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# OUR TURN: FOUR YEARS OF GROWTH, SHAPING DEBATE ON YEMEN

Distinguished readers,

This month marks an anniversary for us at the Sana'a Center: it has been four years since our **first publication** went online. In that short and intense time, we have grown from what was a spark of an idea in a Yemeni diwan into Yemen's leading independent research center. We have grown from a handful of geeks working pro bono in their living rooms into a full-time **staff of more than 30**, working all across Yemen and in seven time zones around the world. Today, our publications reach the most influential levels of policymaking on the planet and are cited by leading international media outlets.

It has been a rollercoaster journey for us, working within the context of a bloody and complex conflict. So we are writing this to mark this anniversary and to thank you for your readership, loyalty and feedback. Let us take this opportunity to also lay out for you in detail just how we have grown, where we stand today and what our plans are for the year ahead.



The Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies is an independent think-tank that seeks to foster change through knowledge production with a focus on Yemen and the surrounding region. The Center's publications and programs, offered in both Arabic and English, cover political, social, economic and security related developments, aiming to impact policy locally, regionally, and internationally.

## ***Core Mission: Produce Knowledge, Provide a Platform and Influence Policy***

As we have embraced and invested in our growth, we have done so carefully, ensuring to remain true to our vision and mission: to produce knowledge, provide a platform for Yemeni voices and influence policy. We also have steadfastly continued to set our own agenda; all nine **programs** currently run by the Sana'a Center began as our own initiatives for which we later found funding.

In terms of direct knowledge production, our output has grown exponentially, with the number of research papers and policy reports we have published more than doubling each year. In the first six months of 2019, we have published as many papers as in all of 2018 -- and this year we expect to at least double our output again while maintaining our rigorous commitment to information, veracity and independence.

Our oldest program, **The Yemen Review** (previously known as “**Yemen at the UN**”), has matured from a short monthly brief evaluating the role of the United Nations in Yemen into a comprehensive one-stop-shop for policymakers and followers of Yemen. In January 2019, we also published our second **Yemen Annual Review**, a comprehensive overview and analysis of developments throughout the year and by far our largest publication. We have covered diplomatic, economic, political, military, security, humanitarian and human rights developments related to Yemen, and we are in the process of expanding our coverage of energy issues, the environment and regional developments. Most importantly, for the past six months we have included **The Sana'a Center Editorial**, which presents our unfiltered opinion on the most pertinent, timely and often overlooked issues concerning Yemen.

Among our broader work, Sana'a Center researchers continue delving into unexamined topics, such as the effect of the conflict on the **mental health of individuals, communities and children in Yemen**. To increase our impact on policymaking, Sana'a Center researchers, along with our partners, submitted a **Universal Periodic Review (UPR) report on mental health** to the UN Human Rights Council prior to the January 23, 2019, UPR session reviewing Yemen's human rights record.

Meanwhile, our gender department has undertaken a year-long **Gender Analysis for Progressive Policy** – based on 88 focus groups and 40 expert interviews conducted across Yemen – with the results soon to be published. This report is set to provide the most comprehensive documentation and analysis yet of the specific impacts of war on Yemeni women and families.

## *Connecting Yemen to the World, and the World to Yemen*

Under the umbrella of providing a platform, we recently announced our **Fourth Yemen Exchange** for this October. This intensive course on Yemen has served as comprehensive, immersive training for diplomats, government officials, INGO staff, journalists and academics. It has brought participants from around the world to engage with Yemeni politicians, bureaucrats, civil society actors, artists, tribal figures, business leaders and other experts. It also has served as a unique track II opportunity for the warring parties to meet even when track I efforts have been unsuccessful. Due to high demand, we will start to offer the Yemen Exchange multiple times a year, with the next following exchange to take place in the first quarter of 2020.

Our **Yemeni Media Breakfast** initiative has similarly expanded. Launched in 2015, the program was initially designed as a breakfast event to introduce journalists to key Yemeni voices, sources and stories. Since then, it has evolved into a platform to facilitate international media access to report from the ground in Yemen. This has included organizing two international press delegation visits to Yemen: to **Marib** governorate in 2017 and **Hadramawt** in 2018. These were unprecedented and logistically challenging feats in a highly insecure country that has been almost sealed off from the world. Through these efforts, the Yemeni Media Breakfast has helped facilitate more than 100 news stories about Yemen in international media outlets (if you are interested in subscribing to our media briefings, please email [media@sanaacenter.org](mailto:media@sanaacenter.org)).

With our partners, the Sana'a Center continues to run the **Rethinking Yemen's Economy** project, a track II initiative that provides a platform for Yemeni intelligentsia and produces actionable recommendations for policymakers. This program brings together current and former Yemeni government officials, business leaders, the banking sector, civil society and international agencies to consider immediate and post-conflict economic, development and social priorities. Via the research hive segment of the project, the Sana'a Center researchers has published papers on issues such as the **expulsion of Yemeni laborers** from Saudi Arabia, **the war economy** and post-war **reconstruction**.

Our strategic **local peacebuilding groups** from Marib and Hadramawt governorates are another platform that we, with our partners, are proud to have brought to the fore. Through inclusive and strategic dialogue, these groups work at the local level to connect these key – but neglected – regions of Yemen to the **international**

**peace process.** Since the launch of this program, we have convened 13 workshops with representatives from these governorates, in Yemen and abroad. We will soon publish situation reports regarding both regions.

And because we believe in ‘paying it forward’, we have been assisting other Yemeni NGOs to build a profile, network with the international community and media outlets, and we have offered coaching and arranged training. With our partners, we organized a networking and strategy meeting of two dozen Yemeni organizations in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, last year – the **first meeting** of its kind since the beginning of the recent war.

### ***Growing Our Reach and Roots***

Our team has continually expanded its physical presence across Yemen and around the world: In the last year, with our partners, we have held events in Sana’a, Sayoun, Mukalla, Marib, Amman, Beirut, Addis Ababa, New York, Washington DC, London, Paris, Brussels, Berlin, The Hague, Geneva, Ottawa and other cities. We also recently officially registered the Sana’a Center Association office in Geneva, Switzerland, and are in the process of opening official offices in other Western cities.

Institutionally, five exceptional individuals – three women and two men – have joined the **Sana’a Center advisory board** in the last year to guide our institutional growth and progress. While we take pride in investing in **Yemen’s future policy** experts and analysts – furthering our commitment to having locally produced knowledge – we are also strengthened by the most recent international additions to our team: **Dr. Gregory D. Johnsen** and **Susan Severeid**. Gregory, a non-resident fellow at the Sana’a Center, previously served on the UN Security Council’s Panel of Experts on Yemen and is now leading our research on armed groups in the country. Susan has brought to our editorial department almost 15 years of experience at The Associated Press.

### ***The Country We Know Yemen Can Be***

Looking back at how we have grown and what we have achieved in the short four years since we emerged, it is difficult not to be left with a sense of awe. There is much that we take pride in: we have grown organically under our own model of leadership; we have maintained our fundamental bias toward information

and the audacity to say what we see no matter who it angers or pleases; and we have held steadfast to our commitment to independent research in one of the most contested areas of the world, and in so doing have helped shaped the world narrative on Yemen.

Today, we can only imagine how much more we could have accomplished if not for these senseless wars. Looking ahead, we will continue to imagine Yemen as the country we know it can be.

*Thank you, again, for your readership.*

*The Sana'a Center team*