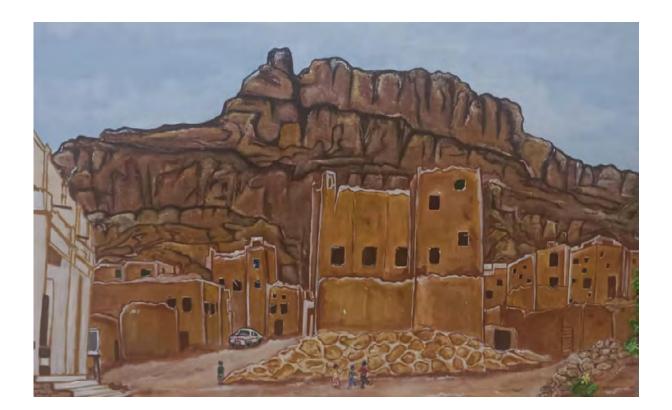# Observe and Act

The Role of Yemeni Political Movements in the Implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Framework

Berghof Foundation

Fight for Humanity

 and

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Acronyms

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GFFO	German Federal Foreign Office
GPC	General People's Conference
IRG	Internationally Recognised Government
MOSAL	Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour
NAP	National Action Plan
NDC	National Dialogue Conference
OSESGY	Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
STC	Southern Transitional Council
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNSCR	UN Security Council Resolution
WPS	Women, Peace and Security

1. Executive Summary

Fight for Humanity and Berghof Foundation, with the support of the German Federal Foreign Office, collaborated on a participatory action research initiative in Yemen involving three key political movements or entities: the Islah Party (Al Islah), the Southern Transitional Council (STC), and Ansar Allah. A team of local researchers, alongside a national coordinator, conducted this research to identify and better understand the factors that encourage the movements to promote the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Framework,[1] especially the protection and participation of women and girls in situations of conflict.

The researchers conducted close to 50 interviews with men and women members of the three movements, including individuals in leadership positions, as well as with associated civil society organisations (CSOs) and women activists. Furthermore, the team conducted interviews with a limited number of external stakeholders and held three Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The researchers inquired about the movements' perceptions, regulations, practices, needs, progress, and challenges regarding the implementation of the WPS framework. The report was written through a participatory process: the chapters were co-drafted by the researchers (in Arabic), the coordinator, and the international project team. Each researcher then presented their chapters to the respective movements in three consultation meetings to review, revise, and approve the final draft from each movement. In addition, the collected data was presented to and discussed by the project team in Amman, Jordan, to identify key research findings.

Despite generally low levels of women's participation in leadership in Yemen – aggravated by years of conflict – the research revealed that women are active participants in the political, economic, and security processes of the three movements surveyed. Women do maintain political representation in all three movement structures, albeit at a low percentage. They also actively participate at different levels in the process of political diplomacy and peace talks, whether through their movements or through the activities of civil society and international actors.

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1 'Framework' is used in this report to replace the more commonly used 'agenda' to avoid any negative connotation of 'agenda' as being something that is imposed by somebody on someone else, following feedback from research participants.

One of the findings shows that women in the three movements actively participate in security and protection-related activities, including leading community committees, advocating for and facilitating the release of prisoners of war, supporting the families of the martyrs and the wounded, providing logistical support to the battle fronts, and defending the rights of women and girls to freedom of movement, education, and economic empowerment.

The research found that the regulations and by-laws of the three studied movements – the Islah Party, the STC, and Ansar Allah – are not inclusive of the concept of protection for women and girls, especially in times of armed conflict, and the concept remains mostly unaddressed in the 2013–2014 National Dialogue Conference (NDC) outcomes or in legislation. The need for dialogue regarding women's protection and participation within the movements – and also among the wider community and actors external to the movements (notably, civil society and international organisations), as well as between the movements – arose as a request from interviewees of the three movements.

The important link between women's participation and protection in Yemen was also stressed in the findings: where real or perceived protection for women was lacking, women's participation was also undermined. However, the contrary was also shown to be true: a lack of women's participation can contribute to continued failures of protection, as issues of women and girls' protection are not prioritized. Safe participation mechanisms therefore need to be established for women in the movements.

Another key finding shows that, in order to be effective, efforts related to promoting the participation and protection of Yemeni women and girls need to be localised and adopted by both men and women in the movements. Women within the three movements have developed a local experience of the WPS framework, which is closely aligned with the concept of human security. This local experience is worthy of attention and development to enable women to play a leading role in their own political participation and protection – including in conflict prevention – on the movement, societal, and state level.

The research recommends the development of tangible programmes and interventions with the movements, which might involve: internal dialogues; fostering discussions between movement leadership and women's groups; integrating women's visions and the WPS framework into organisational and governance development processes; and conducting training and capacity development activities for both women and men within these movements. Moreover, it requires enhancing women's participation through local and international civil society initiatives, extending political, programmatic, logistical, and financial support to women's activities, and promoting women's involvement at all levels of economic empowerment, community resilience projects, education, protection, and psychological support for women and girls.

While finding local and internal solutions is imperative, women also need to enhance their skills and confidence to make more impactful contributions. It is equally essential that these contributions be officially acknowledged and supported, both within the movement and by external actors.

2. Introduction

This introductory chapter provides the background and context underpinning this report, its subject-matter, and the research methodology. It is followed by separate chapters on each of the movements studied, which narrate their perceived understanding of WPS, their policies and commitments in relation to WPS, the current situation and practices, the actors and factors conducive to their implementation of the WPS framework, as well as the opportunities and recommendations to overcome challenges as identified by research participants. The report closes with a crosscutting analysis of the key findings and main conclusions.

2.1. Project Background and Objectives

Women and girls in conflict-ridden countries like Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Libya, and Palestine are facing intensified violence due to ongoing conflicts. The implementation of the WPS framework by states and international actors often falls short, prioritising "add women and stir" tokenism over genuine systemic reform and exemplary measures.[2] This approach does little to address women's meaningful participation in peace processes.

One limitation is the universality of UN Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR) on WPS, as they lack the nuance to tackle country-specific issues and experiences, and the influence of other actors than states on the implementation of the WPS framework in these specific contexts. In the Middle East and North Africa region, women advocate for a holistic approach that integrates international human rights and humanitarian law into the understanding of UNSCR 1325 and its subsequent iterations. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) Resolution No. 30 exemplifies this approach by harmonising Resolution 1325 with broader international law frameworks and considering situations of conflict,[3] in alignment with the need for the localisation of WPS efforts.

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2   UN Women. (2021). *Women, Peace and Security in the Arab Region. Policy Brief*. Available at: https://arabstates.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20Arab%20States/Attachments/2021/07/WPS-Policy%20Paper-EN.pdf.
3   Ibid.

The two organisations leading this project, Fight for Humanity and Berghof Foundation, share a vision that relies on an inclusive and positive approach to engaging in dialogue and demonstrating good practices and examples of respect in order to identify and support the attitudes and behaviours of conflict and political protagonists that strengthen women's rights. The two organisations have complementary expertise and engagement in women's participation and protection rights; hence, the project focuses specifically on these two pillars of the WPS framework.

In 2022, Fight for Humanity and Berghof Foundation, with the support of the German Federal Foreign Office (GFFO), conducted a participatory action research project in Myanmar. This first 6-month intensive research focused on the role that armed and/or political movements can play in implementing the WPS Framework. The study drew on the experiences of two Ethnic Resistance Organisations from Myanmar: the Karenni National Progressive Party and the Karen National Union. The research team conducted interviews with leaders of the two movements and associated CSOs, women activists, as well as external stakeholders, and produced a research report[4] and policy brief.[5] The organisations produced and disseminated new knowledge shedding light on the factors incentivising non-state armed and/or political movements – during this first phase of the project – to abide by, promote, or implement the WPS framework. Fight for Humanity and Berghof Foundation further engaged with policy actors and donors to discuss how to address this challenge in National Action Plans (NAP) and support the implementation of the WPS framework in areas controlled by armed and/or political movements from an international and government perspective.

Building on these recent activities, this report presents a new set of original data and analysis conducted through participatory action research with three political movements from Yemen (south and north). The objective of this research is to open channels of communication with these actors on the protection and participation of women and girls, and provide them with an opportunity to give their opinion on the issue of WPS and make contributions to the enhancement of women's rights. It also aims to showcase unique insights on the factors that incentivize political movements to promote the protection and participation of women and girls, with the hope of identifying avenues for further contribution to a fuller implementation of the WPS framework in Yemen.

While the findings presented in this report are primarily meant to be relevant for the political movements involved, they may also aid practitioners, governments, and other policy actors working on the implementation of the WPS framework in Yemen and beyond. More specific recommendations are provided in the policy brief[6] accompanying this research report.

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4 Zin Mar Phyo, *Observe and Act: The Role of Armed and Political Movements in the Implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in Myanmar*, Berghof Foundation and Fight for Humanity, December 2022. Available at: https://3848af19-2ed2-4045-b6ea-b721d748e98d.usrfiles.com/ugd/3848af_5ff14fcf3b984e299503ff2c3ae0eaf6.pdf.

5 Ann-Kristin Sjöberg, Véronique Dudouet, Katharina Schmitz, Tilman Papesch. *Observe and Act: Opportunities and Challenges for the Implementation of the Women, Peace & Security Agenda in Areas Controlled by Armed and Political Movements. Policy Brief.* Berghof Foundation and Fight for Humanity, December 2022. Available at: https://7c447a88-21ac-4bc7-8e5c-621fa2429435.usrfiles.com/ugd/7c447a_35676b546e3c44fd8e01e6ef7af0b180.pdf.

6 Ann-Kristin Sjöberg, Wameedh Shakir, and Véronique Dudouet. *Empowerment Lies Within: Opportunities and Challenges for the Implementation of the Women, Peace & Security Framework by Political Movements in Yemen*. Policy Brief. Fight for Humanity and Berghof Foundation. February 2024.

2.2. Women's Political Participation and Protection in Yemen

One of the main consequences of the recurrence of armed conflicts over the last sixty years of Yemen's modern political history until today is Yemen's inability to consolidate as a state, leading to a lag in political, economic, social, and security developments. This general decline has affected all Yemenis, especially women and girls.

Concepts of women's participation and protection receive little attention in the political philosophy of the Yemeni state and are barely mentioned in the current Constitution. The political culture of the Yemeni state is influenced by an Islamic perception of participation and protection: participation is for members of the elite, while protection, especially for women and individuals, is the responsibility of the family and society. The state is responsible for protecting its national security and institutions. This being the case, the decline in the representation of women in leadership and decision-making positions may reflect a religious and social culture that finds it difficult to consider women as part of the political elite.

The population of Yemen – which includes over 15 million women and girls – has been living in conflict for nearly 10 years. Even before the war, women's political participation was limited: according to the World Economic Forum, in 2014, Yemen was the world's worst country for women's political representation and participation. At the highest political level, there were only two female ministers out of thirty (6.6%).[7] Of the 301 seats in Yemen's parliament, only one was occupied by a woman (elected in 2003) and only two members of the 111-seat Shura Council[8] were women, while women's representation in local councils (elected in 2006) was under 1%. Women's representation in ministerial positions was measured at 0.1 (with 1 meaning full equality).[9]

Furthermore, the armed conflict that broke out in 2014 has not facilitated more inclusion for women. The latest cabinet – which was formed in 2020 by the Internationally Recognised Government (IRG, also known as the legitimate government) as a result of the power-sharing deal brokered by Saudi Arabia in 2019 via the Riyadh Agreement between the IRG and the Southern Transitional Council (STC) – has not included women for the first time in twenty years.[10]

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7 Elham Manea, (2021), Gender in Post-War Power-Sharing, Governance Arrangements, and Restoration of State Institutions: Background Paper for OSESGY's Gender Unit, June 2021.
8 The Shura Council or the Consultative Council is the upper house of the parliament of Yemen, the lower house being the House of Representatives.
9 World Economic Forum, The Global Gender Gap Index, 2014.
10 Elham Manea, (2021), op.cit.

As a notable exception, the National Dialogue Conference (NDC), held in 2013 during the hopeful period that followed the 2011 uprising in Yemen, provided greater space for women's political participation. They were represented in unprecedented numbers, with a total of 152 delegates out of 565 in the NDC. However, when looking at power dynamics within the NDC, one may argue that the participation of women was not sufficient where it mattered the most, with only five women in the 31-strong NDC technical committee, and only four in the 17-member committee tasked with drafting the Constitution. This was an improvement in comparison to previous levels of participation, and possibly a result of the important role women played in the 2011 protests.[11] However, gender parity was still far from being reached.

The NDC outcomes set women's participation at a minimum quota of 30% in all government authorities and bodies. Political parties also have by-laws providing for quotas for women, ranging from 15% to 25%. However, these are not applied in practice by Yemen's main political parties and movements, where women's political representation in leadership and decision-making positions continues to be low. This is as much the case in traditional political movements, such as the Islah Party, which was founded in 1990, as in newly founded political movements such as the STC.

For example, the Yemeni Socialist Party has three women on the political bureau out of 29 members (10%). Five women out of 34 members (14%) sit on the permanent committee of the General People's Conference (GPC), and 89 women make up 10% of the 886 members in its General Secretariat. The Islah Party's General Secretariat includes one woman among its 15 members (6.6%); and its Shura Council has 13 women members out of its total of 130 members (10%). The Nassirites Party presents a higher figure with 27 women in the Central Committee out of 90 members (30%) and two women out of 16 members (12.5%) in its General Secretariat.[12] The regulations of the STC and its National Assembly include provisions supporting women's representation and empowerment, including granting women 30% of the representation and participation in various bodies. The STC has 10 senior districts, only three of which are headed by women, and the National Assembly, which serves as the parliament, has 303 members, 36 of whom are women (about 12%). The same applies to other levels of leadership. Concerning Ansar Allah, although there are women in official positions and in senior leadership positions, they do not always maintain a strong influence over the decision-making; this includes those who work in the security services.

Yemen ratified CEDAW in 1984 and the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991.[13] The current Yemeni Constitution (1991) proclaims equality between women and men, but also states that women have rights and obligations as determined by sharia law. The mix of statutory law, sharia, traditional tribal practices, and customary law operating in Yemen leaves women vulnerable to social, economic, and political violence, exclusion, and discrimination.[14] It also determines the legal status of women in statutory law, most notably in terms of their personal status, family law, and criminal law, which are largely derived from classical sharia.[15]

As mentioned above, the NDC outcomes set women's participation at a quota of at least 30% in all government authorities and bodies. The NDC outcome document also emphasises the protection of women, children, and the disabled during and after armed conflicts,[16] special transitional measures to ensure equity for women during conflicts and violations, and gender integration into transitional justice mechanisms, among other provisions related to social and economic development.[17]

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11 Shakir, W. (2015). *Women and Peacemaking in Yemen: Mapping the Realities*, Crisis Management Initiative (CMI), September 2015.

12 Manea, E. (2021).

13 Al-Zwaini, L. (2012). *The Rule of Law in Yemen: Prospects and Challenges*. The Hague Institute for the Internationalization of Law. Available at: https://issuu.com/openbriefing/docs/rule_of_law_in_yemen/15. In 2023, more than 65% of girls were married before the age of 18. See "The Crisis in Yemen A Crisis for Women and Girls", Reliefweb, 31.03.2023, Available at: https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/crisis-yemen-crisis-women-and-girls.

14 OECD. (2015). SIGI 2014 *Synthesis Report*. Available at: http://www.oecd.org/dev/development-gender/BrochureSIGI2015-web.pdf.

15 Al-Zwaini, L. (2012), op.cit.

16 The Republic of Yemen, *The Comprehensive National Dialogue Document, The Comprehensive National Dialogue Conference*, Sana‹a, 2013–2014, p. 105, 147 and 199. Available at: https://www.peaceagreements.org/masterdocument/1400.

17 Ibid, p. 70 and 71.

2.3. Women, Peace and Security in Yemen

A number of national and international actors are promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in Yemen. Among them, the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen (OSESGY) has collaborated with several international partners on a wide range of efforts since mid-2015. These actors include the United Kingdom, the European Union, and UN Women. Local partners, such as the Political Development Forum, in partnership with Berghof Foundation, the Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, and DeepRoot Consulting, all represent important civil society actors that are active in peacebuilding. There is also the Women's Summit: an annual meeting held in the city of Aden and organised by the Wojoud Foundation for Human Security, which brings together 200 women and young women leaders. Additionally, there are many roadmaps on WPS, action plans, visions, and frameworks,[18] such as the Feminist Peace Roadmap in Yemen.[19]

Formally, the IRG adopted an NAP for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 on WPS in December 2019.[20] In response, two operational plans were devised in 2022 and 2023. With technical support from the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) WPS expert team, and under the leadership of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (MOSAL), the NAP operational team developed the first-year implementation plan for the NAP. This plan focused on three primary objectives: a) institutionalising the NAP and building the capacity of NAP stakeholders and partners; b) identifying WPS priority issues; and c) mobilising resources. The 2023 operational plan focused on implementing the following objectives: a) improving the performance of the security and justice institutions to be responsive to gender needs – with a focus on the Aden Governorate as a pilot project; b) mainstreaming the objectives of the Yemen NAP into the structures and policies of sectoral ministries and equipping decision-makers, planners, and service providers with tools to integrate gender in their sectoral plans and budgets; c) strengthening the role of CSOs in using appropriate local advocacy and campaigning tools – especially mainstream media outlets and social media platforms – to mobilise local communities around WPS issues, with a focus on protection from and the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).[21]

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18 See Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, *Women's Voices in Yemen's Peace Process: Priorities, Recommendations, and Mechanisms for Effective Inclusion*, 25 January 2023. Available at: https://sanaacenter.org/publications/main-publications/19400.
19 For more details, see the Peace Track Initiative, *Feminist Peace Roadmap in Yemen: A Guiding Framework for Mediators and Negotiators*. March 2023. Available at: https://peacetrackinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Rodamap-udated-1.pdf.
20 PeaceWomen. (2020). National-Level Implementation. Women's International League of Peace and Freedom, United Nations Office. Available at: https://www.peacewomen.org/member-states.
21 MoSAL, UNDP, 2023, *National Action Plan for the Implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda – Yemen NAP, Yemen NAP Second Year Operational Framework (January–December 2023)*.
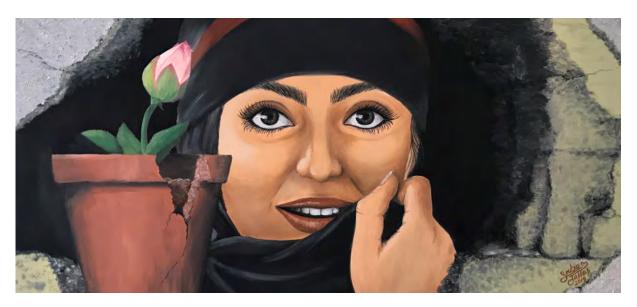
2.4. Methodology

In April 2023, Fight for Humanity recruited and supported a team of four local researchers and a national coordinator to participate in the development of a research methodology. The objective was to better understand the factors that encourage political movements in Yemen to promote the implementation of WPS framework, especially concerning the protection and participation of women and girls in conflict. From July to September 2023, the local team conducted participatory action research with three political movements from northern and southern Yemen: the Islah Party, the STC, and Ansar Allah.

A total of 46 interviews (27 with women and 19 with men) were conducted with women and men leaders and members of the three movements (the Islah Party: 20, STC: 20, and Ansar Allah: 6). In addition, three focus group discussions (FGDs) were held with civil society representatives in Aden (with 11 women and 1 man), and five interviews were conducted with external stakeholders. A July 2023 speech by Mr. Abdul-Malik Al-Houthi, the leader of Ansar Allah, was also considered a data source, as it was issued during the course of the data gathering and presented concurrently with the conducted interviews.[22]

In the beginning of September 2023, the local team participated in a two-day workshop in Amman to present and analyse the primary findings of the research, and at the end of September the international research team and the national coordinator participated in a policy dialogue meeting in Berlin to further discuss the findings.

Based on a participatory action research methodology that promotes peace and security processes and enhances the localisation of the WPS framework among political movements, this report presents the main findings on the three cases. The individual chapters were co-drafted in Arabic by the researchers, the coordinator, and the international project team. Careful attention was paid to keeping the original wording of the research participants/interviewees in Arabic. Chapter drafts were then presented in three consultation meetings: a meeting was held for each movement to review, revise, and approve the final draft of their case. Furthermore, the wording of this report has been adopted to the Yemeni context and the specific movements, and, as a result, it aims to communicate the three movements' own views and commitments on WPS implementation in their own words.

Finally, with agreement from the three movements, the project aimed to develop and implement dissemination and policy outreach activities for Yemen; this has included the production of a short video about WPS presenting some of the results and messages of the research, as well as a policy brief[23] showcasing the main conclusions and recommendations for external stakeholders.

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22 Speech by Mr. Abdul-Malik Al-Houthi, 17 July 2023. Available at: https://www.saba.ye/ar/news3252193.htm
23 Sjöberg, A (2024) op.cit.

3. Research Findings: The Yemeni Congregation for Reform (Islah Party)

3.1. The Islah Party's Understanding of the WPS Framework

The Yemeni Congregation for Reform (Islah Party), founded in 1990, has significant political experience and an interest in women's political participation and in protecting their rights. The party's by-laws and internal regulations guarantee the representation of women in the party's structures at all levels of the organization, starting at the district and governorate levels, and in all sectors, such as in the education and political and social sectors.

However, practice on the ground differs, as women's participation in decision-making positions remains weak, especially at the top level. Until 2000, women in the Islah Party were not represented in some of the higher structures, including the Shura Council. This changed during the party's second General Conference, when four women were elected to the Shura Council. In the third General Conference (held in two sessions, in 2003 and 2005) nine women were elected. In the fourth General Conference (held in 2007 and 2009), 13 women out of 130 members were elected, making up 10% of the Islah Party's leadership. Though this represented a clear step forward in increasing women's participation in decision-making, more is still needed, as stressed in the interviews.

In 2009, during the second session of the fourth General Conference, party leaders decided to establish a Women's Department within the organisational structure of the General Secretariat, which has branches in every governorate and organisational units in every district. Since the General Conference is the highest authority in the Islah Party and its decisions are binding, the Women's Department is like the rest of the departments of the General Secretariat, and women supervise all political, economic, social, and media fields that constitute the departments of the General Secretariat. When women's work in the party expanded, the by-laws and regulations were reviewed, studies and proposals were prepared, and dialogues were conducted the encourage the development of the structures and regulations in a way that would develop women's work and facilitate supervision, follow-up, and improvements to their work.

In addition, the women and men interviewed spoke of Yemen's commitment to all international agreements regarding women, which the parties are obligated to fulfil. In addition, interviewees expressed a demand for the inclusion of women's rights through constitutional provisions in the party's internal regulations and enacting laws – such an inclusion would guarantee protection for women and girls and act as a supervisory mechanism with laws to protect women and girls from violence and uphold their rights.

3.2. Official Policies and Commitments to the WPS Framework

Islah Party regulations stipulate that women within the party have as much right to reach senior leadership positions as men. As part of the political system that constitutes the Internationally Recognised Government (IRG), it still adheres to the outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference (NDC) in which it participated with 50 seats, 15 of which were allocated to women for 30% participation. According to interviewees, even before the NDC, women were well represented in Islah Party structures, with a representation rate in the higher structures equal to 10%.

The Islah Party therefore considers itself bound to the agreed upon outcomes of the NDC, which include a women's participation rate of 30%. However, this percentage has not yet been translated into the party's bodies and must be implemented within the lists of candidates of any upcoming elections. Some of the interviewees noted that all Yemeni parties face the same issue. The matter becomes clearer considering that women within the Islah Party are still demanding that the principle of equal opportunity be affirmed between the sexes, and that women be effectively empowered to access all of the party's various bodies and councils in proportion to their size within the party, and also granted positions in decision-making.

The interviewees explained that the participation of women in the Islah Party increased with the outbreak of the peaceful popular youth revolution in 2011. Accordingly, the Women's Department in the party began working, along with experts, to update regulations to promote the Women's Department to the Assistant General Secretariat – this would have brought about more women's representation in the party's leadership structure. However, the political transformations that Yemen underwent after 2011 led to the postponement of this proposal. After the youth revolution, Yemen entered a transitional phase that witnessed the election of Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi as president of the country, the forming of two national governments, and the convening of the NDC. However, in September 2014, civil war broke out.

The current conflict situation In Yemen has affected the political work of the Islah Party, as Ansar Allah now has control of the capital, Sana'a, and the rest of the Yemeni cities, including the Islah Party's headquarters. All of this has caused a delay in holding the party's fifth General Conference, and thus delayed the process of developing and modernising the party's systems and regulations to be more responsive to women's participation in politics, leadership, and decision-making. However, in the summer of 2023, the Islah Party began forming preparatory committees at the governorate level for the fifth conference, which indicates it will be held in the near future.

3.3. Current Situation and Practices Related to WPS

The war has provided an environment conducive to male hegemony in Yemen, especially in areas that suffer from weak awareness of women's rights and the promotion of customs and traditions. The war has amplified the restrictions imposed on women, such as persecution and restriction of freedom of assembly, expression, and movement, which hinder women from participating in public life, political processes, and gaining access to decision-making positions.

Some of the interviewees indicated that, after eight years of armed conflict, the political gains that Yemeni women had achieved over five decades have almost evaporated with the smoke and dust of war. Women have become unable to protect their most basic rights and have been subjected to various violations

by armed actors spread throughout the country. As for the situation with women in the Islah Party, it may be worse, given that the activity of the party as a whole, including the activity of women leaders, stopped in the governorates under the control of Ansar Allah, and their activity in the governorates under the control of the STC then decreased significantly.

Many women leaders and members of the Islah Party have been displaced from their regions to other cities, so their social activities have stopped, and movement between governorates has become a security risk for them. Some of the interviewees reported that once their identities are known at the security checkpoints, many women are subjected to harsh treatment, including being detained for days or not being allowed to pass.

3.4. Actors and Factors Conducive to the Implementation of the WPS Framework

Women within the Islah Party enjoy a large presence at the middle leadership level. Perhaps the most prominent factor in achieving this, according to the interviewees, is that the Women's Department enjoys independence in drawing up plans and determining activities and means for women's activities.

Women within the Islah Party also participate in all training programmes organised by the party or those organised by local and international bodies. The Islah Party has supported women in education and training in various specialisations, jobs, and skills according to available capabilities.

However, while the war has been a hindrance to women, it has also been an opportunity for widespread involvement in activities that were previously limited to men, and women have demonstrated their ability to manage community initiatives and peacemaking. They are also engaging in political and human rights activism; for example, with the Association of Mothers of Abductees and Forcibly Disappeared as well as many activities with the wounded and the families of martyrs.

The interviews also indicated that local and international organisations play a major role in providing qualification and training opportunities, although not always in the desired manner. Training and capacity development, especially in the legal, media, political, financial, security, peace, governance, and related fields, are extremely important for the WPS framework. Of equal importance is a need for international organisations to focus on women's education (especially girls), strengthening psychological support programmes, and supporting women's issues.

The interviews also noted how women tend to be less affected by the legacy of political rivalry and the crisis of trust prevailing between the various Yemeni parties. Women have a high appreciation for joint work, and this needs to be seen more among women in the various parties.

3.5. Opportunities and Recommendations

From the point of view of the interviewees, there are many opportunities connected to the WPS framework that those involved with the Islah Party could explore and strategize around, the most prominent of which are:

≡ Feminist intellectual production of religious and social teachings

The participation of women in the Islah Party in general, and through its four conferences in particular, and its formulation of visions based on religious teachings and social norms, in addition to its knowledge of matters of democracy, governance, and human rights, have demonstrated that it is possible to build on the religious and social culture of Yemeni society, such as urging morals and respecting and honouring women. These visions represent a great opportunity to implement the WPS framework, whether in investing in the teachings and norms that enhance women's participation in politics, or social teachings and norms that promote the rights of women and girls to protection. The participants added that investing in this opportunity necessarily requires that it be part of a broader combination of interventions, including awareness-raising programmes about the legal and constitutional rights of women and the dangers of violence against women and girls, in parallel with advocacy and support campaigns for women's and girls' issues in this regard.

≡ Promoting the involvement of women in new fields

During the war, women became involved in fields that were previously exclusive to men. This proved their worth and is an indication of their desire to depart from traditional roles. This represents a valuable opportunity that can be extended through a greater openness to involve women in the fields of politics, media, economics, and sports, whether within the party or outside of it. Interviewees emphasised their interest in empowering women economically and supporting projects that contribute to meeting women's needs to achieve security and peace. In addition, they stressed the need to enable women to participate in peace negotiations, and to increase the representation of women in all committees associated with humanitarian operations, peace, and development, which can help the committees to focus on issues concerning women (relating to displaced women, rural women, abused women, detainees, security personnel, politicians and jurists, etc.). Finally, interviewees proposed the expansion of women's involvement and work in politics, media, law and finance within the party, and called for enhancing cooperation between women within the party and women in the government and its local authorities.

Joint work with women from other political parties

By adopting unified work programmes and engaging in common advocacy activities and campaigns in favour of the WPS framework, women can work together across the various parties to enhance their work. This joint work represents a valuable opportunity, especially if such work comes with coordination from outside parties. The interviewees pointed to organisations and bodies working in the field of women's rights both inside and outside of Yemen to play this coordinating role.

Translating commitments into reality

The Islah Party's commitment to the outcomes of the NDC include a commitment to allocating 30% of party leadership positions at various levels to women. Preparations for the fifth conference of the Islah Party represent an important opportunity for holding dialogues, discussions, and mobilising support for approving this 30% quota for leadership positions and electoral lists, or, at the very least, agreeing on a long-term interim plan and implementation mechanisms for the quota system within the party and the government.

Supporting peace initiatives

According to interviewees, women have proven to be more capable than men of managing peace initiatives in various governorates. Therefore, they must be supported and encouraged, and the necessary measures provided for the continuation of these roles, such as economic empowerment, and training and developing capabilities for women in the fields of human rights, media, law, politics, finance, security, peace, and governance sectors, and related fields.

Supporting the education of women and girls

Interviewees also recommended a focus on education for women and girls. This could include addressing the reasons behind drop-out rates for girls' education and finding ways to increase the rate of education among women and girls in particular. In addition, interviewees pointed to the importance of more training for women in managing various state institutions, as well as training for senior leaders – both men and women – on how they can integrate gender into various education and development programmes within the party.

Psychosocial supports

The interviewees also noted the expansion of violations against Islah Party members because of the surrounding security risks. They therefore noted the need for designing special protection programmes for women members that do not ignore aspects of mental health and social support.

4. Research Findings: Southern Transitional Council

4.1. The STC's Understanding of the WPS Framework

The Southern Transitional Council (STC) was formed in 2017 from a wide mix of political actors united by the common cause of restoring the state of the south. The intellectual and political diversity of the STC represents an environment conducive to addressing many issues, including women's issues. When it comes to the WPS framework, interviewees noted that there is a kind of general awareness amongst the members of the STC, both men and women, especially among the leaders. The exception is a small group of women who are well informed about UNSCR 1325. These women represent a good starting point for the STC's work to assume its responsibility to encourage women's political participation and its commitment to protecting the rights of women and girls.

Interviews with STC members, as well as FGDs with representatives of CSOs (including those affiliated with the Supreme Coordination Council of CSOs formed by the STC), indicated that the limited knowledge of WPS among STC decision-makers has made it difficult for women's political rights and women's and girls' rights to protection to be sufficiently represented. This situation has affected the effectiveness of the framework's implementation on the ground, and seems especially urgent for addressing the hopes that women and girls in the south have for the STC to play a greater role in reducing their suffering in light of the exacerbation of violations of their political, civil, and economic rights as a result of the 1994 war, ongoing conflict, and the humanitarian crisis which began in 2015.

4.2. Official Policies and Commitments to the WPS Framework

The regulations of the STC and its National Assembly include provisions supporting women's representation and empowerment, including granting women a 30% participation quota in various bodies. However, the situation of conflict and humanitarian crisis that accompanied the emergence and development of the STC have undermined the efforts of the STC leadership to achieve this goal, despite the strength of their internal policies. In an effective step to overcome this gap, the STC recognised the need for integrated partnership with civil society and women's groups to implement the WPS framework and fulfil women's rights to participation and the rights of women and girls to protection at all different stages, including during conflict and humanitarian crisis, in order to avoid postponing the role and participation of women in the STC and in public life.

Interviewees and FGD participants did emphasise the STC's efforts to create a Coordination Council for Civil Society Organisations through which the STC supports women's organisations and activities related to WPS. This Council is headed by a woman and is open to organisations whose leaders are not members of the STC. The Council adopts programmes targeting youth and women, especially economic empowerment projects.

Research participants also stressed the importance of the "consultative meeting" held 4–8 May 2023, when the STC conducted consultations in Aden, with social, political, and trade union representatives, including women leaders. It is worth mentioning that the consultative meeting is one of the main activities within the STC's process of restructuring and institutional reform, which came in response to an initiative of the STC, announced by its chairman, Aidaroos Al-Zubaidi. According to an opinion article published in Al-Ayyam newspaper by one of the participants in the southern consultative meeting, the meeting's documents stipulated a federal civil state, partnership, separation of powers, the rule of law, equality between citizens, rights and freedoms, and the status and role of women.[24]

The consultative meeting issued a statement that stressed, among its recommendations, the necessity of paying attention to youth and women, as they are main pillars of society, and of supporting them to reach higher positions in decision-making. The drafting and approval of the "National Charter" document in May 2023 was the most important outcome of this consultative meeting. The document includes several commitments related to WPS, most notably:

1. Ensure equality and equal opportunities for all citizens politically, economically, socially, and culturally and work to issue legislation regulating this.
2. The family is the basic unit of society based on religion, morals, human values, respect for the human being and love of the homeland, and for this purpose the efforts of the political, social, professional, and elite forces and components and the Constitution and legislation of the desired southern state should pay special attention to improving the developmental, educational, and economic status of the southern family.

This will ensure:
- Securing the requirements of social, cultural, economic, and health care for the family, especially pregnant mothers, children, and persons with special needs;
- Enabling women to exercise all their political rights and participate positively in public life side by side with their male peers;
- Paying attention to women and youth and ensuring special care in the stages of restoration and state-building, in order to ensure their partnership in achieving this and in all leadership and institutional frameworks, sports events and activities, etc., developing plans and programmes in this regard, and supporting the restructuring of associations and unions for women, youth, and students in all directorates and governorates of the south and at the national, sectoral, and professional levels.

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24 Qasim Daoud Ali, *A Reading of the Outputs of the Southern Consultative Meeting and Its Place in the Current Priorities Matrix*, Al-Ayyam newspaper, 2023. Available at: https://www.alayyam.info/news/9G296A8O-RKBR8A-7F0C.

4.3. Current Situation and Practices Related to WPS

Women are present in the various leadership bodies of the STC, but their numbers do not reach the 30% quota stipulated in the STC's regulations. For example, the STC has 10 senior districts, only two of which are led by women. The National Assembly, which serves as the parliament, has 303 members, 36 of whom are women, or about 12%. The same applies to other levels of leadership.

Apart from women's access to decision-making positions in the STC structure, the circumstances of the STC's establishment and functions imposed by the context of conflict and humanitarian crisis have influenced the STC's foreign policy practices in ensuring women's access to decision-making positions in political, peace, and security processes. For example, women have been absent from the delegations that participate in political negotiations between the STC and the IRG, as well as at the signing of the Riyadh Agreement on 5 November 2019. Participants in interviews and FGDs thought that women's participation in such negotiations would be important, as their aim is to restore the Southern State[25] and its institutions, where women played a leading role. On the other hand, an absence of women has also been reflected in the power-sharing agreements in the various political, military, security, and economic arrangements. For example, women were excluded from the formation of the government in 2020, whose members were appointed by the president in consultation with the Prime Minister and political movements, provided that the ministerial portfolios consist of 24 ministers equally between the southern and northern governorates. This was the first time since 2001 that the Yemeni government was without any ministerial representation of women.

Participants in the FGDs attributed some of the STC's exclusionary practices towards women to the fact that the civil and political process has been eroded in response to the expansion of military operations, including the militarisation of civilian institutions, which has affected women the most in terms of participation and protection.

The information provided in the FGDs suggests a complex and concerning situation regarding women's leadership opportunities in the STC. While the existence of regulations and systems supporting women's political empowerment is a positive step, the reality seems to fall short of these aspirations.

The male and female interviewees of the STC largely seem to agree with the FGDs, as they state that the STC has already created regulations, internally and externally, for the political participation and empowerment of women, but their participation remains ineffective on the ground.

Regarding the rights of women and girls to protection in the context of conflict and humanitarian crisis, interviewees and FGD participants stressed that the STC adheres to and follows the laws in place, but that it does not have protection mechanisms appropriate to the current situation in the country. At the time the laws were made – years before the current crisis – they were perceived to be effective for protecting citizens. The concern is that they were more fitting to stable political, social, and security context and institutions, whereas, in the current situation, circumstances have changed dramatically and there are incidents of SGBV by individuals and actors. At the same time, public security institutions are more vulnerable than ever before and are no longer able to effectively enforce the law. Allegedly, even the norms of community protection that until recently prevailed in Aden are no longer followed.

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25 With the Southern State STC refers to South Yemen, which was an independent state that existed between 1967 and 1990, until the union of South and North Yemen on 22 May 1990.

4.4. Actors and Factors Conducive to the Implementation of the WPS Framework

☰ Political Agreements:

In a 2022 agreement between the IRG and the STC the parties agreed to form a joint delegation for peace negotiations with Ansar Allah,[26] and some of those interviewed reported that the STC delegation will include a woman. Whatever the outcome and given that such negotiations may still be far away, this constitutes an opportunity to advocate for the inclusion of a woman in the delegation, and perhaps even for more than one woman to be represented in that body, as these negotiations are pivotal in deciding the future of Yemen and the south.

☰ Restructuring Process:

The restructuring process of the STC represents a good opportunity to activate the STC regulations, which stipulate that women should have 30% representation and participation in various public bodies. This would require uniting the ranks of women leaders within the STC, engaging them in coalition building, and lobbying for access to decision-making positions. The restructuring also represents an opportunity to incorporate mechanisms to protect the rights of women and girls from violations, especially during conflict and humanitarian crisis.

☰ International actors:

International actors have a strong presence in the Yemeni scene and a wide influence on decision-makers. This represents a positive factor for women's empowerment, because it is easy to reach these parties and convince them of the need to support the WPS framework. The STC is one of the movements that pays the most attention to the international community.

☰ The speech of restoring the Southern state:

In the interviews, participants repeatedly spoke about the importance of the STC's discourse on reinstating the Southern state, which could include the restoration of the leading role of women in the south. During the Southern state, women had an active political presence and participation in various official and popular bodies, and obtained all their rights. Importantly, there was a family law in the south that was among the most progressive laws in the Arab region, and it was always mentioned among women as a primary source of protection, empowerment, and safety for women and girls.

This law can serve as a basis for opening a dialogue among women and in the various events and activities organised by the STC to raise the issue of restoring the social context and the legal system of the Southern State that protected women's rights and was committed to broad participation.

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26 This agreement followed the 2019 Riyadh Agreement which had as a main objective to put an end to military confrontations between the IRG and the STC.

4.5. Opportunities and Recommendations

There are a number of opportunities that the STC could seize to build a strategy to implement the WPS framework, most notably:

≡ The presence of women in decision-making positions

The presence of women in senior bodies, whether in the state or in the bodies of the STC, is a factor that can have a positive impact on women's rights to participation and protection. For women to have a meaningful influence on decision-making, their roles and political abilities and skills need to be sufficiently strengthened. This requires effective communication between women in decision-making positions, women's organisations, and those generally working to advocate for women's issues and to implement the WPS framework.

≡ Internal dialogue on hindrances to women's participation

All interviewees and FGD participants stressed the need for the STC's leadership, both male and female, to review their position and the resulting practices that have reduced women's active participation in political and leadership roles, and to engage in internal dialogue to develop solutions to political and security concerns and mechanisms to enhance women's participation and leadership even in situations of conflict and humanitarian crisis. Participants affirmed that knowing and adopting the WPS framework can present an important opportunity for the STC to emerge from this crisis. Adopting the framework would help the STC identify effective avenues for overcoming the political and security challenges that hinder women's participation and leadership. It would also contribute to overcoming humanitarian and economic difficulties brought about by the successive collapse of the value of the currency, high prices, and poor services, which all hinder the achievement of the STC's political aspirations, along with women's aspirations.

≡ Develop cooperation for women's and girls' protection

Participants believe that the STC should take protection into account, especially in the STC's current restructuring phase, to ensure that protection measures are responsive to the conflict situation and the humanitarian crisis the country is going through. Participants pointed to the efforts and experiences of many CSOs, women's groups and international organisations in promoting women's protection as an avenue for a solution, and noted that joining existing work and efforts could complement their efforts on the ground. Working together could support the inclusion of protection mechanisms in the National Charter and in the restructuring process of the STC. Participants also noted that benefit could come from the UN programme for the implementation of the NAP for WPS in the Aden Governorate, which focuses on reforming security institutions to be gender responsive. It is worth mentioning that this programme is in partnership with the MOSAL, which is headed by a minister from the STC.

≡ Capacity-building for women in the STC

Interviewees and FGD participants saw that one of the most important opportunities would be to enhance women's meaningful political participation through the development of their political capacities and skills. As one of them expressed, "If women's political capacities and skills are weak, even if women get 60% representation in the STC and the government bodies, 30% of men will still be the decision-makers."

CSO participants added that women need to develop their abilities and skills in formulating political visions, conducting political dialogues, and forming political alliances. Currently, women are still invited to participate visioning discussions or proposals and attend dialogues or join political alliances which are pre-developed by male leaders. To really activate the role of women in politics and leadership, it is important to balance the roles to have women who are able to develop political projects and invite male leaders to discuss these, and vice versa. Strengthening the role of women's political leadership in this way will provide effective opportunities to advance on the implementation of the WPS framework.

≡ Provision of material and logistical support for women's efforts

In addition, participants cited the importance of material and logistical support as a conducive factor for implementing the WPS framework, as improving working conditions for women politicians helps them to be able to play an active role in the peace and security process. For example, donors and international organisations can allocate budgets to support women's activities in the ceasefire process, support them in visiting prisons and detention centres, or holding dialogues, all of which require covering the costs of transportation, coordination, communication, etc.

≡ Unifying efforts

An important factor for implementing the WPS framework is for women to have a thorough knowledge of women's rights and understanding of women's issues as a whole. By organising together and unifying efforts from women's initiatives and organisations, women can better defend issues and maintain an influential voice. Work can also be done to strengthen relationships with other bodies that support women's rights, such as the judiciary. Working with various political movements or entities would also contribute to enriching knowledge and practice, provide opportunities for an exchange of experiences, and support agreement on common programmes of action within the WPS framework.

5. Research Findings: Ansar Allah

5.1. Ansar Allah's Understanding of the WPS Framework

On July 17, 2023, the leader of the Ansar Allah Movement, Mr. Abdul-Malik al-Houthi, gave a televised speech,[27] in which he touched on several aspects related to women, most notably: consultation with women, the role of women in public life, family building, faith awareness for women, women's responsibility and protection, women's care for children, and women's rights. The speech had two main starting points: the religious perspective towards women, and the conservative customs and traditions in Yemeni society that define stereotypical roles for women, with reference to the West and its view of women, which he said sought to demean the fundamental and pivotal role of women in the family and raising children.

Some of the members approached for this research hesitated to participate – as indicated by several interviewees – because there was no clear and consistent vision for women's participation in Ansar Allah, especially in the higher political leadership. Women were more responsive to the research because the issue affected them directly. Some preferred to receive and answer written questions. Mr. Abdul-Malik al-Houthi's speech coincided with the period of conducting the interviews, which led to a kind of reluctance to participate in the research among some of the interviewees, especially with regard to their vision and understanding of women's roles in public life. Considering that the speech made this (e.g. women's roles in public life) clear, most of the answers were that the speech implicitly explained this, by reviewing Imam Ali's commandments to his son Al-Hassan, and that there was no room to add to this.

The speech outlined how women's advice should not be taken regarding topics in which they have no experience and in areas that are specialised for men. As for the role of women in life, they were described as one entity with men, since God has referred to them as "human being", just like men. They are viewed as equal to men in humanity, as is the degree of faith. There is no difference between men and women, and the same applies to responsibility, taking into account the diversity of roles in reality, according to the formation, nature, and psychological reality of both of them, and pointing out that the role of women suits their nature.

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27   Speech by Mr. Abdul-Malik al-Houthi, 17 July 2023. Available at: https://www.saba.ye/ar/news3252193.htm.

Regarding the issue of protection, the speech specified that it is the man's role to ensure protection; this is within the responsibilities assigned to man by the text of the Qur'an (guardianship). The man is the one who manages the family's affairs, supporting it financially and providing protection for it, while the very important role of women (according to the speech) is limited to the upbringing and care of children. The speech noted that keeping women away from these roles carries great risks.

The speech presented a comparison between the view of women in the West and in Islam, where in the former they are used as a commodity for economic profit, and work in professions that degrade their dignity, while Islam exalts them and raises their status, and everything related to their care, protection, and financial support falls on men.

The speech also explained the rise of various practices in the recent period, namely the separation between women and men in public places, such as universities and workplaces. When asked about this, interviewees tended to confirm the points of their leader's speech, or refrain from answering altogether, while others justified their leader's words by talking about the advantages of separating women and men, saying how it creates a suitable and comfortable environment for women and gives them more privacy in their workplaces or places of education, and that the first priority is to pay attention to girls' access to education, work, and other services.

Most of those interviewed agreed that restrictions for women do not necessarily stem from religious teachings, but rather from Yemeni culture and society. On a political level, the group fears the West is using women's issues as a political card with the aim of undermining Yemeni society for colonial goals. Therefore, Ansar Allah does not view women's issues as a priority at the present time. It sees the war and reaching lasting solutions to stop it as a first priority, and maintains that only once the war ends must attention be given to all oppressed segments of society – not just women – in order to reach social justice.

5.2. Official Policies and Commitments to the WPS Framework

Current public policies are represented by the national vision of state-building of Ansar Allah. According to its general foundations, the participation of women in public service should be no less than 30%.
When the National Salvation Government was formed in 2016, the same three ministerial portfolios that were previously held by women before 2014 continued. In addition, four women were appointed to the Shura Council of the Sana'a government (representing different political sects), five women were appointed to the positions of deputy ministers, and a number of women were appointed as general managers.

The regular speeches of the Ansar Allah leader often include general guidelines on family and the building of society and women's pivotal role in this. They support women's issues, and address the need to protect women, especially from the "soft war"[28] waged by the West, and consider that women's general activity must be in accordance with Quranic culture and faith identity. From the point of view of most interviewees, this does not conflict with women's rights, it "only [means] that they must observe religious controls in all their movement," whether in public or private.

Women have become highly valued in official and religious discourse, which often focuses on their community participation and steadfastness,[29] and in public events, where special spaces are allocated to them. The interviewees indicated that women are encouraged to participate in society, to support the military and popular committees, or to participate in demonstrations called for by the concerned authorities.

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28 According to the understanding of Ansar Allah, "soft war" is the methods and programmes the West uses to separate Muslims from their identity, weaken their religion, and subject them to the desires of others without thinking. It is usually used in parallel with military wars.

29 According to the interviews, Ansar Allah views steadfastness as the ability to remain resilient and persistent in the face of aggression and war. This has been exemplified over the past eight years, spanning from 2015–2022, as women within Ansar Allah have displayed unwavering determination in the midst of conflict. They have taken on multiple roles in the resistance efforts, beginning with political engagement through public demonstrations that reject the aggression and its effects on society. Furthermore, they have provided essential community support to the fronts by offering financial and nutritional aid. Their extensive advocacy efforts have also helped mobilise society to embrace the values of steadfastness, perseverance, and confrontation, ultimately contributing to their participation in the public sphere.

Women participated in the 2013-2014 National Dialogue Conference (NDC), and were represented in the government and in public institutions. Their participation peaked in 2014, but with the outbreak of war, quota obligations received less attention and new restrictions were imposed on women.

Some interviewees pointed out that the former President of the Supreme Political Council, Saleh al-Sammad, was committed to promoting women's rights, and he organised a special meeting with women in which he praised the role of women from all walks of life and in all fields and stressed the need for all segments of society enhance steadfastness and development. However, this trend declined after his death in 2018 following an air strike in Hodeidah, in the west of the country.

Although the legal system and the Constitution – which are still in place – have formal regulations to uphold women's legal rights, these rights do not cover all women's rights (such as inheritance and the right to hold public positions) and such regulations are not implemented or enforced on the ground.

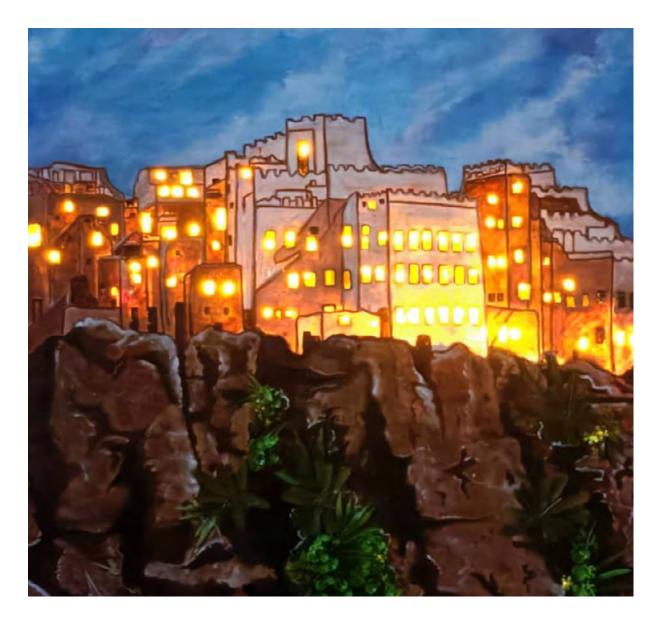## 5.3. Current Situation and Practices Relating to WPS

The war has caused the cessation of most basic services, such as water, electricity, and cooking gas, which became available only with great difficulty and at double the price. However, the cessation of salary payments to male and female government employees, especially teachers, has doubled women's suffering. This has especially affected those who financially support their families, and has had damaging effects on the education sector and the situation of families as a whole. Government schools no longer provide acceptable education services, and the costs of private schools are high. Accordingly, many girls have dropped out of education, and this has caused a major decline in development indicators and in the future status of women.

One of the interviewees pointed out that women face great impediments in obtaining their share of family inheritance, and noted how the judiciary typically procrastinates in deciding cases that concern women. There are no official procedures to alleviate their suffering.

Although there are women in official positions and in senior leadership positions, they do not always have strong influence in decision-making; this includes women who work in security services, where the presence of women is a recent breakthrough. According to interviewees, women do not participate in developing plans and programmes, nor do they participate in policy-making. Their role is limited to implementation alone. In addition, they are prevented from participating in foreign policy and negotiation issues due to security considerations (the war and the security situation that resulted from it). However, the matter does not concern women only, but has a specific impact on them.

In practice, women also face restrictions due to policies limiting their participation in activities, events, and workshops aimed at building women's capacities, or focusing on women's issues, because the priority is placed on confronting the "aggression" (a term given to the Arab coalition leading the war on Yemen). Furthermore, their participation in external events is impeded by restrictions imposed by security authorities on Sana'a airport and the lack of safe corridors. According to some of those interviewed, although there are high-level decisions requiring the abolition of some restrictions imposed on women (such as prohibiting women from traveling unless accompanied by a mahram), this is due to the opinions and jurisprudence of mid-level leadership who imposes these restrictions, who are often strict with regard to women and have the authority to take such measures without any declared directives.

Even at the societal level, there is a decline in the norms that were prevalent in Yemeni society and that provided a kind of protection for women. This may be due to the fact that women, because of circumstances caused by the war, have left their traditional family roles and have become involved in economic empowerment projects offered by organisations and official bodies to the families of martyrs, or that society has gradually begun to lose this characteristic for several internal and external reasons.

5.4. Factors and Actors Conducive to the Implementation of the WPS Framework

The interviewees highlighted the importance of the Families of Martyrs Programme, which works to empower targeted families to be economically self-sufficient. It is one of the important factors that provides women with the kind of security lost as a result of the war, especially since these families usually have lost their breadwinners. In the same way, creative social campaigns and opportunities for more decent livelihoods emerged.

The interviewees also indicate that, despite the decline in the level of protection and safety provided by traditional customs for women, their impact is still significant in achieving positive discrimination in favour of women in conflict areas, and without it, many women would have fallen victim during armed confrontations.

The interviewees spoke about the trend of women receiving greater protection from violations in places of detention or prisons. The security authorities have enabled this trend, and they have also made efforts to follow up on blackmail cases to which women are exposed, which have increased significantly in recent times. Among their procedures, the security authorities specify a toll-free phone number for reporting any extortion operations.

5.5   Opportunities and Recommendations

There are several opportunities that can form the basis for work to serve the framework of WPS relating to Ansar Allah, perhaps the most prominent of which are:

☰ Small projects:

The development of small projects for women is one of the possible opportunities that will enable women to rely on themselves and, as a result, increase their self-confidence and reduce their dependence on others to provide for their needs, which increased significantly during the war period.

☰ Adopting a dialogue approach:

Dialogue encounters between the local community and government agencies can also play a role in raising awareness of women's issues and rights and recognising their roles in community resilience and peacebuilding. International organisations can also develop evaluation and follow-up programmes for the implementation of women and peace programmes and provide the necessary expertise and guidance to achieve the goals of these programmes.

The interviewees indicated the need to strengthen the relationship between Ansar Allah and the rest of the political parties, as this would achieve a feeling of security. This is something that has been missing over the past years, as a crisis of confidence prevails between the various political parties and an almost complete rupture of communication at all levels related to women. Rebuilding such bridges may represent an opportunity not only to dispel fears, but also to expand the circle of discussion about the marginalisation and exclusion that women are subjected to, regardless of their political affiliations.

☰ Activating the Constitution and laws:

Since the Constitution of Yemen still exists and is recognised, it represents a valuable opportunity: work can be done to help women benefit from the texts that support women's rights, and also benefit from the legal system and the national vision for state building. Ways need to be found for these texts to be activated on the ground.

From the point of view of the interviewees, religious discourse does not constitute an obstacle to women obtaining their rights and is consistent with the laws in force, but the problem arises from a lack of implementation of the laws, and from an interpretation that is subject to social norms and strict practices towards women.

☰ Building on community participation:

There is another important opportunity which was pointed out by all of the interviewees, which is the participation of women in the process of steadfastness and their support of the military and community efforts. Just as these roles have led to entitlement for men, women can also find entitlement through these activities, whereby they can obtain their rights and participate in decision-making. The presence of women in decision-making positions and in security agencies would enhance this opportunity. However, effective communication must be achieved between decision-makers, the security sector, and the communities for this to occur.

≡ The role of international organisations:

Most of the interviewees believe that increased support and direction from international organisations for small projects for women could enhance the role of women in society and their ability to ensure their rights, thus reducing the poverty and destitution caused by war and siege. Several organisations and agencies working in this field were mentioned. However, the role of international organisations in advancing women's empowerment and achieving peace and security should be conditioned by a neutral position on all parties to the conflict. One of the interviewees stipulated that she had a clear position on "aggression," and the importance of activating international protection laws for women in a concrete manner because, she argued, silence about the violations to which women are exposed has caused a loss of confidence in the international community and its laws amongst the movement.

While some of the interviewees underlined the opportunity represented by the role of the international community in enabling women to play greater roles in peace and security processes, others rejected the idea and stressed that external organisations and the international community should not be relied upon. Any work in this direction must take into account that excessive sensitivities to the work of international organisations is often a result of the organisations themselves having not taken into account the sensitivities of the societies in which they work – their terms and concepts – and this highlights the opportunity and need for organisations to adopt the concepts that society accepts; this can help further participation processes and the integration of women's issues in their work.

Those who held favourable views of the focused interventions of international organisations suggested that greater support be given for training, qualification, and the implementation of programmes that enhance women's rights and enable them to participate effectively. They also recommended that support be given to girls' education, to psychological and health supports, and to political support for women, which could involve pressuring decision-makers to include their issues and strengthening the legal system, which protects women's rights, to be a more integrated system.

6. Conclusions

The objective of this research was to open new channels of communication regarding the protection of women and girls among key actors in the Yemeni context. The process has provided these actors with the opportunity to share their perspectives on the issue of Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and to make contributions towards the protection of women and girls. As illustrated by one of the project researchers:

> "We will come up with outcomes based on what we have found. The report shares the points of view of the movements. This is very good: because they have received recognition, we give them a voice on the issue. This is the value added of the study."

This final section concludes the report by presenting five key highlights regarding existing understandings, policies, and practices of the WPS framework among the three political movements in Yemen, and highlights related opportunities.

I. The political movements are willing to engage in discussion on WPS

The three movements involved in this research – the Islah Party, the Southern Transitional Council (STC), and Ansar Allah – allowed their members to participate in the research process. One of the researchers explained:

> "I had imagined that no one would answer the questions or that they would try to avoid the answers, but I'm happy to see that they were very courageous, they were brave, and this encourages us to do more, not to give in to fear and to war."

Although the research indicated that knowledge about the WPS framework remains limited among members of the three movements, it found that the practices and activities of the women members on the ground are well aligned with WPS. Moreover, research showed that what the women are doing intersects with, and is inclusive of, the four pillars of WPS: participation, protection, prevention, relief and recovery. Their practices are also in alignment with a human security standpoint, which prioritises people and their social and economic interactions with the aim of protecting them from traditional security threats (such as military action or human rights violations) and non-traditional issues such as poverty, disease, and low levels of education.

II. Women in the three movements actively participate in the peace, security, and humanitarian fields

The research revealed the active participation of women in the political, economic, and security processes of the three movements. Women maintain political representation in all three movement structures, albeit at a low percentage. They also actively participate at different levels in the process of political diplomacy and peace talks when possible, whether through their movements or through the activities of civil society organisations and international actors. Even so, the research revealed that it would be an important step forward for women to be actively involved in holding dialogues and formulating proposals for reform in the governance and organisational structures of the movements and their internal regulations in a way that responds to gender and enhances the participation and empowerment of women.

In addition, women in the three movements actively participate in security and protection-related activities, including leading community committees, advocating for and facilitating the release of prisoners of war and abductees, supporting the families of the martyrs, the wounded, and the displaced, providing logistical support to the battle fronts, and defending the rights of women and girls to freedom of movement, education, and economic empowerment. As summarised by one of the researchers:

> "Women in all movements were clear about their roles in peacebuilding, humanitarian issues, etc. This shows that all movements agree on that there is a role of women in this work."

The women from the movements were also found to be particularly involved in addressing issues of displaced communities and working on various humanitarian, livelihood, and resilience activities, in addition to their work defending the rights of women and girls to protection from violence. The research further showed how women remain open to local and international civil society activities related to peacebuilding and humanitarian interventions and, importantly, how open they are to participating in activities with women from other political movements, if required for peace.

III. There is a need for women's political participation and protection to be promoted across all the movements

Even though women clearly play a role in political processes, the research found that these roles need to be better recognised and supported by the movements, and the movements need to address the obstacles or limitations that prevent women from reaching their full potential.

While the existing rules and laws are not necessarily detrimental for women, the research showed how they could be improved. One researcher spoke to this:

> "The laws and rules are not hindering women, but they are not being implemented. Still, women were not part of creating the by-laws and the regulations, because at the time this was done, they were not participating."

The research found that the regulations and by-laws of the three studied movements – the Islah Party, the STC, and Ansar Allah – and of the rest of the Yemeni movements as well, including political parties and non-state armed actors, were devoid of the concept of protection for women and girls, especially in times of armed conflict. The concept also received rare mention in the Constitution, in the outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference (NDC) or in other legislation. This gap has created a perception among leaders and decision-makers that women's participation in politics during armed conflicts cannot be considered safe – a view that arises out of their fear for women's safety. The absence of actual protection mechanisms may be an additional reason for postponing women's participation in politics until after the war, or until the establishment of the state of the South by the STC, according to its objectives.

The important link between women's participation and protection was thereby stressed in the findings: where real or perceived protections for women were lacking, their participation was also undermined. However, the contrary also remains true: the lack of women's participation can contribute to continued protection failures, as issues of women and girls' protection are not prioritised. Safe participation mechanisms therefore need to be established for women in the movements.

IV. Capacity-building trainings and dialogues were requested both by women and men in the movements

The research identified the need for various trainings, particularly for women and girls, to give them the opportunity to develop the skills and confidence needed for meaningful participation in decision-making. Both women and men from the movements also need to be provided with the knowledge and tools to better support and develop efforts to protect women and girls and enhance their participation, notably through promoting their education, but also through restructuring the movements processes and creating dedicated policies and other tools.

The need for dialogue regarding women's protection and participation within the movements and among the wider community and external actors (notably, civil society and international organisations, but also other movements) came up as a request from the three movements.

V. Solutions need to come from within

The research found that, in order to be effective, efforts related to promoting the participation and protection of Yemeni women and girls need to be localised and adopted by the men and women from the movements. Women within the three movements have developed a local experience of the WPS framework, which is closely aligned with the concept of human security. This local experience is worthy of attention and development to enable women to play a leadership role in their political participation and protection, including in conflict prevention on the movement, society, and state level.

The research recommends that tangible programmes and interventions be developed with the movements, such as:

- establishing internal dialogues to discuss women's issues between the women's movements and leaders of the political movements;
- integrating women's visions and the WPS framework into the process of organisational and governance development;
- training and capacity development activities for women and men in the movements;
- enhancing women's participation with the support of local and international civil society activities;
- providing political, programmatic, logistical, and financial support to women's activities; and
- providing support at all levels for economic empowerment and community resilience projects, education, protection and psychological support for women and girls.

In conclusion, while finding local and internal solutions is important, women also need to enhance their skills and confidence to be better able to contribute, and their contributions need to be officially recognised and better supported both within the movements and by external actors.

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