



Observe and Act

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



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Table of contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Acronyms | 4 |
| 1. Executive Summary | 5 |
| 2. Introduction | 7 |
| 2.1. Project Background and Objectives | 7 |
| 2.2 Women’s Political Participation and Protection in Yemen | 9 |
| 2.3 Women, Peace and Security in Yemen | 11 |
| 2.4 Methodology | 12 |
| 3. Research Findings: The Yemeni Congregation for Reform (Islah Party) | 13 |
| 3.1 The Islah Party’s Understanding of the WPS Framework | 13 |
| 3.2 Official Policies and Commitments to the WPS Framework | 14 |
| 3.3 Current Situation and Practices Related to WPS | 14 |
| 3.4 Actors and Factors Conducive to the Implementation of the WPS Framework | 15 |
| 3.5 Opportunities and Recommendations | 16 |
| 4. Research Findings: Southern Transitional Council | 18 |
| 4.1 The STC’s Understanding of the WPS Framework | 18 |
| 4.2 Official Policies and Commitments to the WPS Framework | 19 |
| 4.3 Current Situation and Practices Related to WPS | 20 |
| 4.4 Actors and Factors Conducive to the Implementation of the WPS Framework | 21 |
| 4.5 Opportunities and Recommendations | 22 |
| 5. Research Findings: Ansar Allah | 24 |
| 5.1 Ansar Allah’s Understanding of the WPS Framework | 24 |
| 5.2 Official Policies and Commitments to the WPS Framework | 25 |
| 5.3 Current Situation and Practices Relating to WPS | 26 |
| 5.4 Factors and Actors Conducive to the Implementation of the WPS Framework | 27 |
| 5.5 Opportunities and Recommendations | 28 |
| 6. Conclusions | 30 |
| 7. References | 33 |

Acronyms

| | |
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| 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.

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.

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 report⁴ 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 brief⁶ accompanying this research report.

4 Zin Mar Phyoo, *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 Council⁸ 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

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

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



- 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-updated-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 brief²³ showcasing the main conclusions and recommendations for external stakeholders.



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.