

**Joint Statement of Yemeni women's rights civil society organizations to the Universal
Periodic Review (UPR)
"Women and girls paying the heaviest price in Yemen"**

Geneva, 13th December 2018

Presented by Muna Luqman, Chairperson of Food4Humanity

Your Excellencies and distinguished delegations,

I am Muna Luqman, Chairperson of Food4Humanity. I will present a summary of a joint submission prepared by six Yemeni women led human rights organizations, which are members of the Women Solidarity Network, in collaboration with the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. In the report, we have covered some of the gaps in Yemen's implementation of previous UPR recommendations pertaining to women's rights. At the back of the room you will find Fact Sheets based on our submission.

I will be focusing on three of the issues included in the submission, namely :

- Humanitarian needs and lack of social services.
- Arms proliferation and explosive weapons.
- Use of child soldiers.

Nisma Mansour will focus on gender based and sexual violence and women's participation in political and public life.

Before presenting our concerns and recommendations on these three areas, I would like to note that our report does not reflect an exhaustive picture of the deteriorating situation of women's rights in Yemen. Given the nature of the UPR, the primary focus of that submission was on providing recommendations addressed to the Government of Yemen. Our organizations have engaged and will continue to engage in other UN processes to call for accountability for violations and abuses of international human rights law and international humanitarian law by all parties and to promote measures to find a durable political solution in Yemen.

On the Humanitarian needs and lack of social services:

The devastating conflict in Yemen has caused massive destruction to infrastructure, interruption of basic social services, damage to the social fabric, and terrible loss of life.

Women are bearing the burdens of this war. They are being disproportionately affected by the protracted humanitarian crisis. Women and girls make the majority of the internally displaced, living in informal settlements or in schools lacking privacy. This increases their vulnerability to sexual abuse. Due to caregiving roles, women are more prone to be affected by diseases and outbreaks such as cholera because of women's traditional roles in taking care of sick family members, fetching and handling untreated water and preparing food. The loss of income, livelihoods and social safety nets and cash transfers has contributed to food insecurity. This situation has been exacerbated by the reduction in government expenditures, the suspension or significant delay in the payment of salaries for government employees since September 2016, and the collapse of the social protection system including the work of the Social Welfare Fund.

Women usually put the welfare of their family ahead of themselves, which means, for example, that they eat last if they manage to secure food at all. Malnutrition is increasing among pregnant

and lactating women. The destruction of health facilities with limited capacity has affected women's access to health services. Women face an increased risk of life-threatening complications during pregnancy and delivery, as well as, loss of access to family planning.

The blockade imposed by the government and the Saudi-led coalition, as well as the use of landmines by the Houthis, has increased the risk of famine especially in the city of Hodaida. It has restricted the mobility of civilians and their access to humanitarian aid and medical evacuations. Because of the ongoing siege of Taiz by the Houthis, women have had to bear the burden of walking in difficult terrains to secure basic life necessities for their families.

For this reason, we urge you to make the following UPR recommendations. You can read them on the PowerPoint slide here at the back.

Firstly, all parties to the conflict must lift all sieges and blockades immediately, and allow immediate and unimpeded access to humanitarian aid.

In addition, we urge to recommend to the Government to:

- End naval and aerial blockades and allow unimpeded commercial aviation, including on the Sana'a airport, and allow the free movement of persons seeking medical care abroad.
- Ensure that durable solutions are established to provide IDPs with shelter, access to health, education, social protection and legal assistance (including access to legal documentation) in collaboration with all relevant actors. A key measure for this is to put in place a national policy to address the humanitarian situation.
- Ensure that gender-sensitive health services, psychological and social support be provided. This must include targeted support for women and girls with specific attention to the needs of IDPs.
- Restore access to basic social services such as, health, education, and social protection. It is essential that the government undertake the payment of public sector salaries arrears.
- Address the shortcomings of the Social Welfare Fund in terms of governance, accountability, gender-sensitiveness, and transparency. This should include the set-up of anti-corruption policies and immediate measures to foster economic empowerment and livelihoods. In particular, measures to support women-led private sector initiatives, small scale industries, and social entrepreneurship.

On Arms proliferation and explosive weapons:

Yemen has always ranked at the top of the most militarized countries. Over the years, there haven't been any serious efforts made by the government on disarmament and arms control in the country. The conflict has increased militarization and arms flows into the country, which is undermining efforts to establish peace.

Human rights violations and abuses and violations of international humanitarian law have been committed by all parties to the conflict. All parties have been using explosive weapons that led to terrible loss of life and destruction. Saudi-led coalition airstrikes have targeted schools, hospitals, markets, weddings, and funerals and continue to be the leading cause of civilian casualties. Many of these attacks have been indiscriminate, disproportionate or directed against civilians and civilian objects. Additionally, Houthis have targeted civilians through ballistic missiles, indiscriminate shelling, snipers, and mines. Most military depots and camps are located within the cities in Yemen, placing civilians at huge risk and as default human shields.

In order to address this situation, we urge you to make the following UPR recommendations:

Firstly, a call on all parties to immediately cease indiscriminate attacks on and targeting of civilians, and to fully cooperate with international mechanisms to ensure effective, impartial and independent investigations

- A call on the Houthis to immediately cease using landmines and destroy existing stockpiles, as well as, to submit the landmine maps.

In addition, the Government of Yemen should be recommended to:

- immediately develop disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programmes and ensure that they are gender responsive and address the recruitment of women and girls by armed groups.
- 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 and international human rights law.
- take measures urgently to identify the presence of landmines and of other explosive devices and to remove them;
- Ensure the development of maps of areas affected by landmines and explosive devices as part of confidence-building measures in the context of peace negotiations.
- Ensure the development of gender sensitive programmes to protect civilians and to care for survivors of mines; and
- Ensure that urgent assistance and appropriate and gender-responsive compensation and support is provided to those wounded by explosive weapons and landmines and their families, or to the families of those killed.

On Child recruitment:

In the previous UPR, recommendations were made relating to child recruitment by armed forces and armed groups. Children are the firewood of this war. Since 2015, the UN has documented 1702 cases of child recruitment with 67% being recruited by the Houthis and 20% by government forces. The national action plan to end the recruitment of child soldiers signed with the UN has not been implemented. The UN has suspended the demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration (DDR) programmes relating to children in 2016 on the basis that it is risky to run such programmes and is necessary to await a political settlement to be achieved.

As such we urge you to make the following UPR recommendations:

Firstly, a call on all parties to the conflict to put an end to the recruitment and use of child soldiers in accordance with UN Security Council resolution 2216 (2015) and their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

Specifically, recommendations addressed to the government should be made to:

- Request the resumption of DDR programmes as a matter of priority.

- Ensure that humanitarian response plans, DDR programmes and peace negotiations effectively comprise mechanisms to support the reintegration of child soldiers and ensure gender responsiveness.

In closing, I wish to reiterate that the government must take necessary actions to alleviate the suffering of the people of Yemen including by fulfilling its obligations and commitments towards women's rights. We hope that you will make UPR recommendations addressing women's rights and encourage you to use our submission and the Fact Sheets available at the back of the room as a reference.

Thank you.



WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE FOR
PEACE & FREEDOM

