, but partly overlapping mandates.

OSESGY

OSESGY and UN Women worked closely together to establish the Yemeni Women's Pact for Peace and Security (known as "Tawafuq"), in October 2015. Selection criteria for the 45 initial members – which included academics, activists, gender experts, businesswomen and members of political parties – were not clear or transparently communicated. Being free to travel at short notice and having a valid Schengen visa were crucial factors determining eligibility.^[25] Existing national networks like the Yemeni Women Union and the Women's National Committee were bypassed. Tawafuq members would represent women's voices on all aspects of OSESGY's work, but the description of their role and responsibilities was ambiguous.^[26]

In 2016, OSESGY appointed a full-time senior gender advisor. It was an important strategic move and had great potential for amplifying women's voices and including them in peace negotiations. Unfortunately, this move became mired in tension, strife and controversy, caused by overlapping mandates, a lack of professionalism and competition between staff of OSESGY and UN Women.^[27] It created a fear of speaking out among Yemenis and expats alike, as well as resentment and distrust towards the UN which reverberates until today.

25) Maria Rodriguez Schaap, former International Crisis Group researcher on Yemen, email correspondence with author, December 10, 2020.

26) Thea Gutschke, "Yemeni Women's Pact for Peace and Security, Stock Taking Study," Inclusive Peace & Transition Initiative, December 2017.

27) Author's confidential interviews with former UN staff and current and former Tawafuq members in person and via Whatsapp between June to December 2019, and February and May 2021; communication in person and in writing with Maria Rodriguez Schaap, former International Crisis Group researcher on Yemen, between October 2019 and March 2021.

During the summer of 2018, under a new special envoy, OSESGY decided to follow the model of the Syrian Women’s Advisory Board, despite reservations voiced inside and outside the UN. As a result, the Yemeni women’s Technical Advisory Group (TAG) was established. Members were, again, handpicked by the OSESGY gender advisor without transparent communication concerning selection criteria. In preparation for the Geneva peace talks that began in September 2018, the newly recruited TAG members were asked to prepare discussion papers on topics assigned to them, in line with their experience and expertise. The papers were submitted to the gender advisor. Authors did not receive any feedback and were left wondering whether their papers were shared with the special envoy and delegation members. They were not paid for their work and were not invited to join meetings organized by the special envoy with the delegation that showed up, or with the G19 ambassadors.^[28] Following the failed talks, several TAG members were informed by the OSESGY gender advisor that they would not be invited to future meetings, even though this first convening had failed.^[29] For members of Tawafuq, the group’s demotion from OSESGY’s primary consultative body for women was a bitter disappointment.^[30]

Following the arrival of a new senior gender advisor in 2019, OSESGY visibly stepped up its efforts to apply a gender-sensitive lens. There was a definite increase in WPS language in briefings by Martin Griffiths, the special envoy for Yemen, to the UNSC.^[31] In 2020, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic led UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to call for a global ceasefire.^[32] It was also the 20th anniversary of the WPS agenda. UN Women Yemen approached women’s organizations and networks that came together in the Group of Nine.^[33] On September 15, 2020, Griffiths briefed the council on the role of the Group of Nine in the drafting of a joint declaration to be agreed to by the warring parties.^[34]

28) Author’s confidential interviews with TAG members in Geneva on September 6, 2018.

29) Author’s confidential telephone call with former TAG member on June 12, 2021.

30) “The Case for More Inclusive Peacemaking in Yemen,” Middle East Report Number 221, International Crisis Group, Brussels, March 18, 2021, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/yemen/221-case-more-inclusive-and-more-effective-peacemaking-yemen>

31) Full text of briefings by the Special Envoy to the Security Council: <https://osesgy.unmissions.org/briefings-security-council>

32) “Now is the time for a collective new push for peace and reconciliation,” United Nations, <https://www.un.org/en/globalceasefire>

33) “Statement by the Yemeni Women ‘Group of Nine’ Network,” Group of Nine, April 15, 2020, <https://women4yemen.org/en/statements-3/english/statement-by-the-yemeni-women-group-of-nine-network.html>

34) “OSESGY Briefing to the Security Council, September 15, 2020,” OSESGY, September 15, 2020, https://osesgy.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/security_council_-_15_september_2020_-_as_delivered_1.pdf

OSESGY broadened its consultation base through meetings with a wider range of women in 2019 and 2020. It stepped up its collaboration on WPS with the UN Department of Peacebuilding and Political Affairs (DPPA) in New York. In April 2020, OSESGY participated in a virtual strategy meeting with the DPPA to look at ways to make Yemen's peace process more gender inclusive.^[35] Participants decided to increase their efforts. During a virtual event to celebrate the 20th anniversary of Resolution 1325, jointly organized by OSESGY and UN Women on October 29, 2020, the special envoy announced his commitment to 'reserved, non-transferable seats for women in any upcoming talks.'^[36]

Progress was reviewed and new actions planned during a follow-up session in December 2020. Implementation of the WPS agenda became a responsibility for all OSESGY staff members, Yemeni experts were recruited to apply gender analysis and produce several position papers. OSESGY has started monthly meetings on WPS for the international community. Supported by OSESGY, female members of political parties started to join forces. OSESGY increased consultation with local women leaders. Matters of concern include the limited funding to address GBV and reproductive health needs, humanitarian needs of female-headed households, the high incidence of GBV and diminishing space for gender and peace activities in the north. Plans are in place to augment the OSESGY allocation for gender expertise in 2022. A full overview of findings and recommendations was communicated to the IEG in March 2021.^[37]

35) "Report of the Secretary General on WPS to the Security Council," Security Council, September 25, 2020, para 16, <https://undocs.org/en/S/2020/946>

36) "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, S/2021/264," Security Council, March 16, 2021, <https://www.undocs.org/en/S/2021/264>

37) Ibid.

UN Women

As the main UN entity for women's rights and gender equality, UN Women has a major role in implementation of the WPS agenda. The Yemen office became operational in December 2014, but does not have a formal standalone status in the UN Women organizational structure.^[38] As a result, it does not automatically receive core funding. Uncovered operational costs and salaries have to be charged to projects. Following the departure of the UN Women Country Representative at the end of 2018, the Iraq – and former Yemen – representative agreed to temporarily manage both countries until a replacement for Yemen would have been recruited. During 2019, this arrangement took on a more permanent character.^[39]

Between 2016 and 2018, UN Women assisted Tawafuq to organize consultations on topics including demilitarization, the future status of Yemen's southern governorates, confidence-building measures, a ceasefire, the economy, and negotiation priorities and challenges. Representatives from other organizations were invited to contribute to the discussions. Stemming from these workshops, Tawafuq prepared and delivered 12 reports for OSESGY. It did not receive any feedback.^[40]

38) "UN Women Regional and Country Offices: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/where-we-are/arab-states-north-africa/regional-and-country-offices>

39) Dina Zorba, UN Women Country Representative for Iraq and Yemen, personal interview by the author on June 27, 2019.

40) Author's confidential interview with a former Tawafuq member, October 31, 2020.

A VIEW FROM THE GROUND

The initiative by UN Women and OSESGY to establish Tawafuq in 2015 was based on the perception that Yemen did not have any women's movements or networks. A narrow interpretation of the WPS agenda limited the focus to women's participation in the future Track 1 peace process. Based on the NDC outcomes, where women negotiated a 30 percent quota in elected bodies and governmental institutions, women expected to be included in peace talks. Women were present in Kuwait (2016), Geneva (2018) and Stockholm (2018), but their participation was not accepted by the delegations. In the meantime, women's needs and inputs on the ground were overlooked by the international community.^[41]

Women's movements in Yemen have their roots in the 1970s. In 1990, upon unification, the two Yemeni Women's Union networks from North and South Yemen merged into one Yemeni Women's Union, headquartered in Sana'a. In 2020, it had branches in all governorates and offices in 132 centers at district, village and neighborhood level and reported 4 million members nationwide. The Women's National Committee, established by the government in 1996, has branches in each governorate.^[42]

In 2010, 554 women's organizations were registered with the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, representing 10 percent of the total number of civil society organizations. Half of the women's NGOs had charitable aims and objectives.^[43] With the collapse of the government after 2011 and the resulting decline in public services, women-led initiatives have grown exponentially. Advocacy and lobbying organizations and networks have also increased, including Tawafuq, the Women Solidarity Network, the Feminist Summit, Women's Voices for Peace, Peace Partners Alliance, Southern Women for Peace and Peace Track Initiative. Due to increased repression targeting defenders of women's rights in Yemen, a growing number of female activists operate from outside of the country.

41) Marie-Christine Heinze and Sophie Stevens, "Women as Peacebuilders in Yemen," Yemen Polling Center and Social Development Direct, 2018, https://www.sddirect.org.uk/media/1571/sdd_yemenreport_full_v5.pdf

42) Huriya Mashur, Abd al-Aziz Muhammad al-Kamim, Mohammad Ahmad al-Mikhlaifi, "Building democracy in Yemen: women's political participation, political party life and democratic elections," IDEA and Arab NGO Network, 2005, page 43, <https://www.idea.int/es/publications/catalogue/building-democracy-yemen-womens-political-participation-political-party-life>

43) "Combined seventh and eighth periodic reports of States Parties due in 2013, Yemen," OHCHR, 2014, CEDAW/C/YEM/7-8, para 7.2.6., https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2fC%2fYEM%2f7-8&Lang=en

In 2015, Yemeni women's organizations were pushing the two main warring parties to develop a National Action Plan for the implementation of UNSC resolution 1325. At the time, former President Ali Abdullah Saleh had allied with the armed Houthi movement against the internationally recognized government, and the Houthi-Saleh alliance initially professed interest in preparing a National Action Plan 1325, but that early responsiveness disappeared after the killing of Saleh in December 2017.^[44] The internationally recognized government eventually followed through in May 2020, launching its National Action Plan 1325 (NAP 1325).^[45] Civil society associations were disappointed, however, because their input was largely excluded. In October 2020, the Peace Track Initiative produced a critical review of the government's outlined plan.^[46] Implementation has yet to begin. The Yemeni government has requested support from the international community to fund a national and international WPS expert to be based in Aden. Recruitment is ongoing.^{[47][48]}

The lack of a strategic plan from the international community has led to an ineffective hotchpotch of activities. Donors working on WPS in Yemen have their own priorities and tend not to coordinate their activities, which causes overlap and unmet funding needs.^[49] While donors are seen as bureaucratic and interested in financing workshops, conferences and training sessions, Yemeni women at the local level are focused on people's immediate humanitarian needs. A strategy and longer-term vision is lacking. According to UNSC resolution 2493, UN agencies have an important role to play here.

The WPS agenda comes with a conceptual framework that is unknown and alien to the average Yemeni woman; moreover, it takes a concerted effort on

44) Maria Rodriguez Schaap, former International Crisis Group researcher on Yemen, email correspondence with author, February 16, 2021.

45) "National Plan to Implement Security Council Resolution 1325, Women, Security and Peace 2020-2022," Republic of Yemen Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor, informal translation arranged by Peace Track Initiative, <https://www.peacewomen.org/action-plan/national-action-plan-yemen>

46) "Yemen WPS National Action Plan, Everything you need to know about Yemen's National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security," Peace Track Initiative, Ottawa, October 2020, <https://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/Yemen%27s%20National%20Action%20Plan%20final%202020.pdf>

47) Kawkab al-Thaibani, "Agents for Change, Women as Grassroots Peacebuilders in Yemen," Women4Yemen Network, December 2019, <https://women4yemen.org/en/statements/e-statements/agents-for-change-women-as-grassroots-peacebuilding-in-yemen.html>

48) "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, S/2021/264", Security Council, March 16, 2021, <https://www.undocs.org/en/S/2021/264>

49) Maria Rodriguez Schaap, former International Crisis Group researcher on Yemen, email correspondence with author, February 16, 2021.

the part of international NGOs and UN bodies to consult with and understand the perspective of these women. For the international community, it is easier to talk to well-educated, anglophone women in the diaspora. But the longer these Yemeni women spend abroad, the bigger the divide between their experiences and perspectives and those of women inside the country.^[50] Confused communications do not only occur between representatives of the international community and Yemeni women, but also among women in Yemen – who are far from a unified, homogenous group. Many women inside Yemen, who do not speak English and lack easy access to the donor community, do not feel heard.

UN Women and OSESGY have unfortunately added to this quagmire by handpicking members of Tawafuq and the TAG without transparent criteria, or clarifying its roles and responsibilities. Members participate in a personal capacity and have no formal constituency. Some women have been put off by the apparent inability of certain UN staff to model respectful behavior toward each other and toward Yemeni women, which has compounded women’s frustration with the UN-led peace negotiations and led to fear of speaking out.^[51]

Polarization and division have also caused women’s issues and women’s organizations to become politicized at the national level. At a grassroots level, this is much less the case – community-based women’s organizations are focused on addressing humanitarian needs and solving pressing conflicts. They tend not to be so interested in politics or to advertise their work on social media with pictures of foreign dignitaries, but, rather, to quietly take on a tremendous amount of work. They are in dire need of modest financial and/or technical support, but unprepared and unable to meet the detailed bureaucratic demands, even for small grants, generally expected by donors. Funding for women-led organizations at the community level is scarce and hard to secure.^[52]

50) “The Case for More Inclusive Peacemaking in Yemen,” Middle East Report Number 221, International Crisis Group, Brussels, March 18, 2021, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/yemen/221-case-more-inclusive-and-more-effective-peacemaking-yemen>

51) Maria Rodriguez Schaap, former International Crisis Group researcher on Yemen, email correspondence with author, February 16, 2021.

52) Kawkab al-Thaibani, “Agents for Change, Women as Grassroots Peacebuilders in Yemen,” Women4Yemen Network, December 2019, <https://women4yemen.org/en/statements/e-statements/agents-for-change-women-as-grassroots-peacebuilding-in-yemen.html>

STRATEGIZING BEYOND THE WPS AGENDA

Implementation of the WPS agenda in Yemen leaves a lot to be desired. There is considerable and growing resistance within the internationally recognized government, the Houthi authorities, the STC, local authorities and militias toward the promotion of gender equality and women's role in peacebuilding.^{[53][54]}

Following the narrow focus adopted by the international community, several visible and vocal female leaders seem focused on political participation, pushing for the 30 percent quota as a panacea for Yemen's lack of gender equality. Women are not a homogeneous category. If such a quota system is to have a positive impact – in Yemen, as in other contexts – cogent answers must be found to several questions, including: the criteria according to which women will be selected to take part in peace processes; the particular expertise and competencies the candidates could be expected to have, beyond being women; who makes the selection of these women; and the size and nature of the women's constituencies. The “add women and stir” approach has serious shortcomings. It fails to address lopsided power relations between men and women and runs a risk of cooptation by the warring parties and status quo actors. A quota approach unsupported by additional safeguards and policies is unlikely to result in transformative change.

A key, although so far overlooked, instrument for the implementation of WPS in the Yemeni peace process is the UN CEDAW Convention. It provides a legal basis for implementation of the WPS agenda.^[55] Until now, neither the UN nor Yemeni civil society have seriously explored the option of leveraging Yemen's commitment to, and legal obligations under CEDAW, in order to further implementation of the WPS agenda.^[56]

53) Nadia Ebrahim, Aicha Madi and Nismah Mansour, “Peacebuilding without protection, Yemeni women's barriers to peace,” London School of Economics blog, December 10, 2020, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/wps/2020/12/10/peacebuilding-without-protection-yemeni-womens-barriers-to-peace/>

54) Kawkab al-Thaibani, “Agents for Change, Women as Grassroots Peacebuilders in Yemen,” Women4Yemen Network, December 2019, <https://women4yemen.org/en/statements/e-statements/agents-for-change-women-as-grassroots-peacebuilding-in-yemen.html>

55) “General Recommendation Number 30 on Women in conflict prevention, conflict and post conflict situations,” CEDAW Monitoring Committee, 2013, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolNo=CEDAW/C/GC/30&Lang=en

56) A notable exception is the report by Rasha Jarhum, “Status of Women during Conflict in Yemen, Reflections on WPS UNSCR 1325 & CEDAW 30th Recommendation,” undated, <https://jarhum.files.wordpress.com/2016/03/yemen-wsp-and-cedaw-30-to-be.pdf>

Obligations for state parties under CEDAW extend far beyond women's role before, during and after conflict. State parties commit themselves to the implementation of a normative framework for women's human rights. Enforcement takes place firstly through reporting to the CEDAW Monitoring Committee. Civil society can participate through the submission of shadow reports. A second option is the interstate procedure, by which one state party can file a complaint with another state party. For countries that have ratified the CEDAW Optional Protocol, inquiry and individual complaints are additional options.^[57] As the legally binding UN human rights treaty for women, CEDAW aims to resolve gender equality gaps in all areas of life, which is essential for the realization of sustainable development and sustainable peace.

Sustainable Development Requires Gender Equality

The impact of the current war on Yemen's development has been devastating. A 2019 report from UNDP focusing on the consequences of the ongoing war on Yemen's demography, economic development, human capabilities and gender dynamics makes for chilling reading. Should the conflict end in 2022, it found, development in Yemen will have been set back by 26 years.^[58]

Since 1975, UN development agencies have emphasized the importance of gender equality for achieving development goals. Gender equality speeds up economic growth and the achievement of other development goals.^[59] The global development agenda consists of 17 interlinked Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).^[60] SDG 5 addresses women's human rights.^[61] Achieving this goal is an end in itself, but significant progress in SDG 5 will facilitate and accelerate the attainment of the other 16 goals.^[62] CEDAW implementation creates the foundation for realizing all SDGs.

57) Daniel Cortoza Díaz, 'The CEDAW Convention: de jure and de facto dichotomy', Degree in Law (4th year), Autonomous University of Barcelona, 14 May 2018, https://ddd.uab.cat/pub/tfg/2018/194342/TFG_dcardonadiaz.pdf

58) "Assessing the Impact of War on Development in Yemen," UNDP, 2019, <https://www.arabstates.undp.org/content/rbas/en/home/library/crisis-response0/assessing-the-impact-of-war-on-development-in-yemen-.html>

59) "Gender Equality as an accelerator for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, discussion paper," UNDP and UN Women, 2018, https://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/gender/Gender_equality_as_an_accelerator_for_achieving_the_SDGs.pdf

60) "Sustainable Development," UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>

61) "SDG5 targets and indicators," Medium, July 6, 2016, <https://medium.com/sdgs-resources/sdg-5-indicators-5fe7d2b13b58>

62) "Achieve Gender Equality to Deliver the SDGs," IISD/SDG Knowledge Hub, July 6, 2017, <http://sdg.iisd.org/commentary/policy-briefs/achieve-gender-equality-to-deliver-the-sdgs/>

Sustainable Peace Requires Gender Equality

The UNSC is primarily concerned with the security of nation states, as opposed to the UN development organizations, which are focused on human security. The latter can be summarized as a person's freedom from fear, freedom from want and freedom from indignity.^[63]

State security and human security are often regarded as competing paradigms, with state security taking precedence over human security. When state- and non-state actors use violence to resolve a conflict, that is a decision, not an inevitable given. Research over the past decade has shown that the use of violence at state level is behavior which is ultimately rooted in the experience of violence at the household and community level.^[64]

Violence against and discrimination of women is key in the emergence and continuation of patterns of violence. All the myriad ways in which violence against women manifests itself, in personal relationships and at the community level, contribute to an enabling environment for violent ways to resolve conflict, inside or outside a state's borders. Violence against women has a direct link to state security.

A statistically significant correlation between a lack of gender equality and violent conflict was demonstrated in three areas: lack of physical security for women; lack of equality under family law; and lack of female participation in decision-making.^[65] Given Yemen's seemingly perpetual ranking at the bottom of the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap reports, these findings are of particular relevance. CEDAW implementation facilitates the emergence of gender equality and therefore sustainable peace.

63) "Human Security in Latin America," Inter-American Institute of Human Rights, undated, https://www.iidh.ed.cr/multic/default_12.aspx?contenidoid=ea75e2b1-9265-4296-9d8c-3391de83fb42&Portal=IIDHSeguridadEN

64) Valerie M. Hudson, Bonnie Ballif-Spanvil, Mary Caprioli, Rose McDermott and Chad F. Emmett, "The Heart of the Matter, The Security of Women and the Security of States in 'International Security'," Volume 33. No. 3 (Winter 2008/2009). pp 7-45

65) Valerie M. Hudson, Bonnie Ballif-Spanvill, Mary Caprioli and Chad F. Emmett, "Sex and World Peace," Columbia University Press: New York, 2012

CEDAW

State parties have to submit periodic reports to the CEDAW Monitoring Committee. Its 80th session, scheduled to take place in Geneva from October 18–November 5, 2021, will include a review of Yemen. The discussion will be based on: Yemen’s most recent periodic report, submitted in 2013;^[66] a list of issues and questions sent to the internationally recognized Yemeni government by the committee;^[67] a governmental response to those questions;^[68] and four shadow reports submitted by Yemeni civil society.^[69] The outcome of this scheduled review is of great importance for the future of Yemen.

66) “Combined seventh and eighth periodic reports of States Parties due in 2013, Yemen,” CEDAW/C/YEM/7-8, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2fC%2fYEM%2f7-8&Lang=en

67) “List of Issues and Questions in relation to the combined seventh and eight period reports of Yemen,” 2020, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2fC%2fYEM%2fQ%2f7-8%2frev.1&Lang=en

68) “Replies of Yemen to the list of issues and questions,” 2020, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2fC%2fYEM%2fRQ%2f7-8&Lang=en

69) “Pre-sessional Working Group, 67th session, Review of Yemen,” Peace Track Initiative (PTI) and WILPF, March 2020, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2fCEDAW%2fICO%2fYEM%2f41380&Lang=en; “Report of the Civil Alliance for Rights and Feminism (CARF) in Yemen on the Implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW),” CARF, October 2020, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2fCEDAW%2fCSS%2fYEM%2f43533&Lang=en; “Alternative Report on Yemen,” submitted to the UN CEDAW Monitoring Committee, Women4Yemen and the Association of Abductees’ Mothers, October 2020, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2fCEDAW%2fCSS%2fYEM%2f43451&Lang=en; “Shadow Report of the Yemeni NGOs CEDAW Coalition on the Implementation of CEDAW in Yemen, Presented to the 77th Session of the CEDAW Committee Scheduled on 26 October – 5 November 2020,” Sister Arab Forum for Human Rights, 2020, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2fC%2fYEM%2f7-8&Lang=en.

CONCLUSION

Yemeni women have lost faith in the international community's ability to deliver change. Implementation of the WPS agenda in Yemen by the international community is haphazard and superficial.

The CEDAW Monitoring Committee has scheduled a review of Yemen's combined seventh and eighth periodic report to the agenda for its 80th session in October 2021. This is a crucial occasion for Yemen's future. CEDAW is a legally binding treaty which outlines the universal human rights of women and gender equality. It includes implementation of the WPS agenda. The importance of full CEDAW implementation without reservations extends beyond the WPS agenda. Gender equality is equally essential to the realization of sustainable peace and the achievement of development goals.

The international community needs to come together to use this opportunity for drafting a strategy, taking into consideration input from civil society, to create an enabling environment for gender equality in the medium to long term. Its blueprint needs to be based on an ongoing commitment to CEDAW implementation by Yemeni authorities and form an integral part of peace negotiations and agreements.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The UN Security Council is the highest international authority for matters of peace and security and the architect of the global WPS agenda. The upcoming discussion on Yemen by the CEDAW Monitoring Committee provides an excellent opportunity for the Security Council to issue a new resolution on Yemen, focused on the importance of CEDAW for implementation of the WPS agenda and for gender equality as an indispensable condition for sustainable development and durable peace.
- The international community should initiate CEDAW diplomacy in dialogues with the internationally recognized government, the STC, the armed Houthi movement and other relevant Yemeni parties to ensure ongoing and future commitment to full CEDAW implementation.
- The Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary General for Yemen (OSESOGY), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and UN Women can organize a participatory process to develop, facilitate and support an enabling environment for a Yemeni-led process towards gender equality.
- UN Women and/or the UN Yemen country team should take the lead in designing a UN Inter-Agency WPS strategy, in line with UNSCR 2493.
- International NGOs and Yemeni civil society could develop a bilingual online Yemen gender portal (web based and/or app) to share available information, including: studies and reports on Yemeni women; CEDAW documents; toolkits on relevant courses; funding possibilities and scholarships.
- The international community could establish a multi-donor support fund for women-led NGOs and a support office for community-level initiatives, managed by Yemeni experts, that would accept funding requests on a rolling basis and allow for mini- and small grants.

Joke Buringa is a gender specialist and a former employee at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. She further specializes in international relations, with a focus on the Arabian Peninsula, Iraq, and Iran, looking at regional security, energy security, and bilateral economic relations.

Her practical experience in Yemen includes working with the Hudaydah municipality in the former Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) from 1985, followed by a period of research and training concerning women's role in development for Dutch-funded projects. The resulting bibliography was published by the American Institute for Yemeni Studies in 1992. She later returned to Sana'a to work as a diplomat and gender specialist with the Dutch MFA in addition to other assignments in the Middle East/North Africa Department and the DG for International Cooperation involving Yemen.

Burgina holds a master's degree in social anthropology with a specialization in women's studies, from the University of Amsterdam, and a certificate in international relations from the Clingendael Institute in the Hague.

The Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies is an independent think-tank that seeks to foster change through knowledge production with a focus on Yemen and the surrounding region. The Center's publications and programs, offered in both Arabic and English, cover political, social, economic and security related developments, aiming to impact policy locally, regionally, and internationally.

