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for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the High
Commissioner and the Secretary-General**

Written statement* submitted by The Next Century Foundation, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



Moving beyond ceasefires: a way forward for Yemen

As of 2021 Yemen has entered its seventh year of conflict - conflict which has led to a disappearing of the socio-political fabric of Yemen's tentative democratic tradition. Plagued by decades of political instability and rampant sectarianism, Yemen's conflict can only be remedied through strong governance.

Lessons should be learnt from the past, when power was so centralised that citizens felt disenfranchised. Before the war, power was consolidated centrally by a group of political, social, tribal and military elites. Yemen's elites' failures to clamp down on corruption served to feed the fire of dissent. Only by facing past mistakes can we hope to bring Yemen out of its dark night.

A country divided between two governance entities: an internationally recognized government led by President Abdu Rabbu Mansour Hadi, and a de facto government-alike structure run by Ansar Allah from the country's capital, Sana'a, both competing authorities have failed to provide basic services to citizens, thus opening Yemen to rapid disintegration.

President Hadi's government currently lacks the political clout required to operate inside Yemen in a cohesive and meaningful way.

We plead to all involved to go beyond the brokering of ceasefires to instead focus on working on national solutions - without losing sight of Yemen's idiosyncratic regional needs and thus help build long-term governance. Today's failures are very much the result of failures in vision on the part of the international community.

Yemen's regional and international stakeholders are also to blame for Yemen's catastrophe. The blocked airports and seaports have fueled humanitarian atrocities. National solutions cannot go forward whilst the proxy war waged on Yemen's soil is not stopped.

As for the Houthi, President Hadi's main opponents, they have found it difficult to finance their military efforts. The war being pursued against them by the coalition in an attempt to remove them from power has therefore depleted state revenues in the North at the expense of basic services.

Yemen's ills have also been compounded by the emergence of armed non-state actors - a direct result of Yemen's chronic governance vacuum. Given the current absence of strong central institutions, further fragmentation is bound to happen unless concrete steps are taken now.

Following months of negotiations, a new cabinet was appointed under President Abdu Rabbu Mansour Hadi and Prime Minister Maeen Abdulmalik Saeed in December 2020.

At a glance, the new power-sharing government reflects some of the outcomes of the 2013–2014 national dialogue, highlighting parity between North and South Yemen. In reality, the agreement has been met with opposition, made manifest by the Taiz protests in December.

Furthermore, the two-party settlement is unlikely to translate into long-lasting peace. Most of the northern governorates are under Houthi control, making the agreement logistically impractical. Northern ministers will lack decision-making authority in the region, a direct challenge to the overall authority of the state and the Republic as it stands today.

Tihama's Exclusion

Further recalibration thus needs to be considered to reinstate a sense of political and institutional legitimacy, so that the government can represent a fully functioning federated Yemen.

The new government has so far successfully included 24 ministers - the representatives of major political forces in Yemen, with equal numbers of members from Northern and Southern regions, including the Southern Transitional Council (STC). However, such a

power-share failed to adequately include the Tihama region, despite it being home to 23% of Yemen's population.

In addition to the exclusion of the Tihama region, tribal leaders, and civil society actors, the new government has failed to include women – a failure that discredits the new government, especially since under the previous government women were offered an ever-increasing voice and role.

Women

Women's participation in conflict prevention and resolution advances security. One study found that substantial inclusion of women and civil society groups in a peace negotiation makes the resulting agreement 64 percent less likely to fail and, according to another study, 35 percent more likely to last at least fifteen years. Higher levels of gender equality are associated with a lower propensity for conflict, both between and within states.

Strengthening women's participation in governance in Yemen, which suffers from a litany of overlapping interrelated issues, could allow strides to be made towards stability as well as cementing much needed socio-economic advancement.

Federalism

Nearly half of the conflict-resolution agreements forged in the crisis points of the world during the 1990s have failed within five years of their signing. Ninety percent of civil wars in the 2000s occurred in countries that had already experienced civil war in recent decades. All actors engaged in brokering Yemen's peace must grapple with this reality. No real solution has been brought to the table as yet and it is now painfully obvious that for Yemen to attain peace and security, new thinking is needed.

A key outcome of the 2011-2014 transition period following the Yemen uprising was the emergence of the option of federalism as a new form of governance. The Shura Council was to be divided into half, comprising 50% Northerners and 50% Southerners. Today, Yemen's weak state and government are the primary obstacles to the country's transformation to a federal system or any other form of empowered local governance.

Despite the criticism surrounding federalism in Yemen, compared to its alternative, which would of course be partition, federalism appears to be a relatively amicable institutional exercise, one which will allow each region to be recognised with its own rights.

Mere political will is insufficient when it comes to building a successful federation. Channels of cooperation between local regions must be established on the basis of an efficient structure that emphasises the devolution of powers. For community-based needs to be met, prerequisites for a successful federation include having a strong central capital that acts a keeper of the Constitution, settles disputes, and ensures equitable distribution of resources. The Next Century Foundation is especially concerned about the latter due to a sharp increase in levels of corruption and the rerouting of humanitarian aid.

The Gulf Cooperation Council

Reconciliation between the member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council will hopefully translate into greater cooperation in Yemen as far as finding common political ground goes.

The Gulf détente signals a positive move towards post-conflict recovery in Yemen after years of proxy division in the Arab coalition. The Next Century Foundation (NCF) hopes that the end of the blockade of Qatar will mean stronger regional support and assistance in Yemen. It will also resonate strongly in the context of Yemen, where the lifting of the blockade is an urgent priority if the ongoing humanitarian catastrophe is to be ameliorated.

Ansar Allah

Lastly, the NCF commends United States of America President Joe Biden's administration's decision to look into reversing the United States of America's designation of Ansar Allah (aka the Houthis) as a terrorist group. Former President Trump's decision to designate Ansar Allah a terror organisation will exacerbate an already suffocating reality, without facilitating a peaceful resolution to Yemen's deepening political crisis. The designation rendered humanitarian aid workers' efforts moot as supply lines and access, which were already at constant risk of disruption, come to a standstill, creating barriers such that it will be nearly impossible for anyone to effectively and efficiently deliver aid to those in need. In Yemen that is a catastrophe.

Future Governance

For the past few months, the Next Century Foundation hosted a weekly peacebuilding working group. This deliberative platform, consisting of Yemenis from various regions North and South, echoes the strong sentiment of all actors needing to work together to achieve political stability through the promotion of strong governance.

There was a consensus by most but not all that Yemen should not be partitioned but have federal governance. The federalization of Yemen was the final outcome of the National Dialogue Conference, which agreed that Yemen would be transformed into a six-region federal system. The regions would be:

- Azal, Saba, Janad and Tihama in the North;
- Aden and the Hadramawt in the South.

We endorse this way forward in combination with national elections for a central government and local elections for regional assemblies. One credible approach would be for the central government to deal with national and international issues such as defence and internal security; the local governments to have devolved budgets to deal with all local issues such as infrastructure, healthcare and education. Members of regional assemblies to be empowered to vote by a two thirds majority to combine regions should they so wish.

We strongly advocate that autonomy and authority be restored to the people of Yemen. All parties should urgently work together on paving a way forward for Yemen; a way forward is only possible when international and national stakeholders take responsibility for their role in Yemen's humanitarian atrocities. Strong governance is integral to building long-lasting peace, and even more so to avoid Yemen remaining a failed state. An entire generation having only been exposed to war, Yemen's man-made humanitarian catastrophe may lead to the country's permanent downfall.
