



MWMN
MEDITERRANEAN
WOMEN MEDIATORS
NETWORK

THE ROLE OF YEMENI WOMEN IN THE PEACE PROCESS

MUNA LUQMAN



On 10 January 2020, the MWMN hosted **Muna Luqman**, Chairperson of Food4Humanity and co-founding member of the Women Solidarity Network, who spoke on “The Role of Yemeni Women in the Peace Process”. The webinar was part of a new initiative of virtual meetings launched at the end of 2019 by the MWMN.

Here you can read her speech that she kindly shared with us.

“Before the actual war erupted in Yemen, we were full of hope that change and democracy, equality and wealth distribution were coming, and that a real chance for human dignity was being made. That is the hope we had during the transitional period after the Yemen Spring. But I would be lying if I said we didn’t see the war coming. There were many warning signs: we were already one of the most heavily armed nations ranked in the top ten countries for carrying firearms, we already had an existing humanitarian crisis and we were one of the poorest countries in the region, and grievances of marginalised and oppressed groups had not been addressed for decades.

As the war escalated, state institutions disappeared and we, as women especially, had to pick up the pieces of what remained.

War was inevitable, but so is peace. When the war began in Yemen, I was living and working in Taiz. I was trapped in the crossfire and saw many women and children die around me and others injured. Today, Taiz is the largest city devastated by the conflict and has been under siege for more than four years.

All parties to the conflict have been using explosive weapons that have led to terrible loss of life and destruction. Saudi-led coalition airstrikes have targeted schools, hospitals, markets, weddings and funerals. Many of these attacks have been indiscriminate, disproportionate or directed against civilians. Additionally, Houthi rebels have targeted civilians through indiscriminate shelling and use of snipers and mines. Most military depots and camps are located within the cities in Yemen placing civilians at huge risk of being



used as human shields.

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One of the saddest moments I have experienced was watching the youth join the fighting. The slogan used to mobilise the youth was “leave your pens and pick up your kalashnikov”. It broke my heart seeing poets, writers, artists and peaceful youth abandoning their ambitions to carry guns and sacrifice their lives.

I felt I had to do something to help the people and protect young men from being recruited. I therefore decided to establish the initiative called Food4Humanity, which aimed at fostering volunteerism among youth and through humanitarian projects divert them from fighting to peacebuilding.

I was directly involved in mediating many local conflicts that aroused during the civil unrest before the war broke out and during the conflict such as: mediating to evacuate children trapped in the crossfire; resolving an armed water dispute; mediating to open humanitarian corridors in the city of Taiz; and facilitating the entering of oxygen and medical supplies and other humanitarian aid at a time when there was no presence of government services or international organisations on the ground.

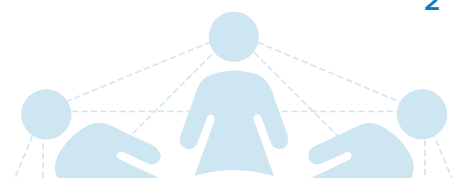
Yemeni women are truly the everyday heroes.

After more than two years of war, the situation in besieged Taiz became unbearable and I had to relocate due to direct risks and threats received. I moved to Egypt, but I did not stop working nor has my team in Yemen that continues our activities with my daily guidance and support.

With my sisters I co-founded one of the largest women’s network called the Women Solidarity Network that involves Yemeni women both across the country and of the diaspora. As a network, we decided that our priorities were (1) work to protect each other from violence; (2) work to push for women’s rights and gender equality; (3) come together to contribute to peacebuilding.

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Members of the Women Solidarity Network relentlessly work to end bloody conflicts over water and land resources, to evacuate schools from armed groups, to restore the



rights of our sons and daughters to education, and they risk their lives on a daily basis to rescue families trapped in conflict zones. Many network members play leading roles in alleviating the suffering of citizens by conducting relief projects and negotiating the opening of humanitarian corridors. They are working to release the detainees and to reintegrate children who have been involved in hostilities, contributing to ceasefire campaigns in some areas that have witnessed armed conflicts, leading efforts in alleviating the suffering of families through relief and development projects, and revitalising the economy through small income-generating projects. Yet we see the women who are the real peace makers largely excluded from the formal peace process led by the UN.

Apart from Yemen and the region badly needing disarmament, we are also calling for inclusive peace processes of all political actors and societal groups including women and youth and are supporting transitional justice processes not only to hold perpetrators accountable for violating and abusing international humanitarian law, but also to support reparation and reconciliation efforts to mend a deeply fragmented society.

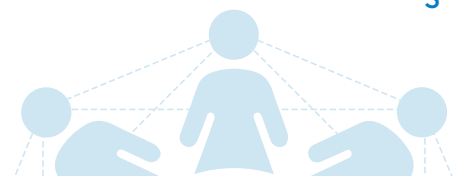
The impact that Yemeni women have had during this conflict are critical contributions to security and will definitely contribute to reaching better and sustainable peace agreements. We, as women, have the highest stake in peace.

However, women have been excluded from the current formal peace talks by parties to the conflict, reversing the small gains in women's political participation previously made. While women have been engaged in local level peace initiatives, they lack the resources to maximise the positive impact of their role.

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Although women's protection is a local norm and women used to rarely be victims of assault or direct targets of violence because of Yemen's rich social capital, today peacebuilders are currently being attacked, detained and accused of being traitors. Part of this is due to their work in coexistence, deradicalisation and community awareness because the militant groups - specifically the Houthi rebels - militarise the community and perceive women as a threat.

We are advocating around the world to support women's effective participation in the Yemen talks to ensure that the peace agenda is gender responsive and that women's agenda for peace and their priorities are included. We also want to ensure that delegates and mediators have gender experts on their teams.



We supported the US Congress to pass the legislation to halt arms transfers and we are advocating around the world for the international community to work towards creating a peace-driven economy instead of a weapons-based economy.

The Middle East does not need any more flows of weapons if we are to have a real shot towards sustainable peace!

Yemeni Women Road Map for Peace

We are calling on all parties to:

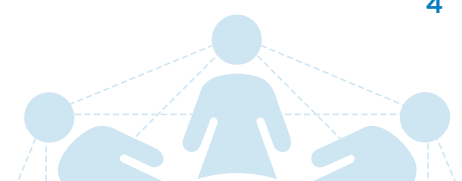
- immediately cease indiscriminate attacks and targeting of civilians and to fully cooperate with international mechanisms to ensure effective, impartial and independent investigations;
- put pressure on the Saudi-led Coalition to halt airstrikes in populated areas and to agree on safe zones that should not be targeted by airstrikes in line with international humanitarian law;
- call on the Houthis to immediately cease using landmines and to destroy existing stockpiles, as well as to submit map of where the landmines are;
- immediately develop disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programmes and ensure that they are gender responsive and address the recruitment of women and girls by armed groups;
- ensure that urgent assistance and gender-responsive support is provided to those wounded by explosive weapons and landmines and their families.

At the Women Solidarity Network, we are also working to bridge the gap between donors and women-led civil society organisations and initiatives at the grassroots level in the fields of humanitarian access and peace building.

Through the Peace Track Initiative we are working on access to decision-making processes and meaningful participation to:

- ensure that the peace agenda is gender responsive and that women's issues and priorities are included as well as to ensure that delegations have gender experts on their teams;
- regularly consult with women leaders and women's organisations from across the country as per UNSC Resolution 2122 (2013) and Presidential Statement S/PRST2017/7;¹

1 UN Security Council Resolution 2122 (2013) on women, peace and security, 18 October 2013, [https://undocs.org/S/RES/2122\(2013\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/2122(2013)); UN Security Council Presidential Statement on Middle East (Yemen), 15 June 2017, <https://undocs.org/en/S/PRST/2017/7>.



- ensure women's representation of no less than 30 per cent in peace processes in all tracks, including women's representation in all committees created as result of the peace negotiations and political processes during the transitional period such as de-escalation committees, reparation and reconstruction committees, and any other committees established;
- ensure that women are fairly represented including 50 per cent of southern women and 20 per cent of young women, and ensure that representation reflects the geographical diversity at the local and national levels;
- commit to develop a mechanism for women to be heard in the negotiation process including rural women and women victims/survivors of the war to ensure that their priorities are addressed in any upcoming political solution;
- support women peacemakers at the local community level in the urban and rural areas by allocating necessary resources and supporting them technically;
- ensure that there are mechanisms for protecting women and women human rights defenders.

Finally, we need you to join hands with us to bring an end to the conflict in Yemen. The people of Yemen are paying a heavy price and the women are bearing double the burden of this war. The billions being spent on bombs and drones provide no solutions!

A real sustainable and lasting peace will only be achieved if women, the real peace makers, are included and pave the way to peace.

Thank you.”

