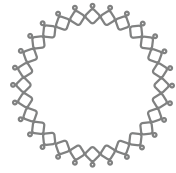




YEMEN
INTERNATIONAL FORUM
منتدى اليمن الدولي
Stockholm 2022

FINAL REPORT OF THE
**YEMEN INTERNATIONAL
FORUM 2022**





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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.

Report edited by Susan Severeid, senior editor at the Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies.



FBA

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With few advances in Yemen's formal peace track since the 2016 Kuwait negotiations, the UN-led effort to achieve a sustainable peace must be better integrated with Yemeni initiatives if it is to succeed. This was the premise of the Yemen International Forum (YIF), held on June 17-19, 2022, in Stockholm, Sweden, which brought together international actors with Yemeni political stakeholders, individuals involved in parallel initiatives to the formal political process, youth and civil society representatives, experts and academics. By providing a platform for these 205 stakeholders, 71 percent of them Yemeni, to envision a post-war Yemen and explore creative solutions for the many challenges en route to it, the forum aimed to ensure progress in six critical areas: Political Settlement, Political Life, The Southern File, The Economy, Reconciliation & Justice, and Security.

YIF participants widely viewed ending the war as the overarching requirement for significant progress across all themes. While a series of truces have instilled relative calm nationwide since April and allowed for piecemeal progress in some areas, even these gains will remain tentative unless integrated within formal peace negotiations. Track I settlement actors, including UN Special Envoy to Yemen Hans Grundberg and regional, American and European envoys, briefed YIF participants in plenary sessions and held focused, private bilateral discussions on the sidelines of the forum.

Political Settlement sessions acknowledged the need for a final framework to address regional security concerns, especially those of Saudi Arabia. However, Yemeni and international participants generally agreed that, for a lasting peace, Yemenis must decide Yemen's needs. Doing so requires localizing peace by seeking out, supporting and adapting promising local-level initiatives nationwide, and ensuring inclusivity in shaping the final settlement. Beyond those actors with forces on the ground, inclusivity means drawing in political parties outside the internationally recognized government's Presidential Leadership Council (PLC), along with civil society actors, tribes, marginalized groups and others. Several of these actors, focusing on the specific themes of the forum, explored what work could begin prior to a settlement deal that would both ease socio-economic burdens on Yemeni civilians and prepare the way for post-war stability.

The Yemeni government body now primarily responsible for guiding the war to a close is the eight-member PLC, led by Rashad al-Alimi. Formed in April in Riyadh as a replacement for the Yemeni presidency, its members represent the main political-military factions on the ground fighting Houthi forces. Creation of the PLC was generally supported by Yemen's political parties, the international community and by many YIF participants, despite concerns about its exclusion of non-military civil-political actors.

Yemeni political life encompasses a wide array of actors and organizations, many of which have been fundamentally weakened by the prolonged conflict. Representatives of political parties, civil society organizations (CSOs), syndicates, trade unions and tribes used YIF sessions to look at how they can rebuild internally, the roles they can play now and in the future, and how they can influence the parties to the conflict and the UN peace process to ensure their concerns and interests are taken into account. Post-war Yemen will be defined in large part by how well these sectors of society reform and engage. Civil society, trade unions and professional syndicates were early victims of Yemen's war, with most unions closing and many of the surviving CSOs shifting their activities to the humanitarian response. During the YIF, civil society actors focused on how to prepare to shift again, to participate in Yemen's reconstruction and reconciliation.

Formation of the PLC brought with it a formal role at the highest level of decision-making for southern actors, which was broadly welcomed – with caveats – by YIF participants in sessions focused on southern Yemen. The Southern Transitional Council (STC), strengthened by its affiliated, Emirati-backed fighting forces, has cast itself as the sole representative of the south, but other southern actors present agreed the PLC cannot be effective if it marginalizes other southern constituencies. They advised the PLC to be transparent about its appointments, end armed groups' control of population centers, act quickly to provide public services and support an intra-southern dialogue, which participants saw as critical to unifying southern positions ahead of peace talks. Another key issue of consensus among southern leaders present was the desire for local control of the south's natural resources and to begin a structured decentralization of public revenue collection and decision-making.

Within the economic file, YIF participants engaged in discussions on how to ameliorate the country's economic deterioration, with a focus on the central bank and commercial banking sector, development and humanitarian aid, Yemen's private sector and missed opportunities. Banking and financial sector actors from throughout Yemen hammered out a three-pronged initiative to: restore the banking sector's capacity to facilitate foreign trade and reduce the cost of imported goods; restore currency stability, narrow the divergence of old and new rials and prepare the groundwork for reunifying the currency; and address the country's liquidity crisis. To succeed, participants agreed technical and financial support is needed from the international community along with the direct involvement of the UN special envoy's office.

YIF participants identified short-term socioeconomic improvements that could help support a peace settlement and provide the foundations for a stable political and security environment. These included supporting local food production, improving service delivery and preventing further deterioration of state institutions. Participants also noted the obstacles to such projects, such as insecurity, endemic corruption and water scarcity.

Once the war ends, Yemenis will not only be left to rebuild their state structures, economy, institutions and organizations, they will also need to reckon with the deep divisions, personal trauma and scars to the national psyche created by wartime abuses and crimes.

YIF participants, including torture survivors, relatives of victims and victims' advocates, sought ways to ensure reconciliation and justice are incorporated into the peace process, despite the reluctance of political actors and warring parties.

In examining the imbalances within the military and security sectors, YIF participants considered how a post-war restructuring of Yemen's armed forces could ensure national security and the specific needs of individual governorates. These discussions focused on the need to develop national defense and security strategies, the challenges of integrating fighters into the armed forces and the private sector, and salary payment schemes to incentivize accountability and professionalism among fighting forces before and after the war ends. Participants also sought to shift security priorities on the ground away from the battlefield and toward human security by, for example, emphasizing community policing.

Key Results

Potential areas for follow-up discussions, research and refinement identified through the YIF sessions:

Political Settlement

- A common vision of a secure future for Yemen, established through dialogue between the warring sides, could facilitate intermediate steps en route to a final settlement.
- For the best chance at security and stability, a settlement agreement must:
 - address the national security concerns of regional powers, especially Saudi Arabia;
 - dismantle non-state forces and require them to give up their weapons;
 - deter external threats by grounding a deal in international law; and
 - be shaped in an inclusive manner, considerate of Yemen's political, societal and regional diversity.
- Tap tribal leaders to document truce violations, secure roads and public spaces, and ensure stability within their local areas. Consult directly with tribal figures on how they can best support peace efforts in local and regional contexts.

Political Life

- Assess changes needed to party leadership, organization and programs in light of the recent truce and the new PLC governing structure.
- Address the insufficiency of data available for defining the scope of community needs in areas such as electricity and infrastructure.
- Invest in virtual tools for communication between party members and officials in and outside Yemen, and among parties more broadly.
- Address the lack of meaningful representation of women in the political sphere by:
 - assisting women in attaining positions of decision-making authority, locally and nationally;
 - creating zero-tolerance gender discrimination policies to ensure a unified response from civil society to harmful gender-based policies;
 - pressuring the international community to integrate women into decision-making processes in all areas rather than bringing them in only to discuss “women’s issues”;
 - protecting women peace-builders from security threats; and
 - ensuring wartime gains, such as the broader acceptance of women working outside the home, are not lost when the war ends.
- Address the exclusion of ethnic and religious minorities in political processes by:
 - setting up advisory panels on diversity, which can act in a consultative role with UN agencies or others on matters such as ensuring curriculums incorporate a better understanding of Yemen’s minority communities;
 - reviewing legislation to criminalize racism and discrimination; ensuring constitutional protections for minorities are included during state building; and
 - establishing a neutral state judicial system, while ensuring access to international courts and laws when discriminatory practices are ignored.
- Improve the selection process for, and diversity of, Track II efforts, and create platforms for Track II organizations that are free from donor pressures or dictates, allowing local groups to coordinate among themselves.
- Initiate strategic planning, training and capacity-building among CSOs that promotes financial independence, prioritizes partnerships, and emphasizes sustainability and alternative funding schemes.
- Encourage Yemeni authorities and the international community to involve local communities in needs assessments and program planning, and to allow for real, rather than symbolic, participation in international political discussions.
- Develop funding strategies and create trade union networks that collectively promote and sustain union activities.

The Southern File

- Convene and support an inclusive intra-southern dialogue with international support to build trust, unite southern factions around common understandings, and address long-term southern Yemeni goals.
- Focus on local control of resources and decentralization, possibly drawing on gains made in the 2013-14 National Dialogue Conference. Toward this end, undertake independent collection and transparent sharing of resource-related data, so potential revenue streams are fully understood.
- Create mechanisms to transition from dominant local groups exerting informal governing authority to formal governance led by the PLC to improve services.
- Advise the PLC on improving living standards and basic services, recognizing this will require ending the free reign of armed groups, building institutions of government and dealing seriously with corruption.

The Economy

- Create an inclusive mechanism to engage key stakeholders and generate political buy-in for a three-pronged banking initiative, drafted by YIF participants primarily from Yemen's banking sector, to address central bank divisions, the currency crisis and liquidity issues.
- Empower the private sector by directly confronting barriers to international trade and obstacles to domestic commerce by:
 - expanding operations at the air and sea ports in Al-Mahra governorate and in Mukalla, Hadramawt;
 - resuming large-scale overland trade with Saudi Arabia and Oman; and
 - opening, rebuilding and maintaining roads along key trade routes, which will require support from the international community.
- Consider, through further research and consultations, where and how best to:
 - invest in alternative energy production;
 - improve access to microfinance opportunities;
 - engage the Yemeni diaspora to help reverse the "brain drain" the country has experienced during the war; and
 - redirect development policies toward improving productivity in agriculture, fisheries and other food-related sectors.
- In support of development policies, address water scarcity by shifting to rain-fed, fast-maturing crops less impacted by climate change and enforcing environmental protection policies aimed at preventing the depletion and contamination of water basins.

Reconciliation & Justice

- Explore ways to effectively engage in and coordinate efforts by CSOs, youth and women to actively lobby the UN special envoy's office for support on inclusion of justice and reconciliation issues in the formal settlement process. This exploration could be done in conjunction with CSOs' planning to promote activities to build tolerance and cohesion.
- Support and promote artistic efforts to draw attention to the impact of war on ordinary people and memorialize civilians' experiences.
- Take a victim-centered approach that combines formal justice with reconciliation to ensure accountability.
- Seek international funding to offset the costs of documenting violations, providing mental health support and meeting other locally determined needs.
- Capitalize on the interest among youths and women to advance reconciliation and justice, and ensure support is not only focused on city centers.
- Create networks to adapt effective local mediation techniques and channel them for use in other communities or nationally.
- Identify potentially transferable elements of transitional justice frameworks used by other countries.

Security

- Refine ideas on decentralizing the armed forces, integrating fighters and providing basic salaries by establishing reserve forces under local control at the governorate level. Options exist at each juncture, which may vary based on regional needs, and should be fully considered in focused research and consultations. Elements to explore include:
 - Fighters from any armed group could enlist in their home governorate's reserve force;
 - local government security personnel could be drawn from reserve forces, with remaining reservists working in the civilian economy while receiving professional and vocational training;
 - some former fighters could be channeled to the military engineering corps, helping it to play an important role in reconstruction;
 - a national fund to help rehabilitate fighters;
 - a guaranteed basic military salary as a safety net so reserve personnel are financially able to leave armed groups;
 - how to work with the Interior and Defense ministries on clear criteria for integration and accurate numbers of actual fighters; and

- when and how to engage donors and economic experts given that absorbing fighters is likely to significantly expand the state payroll, at least initially.
- Reform the Yemeni armed forces to address the security sector fragmentation that has made communities less safe. Possible short- and medium-term steps toward accountability and professionalism include:
 - instituting an interim payment scheme to supplement or replace the irregular paychecks many fighters receive so integration and a degree of accountability can begin;
 - strengthening retention criteria;
 - building transparency into reforms to budgets and processes;
 - promoting early retirement and job rotation;
 - emphasizing community policing;
 - seeking out examples of local civil society improvements to security, such as Taiz's community safety programs, and striving to replicate them;
 - funding CSOs' accountability-related programs, such as those providing legal aid to prisoners;
 - transitioning toward prioritizing human security, through focused dialogue between civil society and military-security organizations; and
 - addressing the issue of untrained civilians who were recruited to fill officers' ranks, without knowledge of laws or discipline.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

International efforts to bring peace to Yemen secured a two-month truce from the warring parties in April and facilitated two further extensions. Diplomacy through the formal UN-led peace track strives to convert the truce into a permanent cease-fire and formal peace deal. Even if this goal is achieved, this formal political process cannot succeed in bringing a lasting peace to Yemen on its own. Moving beyond a cease-fire requires Yemenis to start sculpting the final framework of the political settlement, which in turn requires wrestling with a long list of difficult issues, such as: What shape should the state take? How can the economy be rebuilt and state institutions, split for years between Sana'a and Aden, be reintegrated? What roles will exist for key players on both sides of the larger conflict? How should the army be structured and former fighters integrated into society and new roles? What sort of national security strategy is needed? How and when should southern issues be integrated? What national reconciliation and accountability mechanisms can heal deep and painful societal divisions? What roles can political parties and civil society play in restoring communities, cities, regions and the nation? Where will the capital be located? These sensitive issues are among many that are critical for Yemenis to work out.

The Yemen International Forum (YIF), held June 17-19, 2022, in Stockholm, Sweden, sought to launch that process, though work began many months earlier to identify issues and bring as diverse a group of participants from across Yemen as possible to meet with each other and with international actors relevant to a sustainable settlement. This report highlights ideas, opportunities and new directions that YIF participants identified during discussions and workshops, so that a Yemeni-led, internationally supported course can be charted. The forum also served as a discrete platform for Yemeni political stakeholders to converse. It allowed international actors to engage meaningfully with stakeholders and to brief them on the truce and current peace efforts as well as other international concerns in Yemen, such as UN efforts to offload oil from the decrepit FSO Safer storage facility in the Red Sea.

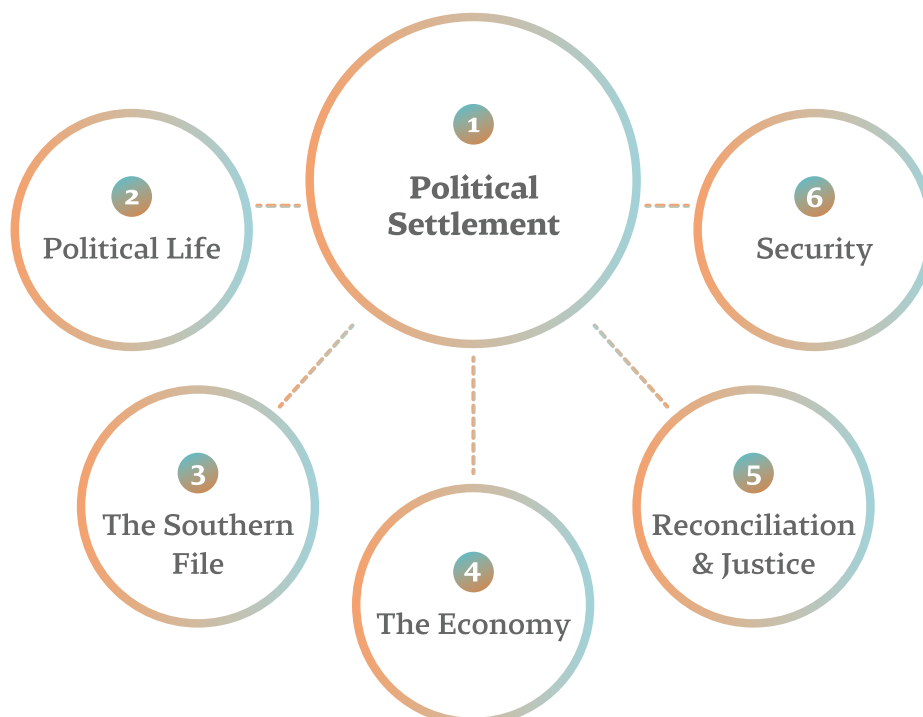
Follow-up research and activities continue to evolve from the dialogue in Stockholm, with the hope that as ideas are shaped and refined they will influence the domestic and international stakeholders involved as well as the formal peace process. In this way, any final settlement that ends fighting on the ground will have the best chance of being sufficiently tailored to Yemen's needs to survive the monumental tasks of reintegrating state institutions, reconciling Yemenis and rebuilding the economic, security, political and social constructs so profoundly warped and fragmented by the prolonged war.

PREPARATION FOR THE FORUM

From the outset, the design of the Yemen International Forum was grounded in the idea that the discussions and processes be Yemeni-owned and Yemeni-led, with international stakeholders primarily engaged as active listeners in the sessions. Preparation for the Stockholm forum involved broad consultations, including 64 key informant interviews and 15 roundtables, engaging approximately 150 individuals from February through April 2021. These included all key warring parties, major political stakeholders and civil society activists, Yemeni and international experts and practitioners, representatives from the UN Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen (OSESGY) and international non-governmental organizations involved in Track II initiatives. Discussions focused on six themes proposed by Sana'a Center experts: Political Settlement, Political Life, The Southern File, The Economy, Reconciliation & Justice, and Security. These consultations, conducted primarily online, were combined with desk research carried out by the Sana'a Center's thematic experts, resulting in six internal discussion papers used to inform the forum agenda and provided to session facilitators.

The background process was guided by a comprehensive methodology note that delineated the selection and prioritization of sub-topics under the six thematic files. This was framed as follows: 1) issues that can be addressed inside the UN-led political process; 2) issues best addressed in informal complementary processes; and 3) issues that can be addressed ahead of a political settlement.

The Yemen International Forum Themes



Diplomatic outreach conducted ahead of the forum included meetings with the Gulf Cooperation Council, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Oman, the European Union, the Netherlands, France, the United States and the United Kingdom. Outreach to domestic actors included governors, cabinet ministers, representatives from the Houthi movement (Ansar Allah) and the Southern Transitional Council (STC), and members of the recently established Presidential Leadership Council (PLC) and associated committees. Ultimately, 205 participants, 71 percent of them Yemeni and 32 percent of them women, took part in the YIF.

Forum discussions aimed to provide practical guidance for follow-up dialogues that can strengthen both the formal political process and complementary Yemeni-led mediation processes. YIF participants identified areas where mechanisms are needed but currently do not exist, and examined how to improve links between formal and informal peace initiatives.



01. POLITICAL SETTLEMENT

The Yemen International Forum opens in Stockholm on June 17, 2022 //Sana'a Center Photo.

Although the nationwide truce that began in April raised hopes of progress toward a political settlement, the truce remained temporary and expired in October, with little indication that formal peace negotiations will resume soon. YIF participants discussed the mandate for negotiations as well as the international and regional considerations for crafting a successful settlement. Plenaries specific to settlement issues provided an opportunity for interactions among international diplomats steering the UN-led peace process, including UN Special Envoy to Yemen Hans Grundberg; regional, US, Gulf and European envoys; and YIF participants more broadly. While ending the war has been the focus of the UN-led peace efforts, many YIF participants advocated for the political process to encompass economic, regional and justice issues to ensure that any political settlement leads to a sustainable peace in Yemen and a rapid recovery from the war's impacts. Among the key takeaways were:

- There is no consensus on whether UN Security Council resolution 2216 remains the most useful basis for peace talks. However, there is shared interest by the Yemeni warring parties in negotiating a future for Yemen separate from international interference. This shared interest could prove the basis for a revamped approach to the negotiations.
- Although a final framework has to take into account specific regional security concerns, Yemen's needs must be decided by Yemenis.
- The new PLC is a positive step for the formal peacemaking process because it includes all key actors on the ground in the anti-Houthi military coalition. However, the settlement process must look beyond an eventual cease-fire, so PLC input alone is not enough.
- Inclusivity in shaping the final settlement is critical to a sustainable peace, though complicated by the war's toll on political parties and civil society.
- Tribes have multiple roles to play in supporting and advancing the peace process, with significant potential to ensure security in their own territories. However, given their heterogeneity, engaging tribes as a bloc may be less fruitful than facilitating tribal contributions on local and regional levels.

Assessing the Foundations

Revisiting UN Resolution 2216 and the Kuwait Talks



UN Special Envoy for Yemen Hans Grundberg speaks June 17, 2022, during the opening session of the Yemen International Forum in Stockholm //Sana'a Center photo.

The UN-led peace track has made little progress in the past six years, and opinions among YIF participants varied somewhat on whether the mandate of the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen (OSESGY) is optimal, in particular: 1) UN Security Council Resolution 2216;^[1] and 2) the Kuwait peace talks based on 2216 that opened in April 2016, but collapsed a few months later.^[2] While some YIF participants said these remained suitable underpinnings of a framework that takes into account current realities, another described them as outdated and hindering a political settlement. The latter suggested a general framework is needed that transcends formalities and focuses on how to rescue Yemen from its crisis and arrange negotiations that enable Yemenis to solve their own problems.^[3]

Some common ground exists on which to move forward, as both the Houthi movement and the Yemeni government seek a secure future for Yemen without external influence – the government does not want Iranian influence and the Houthis do not want Saudi influence. An international YIF participant suggested the best way, then, to reduce the likelihood of external intervention is for Yemenis to agree among themselves, so that is where efforts should focus.^[4]

^[1] Resolution 2216, approved by the UNSC in April 2015 called on Houthi forces to unconditionally lay down their weapons and withdraw from all territory they had seized, including Sana'a. See: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N15/103/72/PDF/N1510372.pdf?OpenElement>

^[2] The 2016 Kuwait talks envisioned a power-sharing agreement giving the Houthis a minority stake in a transitional government that would oversee reintegration of government offices and arrange for elections. It also required all non-state actors to put down heavy weapons and cede control of cities to state security. See: "Rethinking Peace in Yemen," International Crisis Group, Report #216, July 2, 2020, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/yemen/216-rethinking-peace-yemen>

^[3] Two Yemeni participants, "Basis for Negotiations," YIF panel discussion, Stockholm, June 18, 2022.

^[4] International participant, "Basis for Negotiations," YIF panel discussion, Stockholm, June 18, 2022.

Establishing a common vision of a secure future for Yemen through dialogue could facilitate resolution of many transactional issues en route to a settlement,^[5] such as exchanging prisoners, opening roads and pulling back forces.

Several YIF participants expressed frustration with what they viewed as the Houthi authorities' avoidance of formal and informal peacemaking efforts; some panelists, however, advised against assuming the Houthis will not engage, with one of them urging efforts to open "real relationships" so conflict can end.^[6] In terms of the internationally backed government's preparedness for meaningful negotiations, panelists described the creation of the PLC as a positive step for the formal peacemaking process, specifically because it includes key actors on the ground in government-controlled areas.

^[5] International participant, "Basis for Negotiations," YIF panel discussion, Stockholm, June 18, 2022.

^[6] "Basis for Negotiations," YIF panel discussion, Stockholm, June 18, 2022.

Regional Considerations for Security and Internal Stability

While a shared interest exists to forge a Yemen free from international interference, realistically, peacemaking in Yemen is not simply a matter of lining up the internal parties. Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Iran each are capable of derailing any agreement they perceive as antithetical to their interests, or of playing a positive role in supporting peace and stability in Yemen. Yemeni warring parties have become more integrated into their foreign backers' agendas as the war has stretched on, and they have increasingly relied on them for weapons and financial support; other regional states – Oman, Qatar, Turkey – also have played roles, and have a stake in the nature of any resulting peace. While resisting formal peace talks, Houthi authorities have been willing to participate in off-and-on backchannel talks, generally hosted by Oman, since 2019, but only with Saudi Arabia; it is not clear to what extent the Houthis regard the Riyadh-orchestrated PLC as a negotiating partner. Saudi and Houthi officials reportedly resumed such discussions in June 2022, but these were said to focus on border security and the drones and ballistic missiles used in Houthi strikes on the kingdom – direct national security concerns of Saudi Arabia.^[7]

Yemeni and international participants in Political Settlement sessions noted that security and stability in Yemen are more likely to result from an agreement that:^[8]

- Reaches out to neighbors and addresses the national security concerns of regional powers, primarily Saudi Arabia, which will not accept a hostile authority in Sana'a;
- Dismantles non-state forces and requires the relinquishing of weapons they have accumulated (see: 6. Security, 'Integrating Fighters'); and
- Anchors all elements in international law as a way to deter external threats.

Ensuring Inclusivity in Peacemaking

While the PLC contains the key anti-Houthi actors required to facilitate decisions that will need to be made to end the war, broader inclusivity in the settlement process – especially regarding political and other civilian segments of Yemeni society – was viewed as important in preventing a return to arms.^[9] Throughout the YIF, party officials and other forum participants wrestled with how to rebuild party apparatuses largely incapacitated by the war and to work with the PLC to exert influence on settlement negotiations (see: 2. Political Life, 'Reviving and Reforming Party Activity' and 3. The Southern File, 'The PLC: An Opportunity for the South?').

^[7] Aziz El Yaakoubi, "Saudi Arabia and Yemen's Houthis Resume Direct Talks, Sources Say," Reuters, June 14, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/saudi-arabia-yemens-houthis-resume-direct-talks-sources-say-2022-06-14/>

^[8] "Basis for Negotiations," YIF panel discussion, Stockholm, June 18, 2022.

^[9] "Basis for Negotiations," YIF panel discussion, Stockholm, June 18, 2022.

Political parties now have two main tracks to influence or participate in the peace process, through their advisory roles to the head of the PLC and through the PLC's 50-member Consultation and Reconciliation Commission (CRC), also appointed in April during talks in Riyadh. However, although there was a general consensus among party representatives at the YIF that the PLC had potential, and that parties should work to support it, many said it needs to be more inclusive. Yemeni civil society organizations (CSOs) currently are largely unable to affect the formal settlement process through the PLC, though several work with international organizations attempting to exert influence through Track II programs (see: [2. Political Life, 'Civil Society and Track II'](#)). The lack of a strong role for civil society is a loss for the process. However, given their knowledge of local needs and ability to think beyond typical settlement-track solutions and conflict resolution mechanisms, an emphasis should be placed on finding more effective channels for CSO input.

Tribal Engagement in the Settlement Process

Perspectives differed on whether, how and to what extent tribes should be involved in the political settlement process (see: [2. Political Life](#)). Beyond longstanding concerns about state versus tribal authority, some panelists cautioned against viewing or including tribes as a bloc in peacemaking efforts, given their heterogeneity and the history of blood feuds igniting conflict.^[10] While some tribal sheikhs highlighted the tribes' roles in facilitating agreements on specific disputes, in peacekeeping, and in addressing humanitarian needs, they maintained that politicians are ultimately responsible for securing political settlements. Yemen is a tribal society and, as multiple YIF participants noted, individual members of tribes already are involved in political processes, as they are in all aspects of Yemeni society.^[11]

YIF participants suggested tribal leaders be tapped to observe and document truce violations and to ensure safe roads and public spaces in their territories, tasks made possible by the calmer security environment since the truce. Because tribal leaders are powerful within their own areas, they are well placed to ensure localized stability, which, if replicated across regions, can instill a degree of peace.^[12] Given the diverse roles played by tribes, and their unique abilities to cater to specific local and regional needs, further consultations with tribal figures on how, when and in what capacity they can assist would be beneficial.

As much as various sectors of society are keen to influence the settlement process, many YIF participants also viewed the success of the UN-led peace process as critical to allowing them to move forward with post-war reconstruction, reconciliation and state-building efforts.

^[10] "Role of the Tribes in Peace and Conflict Resolution," YIF panel discussion, Stockholm, June 17, 2022.

^[11] "Role of the Tribes in Peace and Conflict Resolution," YIF panel discussion, Stockholm, June 17, 2022.

^[12] "Local Reconciliation and Justice Mechanisms," YIF roundtable, Stockholm, June 17, 2022.



02. POLITICAL LIFE

Ali Saif Hassan, founder and director of the Political Development Forum, questions panelists during the Yemen International Forum in Stockholm on June 18, 2022. //Sana'a Center photo.

Political life in Yemen encompasses a full array of actors: parties and informal groups, often with military wings that are engaged in the war; and CSOs, syndicates and trade unions, which have had their work on the ground upended by war since 2014. Yemen's tribes, which have sought to protect their communities and steer battlefield outcomes, also remain important, although the nature and extent of their political influence has lessened in recent years. Ensuring inclusivity of Yemeni women and minorities in political processes and state building is an ongoing challenge. The ability of these varied sectors of society to rebuild, re-engage, reform and adapt to ever-shifting realities will greatly impact the nature of post-war Yemen and the country's ability to sustain peace.

Political Parties

Reviving and Reforming Party Activity

Yemen's traditional political parties and the Southern Transitional Council (STC) agreed in April to the formation of the PLC in Riyadh, and became part of the CRC, the PLC's simultaneously appointed a 50-member advisory body.^[13] In general, there was optimism among participants that the PLC and CRC could provide a framework for stronger political processes in government-controlled areas,^[14] and that taking advantage of the truce could increase prospects more broadly for warring sides to respond politically rather than militarily.^[15] Near-term informal consultations with Houthi authorities and with the STC and other southern actors could help identify avenues to pursue during the relative calm.^[16]

Some political leaders viewed the renewal of party activity as dependent upon a restoration of the state, noting that some parties cannot operate in Aden and others cannot raise their flags in Sana'a. The risk of arrest or assassination in some areas, an inability to travel safely to meetings, and communication woes have contributed to the fragmentation of once-nationwide memberships. And since the implementation of party policies happens on the local level, the more conflict spreads, the less party activity is carried out. Other participants argued that the absence of a national identity weakens party cohesion, and cited a need to be more responsive to constituent concerns and to involve more young people.^[17]

^[13] The General People's Congress (GPC) and emerging powers, including the STC, the Political Bureau of the National Resistance forces, and the Giants Brigades, are represented within the PLC; the GPC, the Islah party and the STC as well as other parties also have members serving in the CRC.

^[14] YIF participants emphasized the need for unity among these parties and the opportunity the new political hierarchy provides for this. However, follow-up consultations could also consider questions of party independence from the government, the extent to which that is possible while serving within it, and the necessary role of parties as watchdogs. Pre-forum consultations emphasized the importance of parties' oversight role: "Challenges to Political Life: Political Parties and Civil Society," a YIF discussion paper, Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, June 2022, p. 12, https://sanaacenter.org/yif/pre-forum-discussion-papers/2022/YIF_Discussion_Paper_Challenges_to_Political_Life.pdf

^[15] Multiple participants, "Political Parties in the Peace Process," YIF roundtable, Stockholm, June 17, 2022.

^[16] While YIF participants did not offer detailed ideas, consultations prior to the forum suggested more parties seek to replicate the sort of open channels of communication the Socialist and Nasserist parties have maintained with Ansar Allah and the STC: "Challenges to Political Life: Political Parties and Civil Society," a YIF discussion paper, Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, June 2022, p. 14, https://sanaacenter.org/yif/pre-forum-discussion-papers/2022/YIF_Discussion_Paper_Challenges_to_Political_Life.pdf. Further workshops could explore such practical channels.

^[17] "Political Parties in the Peace Process," YIF roundtable, Stockholm, June 17, 2022.

While there was a degree of agreement on the challenges facing political parties, proposed solutions varied. Some areas that could be pursued in follow-up discussions and workshops included:

- Seeking out ways to transcend conditions where in-person contact is not possible by using virtual tools to communicate among members and party officials in and outside Yemen, and among parties;
- Examining the extent to which party leadership, organization and programs should change in light of the opportunity provided by the new PLC governing structure and the calmer atmosphere since the truce; and
- Addressing the lack of research and data in areas such as electricity and infrastructure that could allow political parties to understand the scope of specific community needs and respond accordingly.

To restore Yemen's historically vibrant political life, political party leaders largely focused on the need to promote unity, so they could influence peacemaking, and to restore the state, so their parties could rebuild and resume their regular activities. One party leader spoke about how parties' ideological differences benefit society, but only while they are in the opposition. Once in positions of power, tendencies to impose party ideologies more broadly have been detrimental,^[18] resulting in the rise of armed groups in the political space. In a rebuilt structure, the speaker recommended that political parties that develop armed wings and choose to keep them outside the state's military chain of command ought to dissolve their political wings; in this way, political processes used to overcome disputes could remain peaceful.^[19] A significant focus of security sessions at the YIF involved when and how to begin integrating fighters into society (see: [6. Security, 'Integrating Fighters'](#)). Integration, disarmament and regional relationships all would be important to rebuilding Yemen's political structure, assuming party-affiliated armed forces cease functioning outside of state control. Efforts to secure buy-in for such a structure could, however, begin prior to this, if parties develop a strategic vision for how political groups should function and what the nature of their regional relationships should be.^[20]

Addressing Meaningful Inclusion of Women in the Political Sphere

The marginalization of women in the political sphere is apparent, with no women in the PLC, the December 2020 cabinet, or the reshuffled cabinet of July 2022. Five women serve in the 50-member CRC. The need for inclusivity, of women as well as younger men, was noted in

^[18] Senior party official, "Shifting Political Landscape: Formal and Informal Political Groups," YIF, Stockholm, June 19, 2022.

^[19] Senior party official, "Shifting Political Landscape: Formal and Informal Political Groups," YIF, Stockholm, June 19, 2022.

^[20] Participants in the "Shifting Political Landscape: Formal and Informal Political Groups," on June 19, 2022, discussed the need to reevaluate regional relationships, with a participant saying the PLC should redefine its relationships with Gulf Arab allies and that all political parties and groups should avoid having their own separate international relationships.

YIF sessions across all six themes. In the session, “Women at the Negotiating Table and in Decision-making Bodies,” there was a shared understanding that women’s participation in Track 1 peacemaking, as well as in Yemeni political bodies, is primarily tokenism;^[21] women’s participation was generally viewed as being reduced to committees or discussions focused on softer “women’s issues” rather than on “hard issues,” such as the economy and security.^[22]

Though limited, the inclusion of women in the CRC was cited as positive. One panelist urged women to strive for a unified front on issues because men in power use differing views among women as a reason to deny women participation.^[23] Another participant, active in supporting women and girls in central Yemen, said women have proved themselves in civil society, in political movements and in resolving issues on the ground, but still are rarely seen in local- and governorate-level political offices; she attributed this to obstructionist local authorities.^[24] Likewise, YIF participants spoke of their encounters with gender-based obstructionism in other sectors. A professional woman and union member, for example, spoke of the lack of support for training young women for future leadership opportunities in syndicates.^[25]

Roundtable participants discussed the roles of education and the media in influencing Yemenis on gender roles and raised ideas to support meaningful inclusion that could be advanced through public awareness efforts. They included:^[26]

- Assisting women in attaining positions of decision-making authority;
- Supporting and promoting efforts to bring more women into state entities;
- Creating zero-tolerance policies to organize around when authorities attempt to institute harmful gender-based policies;
- Pressuring the international community to integrate women into decision-making processes in all areas rather than treating women as an isolated component to be brought in to discuss “women’s issues”;
- Protecting women peace-builders on local and national levels, and working to improve their capacities and those of grassroots human rights organizations; and
- Defending women’s rights, including war-time gains such as a broader acceptance of women working outside the home, with the help of the community-level CSOs.

^[21] Participants in the June 17, 2022, roundtable, “Women at the Negotiating Table and in Decision-making Bodies,” noted that no Yemeni male political figures participated in or attended that session.

^[22] “Women at the Negotiating Table and in Decision-making Bodies,” YIF roundtable, Stockholm, June 17, 2022.

^[23] Political activist, “Women at the Negotiating Table and in Decision-making Bodies,” YIF roundtable, Stockholm, June 17, 2022.

^[24] Civil society activist, “Women at the Negotiating Table and in Decision-making Bodies,” YIF roundtable, Stockholm, June 17, 2022.

^[25] Union member, “Syndicates and Trade Unions,” YIF panel discussion, Stockholm, June 18, 2022.

^[26] “Women at the Negotiating Table and in Decision-making Bodies,” YIF roundtable, Stockholm, June 17, 2022.

Marginalization of Minorities and Exclusion from Political Processes

The YIF addressed issues of marginalization experienced by minority communities including the Muhammasheen (literally, the “marginalized”); Muwalladeen, or mixed-origin Yemenis; and the Baha’i religious community. Panelists noted that existing Yemeni laws may provide for equality, but that in practice these ethnic and religious minority groups have been discriminated against in daily life and excluded from political processes. Members of minority communities are neither heard by the international community, which tends to speak to those carrying weapons, nor by state officials, such as members of parliament.^[27] YIF participants spoke of a need for more minorities to claim their identities as a way of easing exclusion, which requires setting aside shame or fear of being marginalized by making one’s minority status known. Some ideas raised to improve the status of minority groups included:^[28]

- Setting up advisory panels focusing on diversity. Such panels could work with UN agencies and on matters such as school curriculums to ensure better understanding of Yemen’s minority communities;
- Reviewing laws and addressing limited implementation of legislation that would criminalize racism and discrimination, and ensuring constitutional protections are included when state building moves forward; and
- Establishing a neutral state judicial system as well as access to international courts and laws when discriminatory practices cannot be resolved.

^[27] Panelist, “Minorities in Yemen’s Peace Process,” YIF panel discussion, Stockholm, June 19, 2022.

^[28] Multiple panelists, “Minorities in Yemen’s Peace Process,” YIF panel discussion, Stockholm, June 19, 2022.

Civil Society and Track II

When formal peace efforts stall, attention shifts to informal Track II processes such as international forums, unofficial dialogues and civil society initiatives as ways to, at minimum, prevent divides from growing wider until UN efforts can resume. YIF participants spoke of a need to improve the selection and diversity of Track II actors as well as to be more flexible in assessing and responding to gaps with new frameworks as needed. In Yemen, as a participant noted, Track II actors rarely have the independence and ability to drive processes; rather, their involvement is more passive – submitting ideas or papers, or participating in advisory groups. This, along with informal UN control over the selection process for Track II participants and a lack of coordination among these actors outside of the UN or other internationally led arenas, makes them less effective than they could be. However, YIF participants said Track II efforts could be strengthened if platforms were created for participating organizations to coordinate among themselves.

Preparing CSOs for a Shift to Post-War Development, Reconciliation

War has decimated Yemen's civil society sector, and representatives of CSOs at the YIF spoke frankly about the challenges they faced on the ground and in securing aid, especially when trying to carry out their own needs-driven agendas as opposed to donor-designed projects. They discussed their current capacities as well as what was needed to help them shift from humanitarian crisis response to participating effectively in the reconstruction and reconciliation of Yemeni society. Perceptions of how best to strengthen CSOs varied, but among the potential solutions raised were that CSOs should:^[29]

- Be involved in monitoring the truce and in activities and mechanisms to promote cohesion and tolerance in society;
- Empower women to participate in economic recovery efforts and political decisions, and ensure regular civil society dialogues are inclusive of minorities, women and youth;
- Work toward financial independence, so organizations can operate more freely and according to needs by, for example, seeking out domestic partnerships and local private-sector funding; and
- Capitalize on their accumulated experience in humanitarian relief by applying this expertise throughout society.

They also proposed Yemeni authorities and the international community:

- Involve local communities in conducting needs assessments and program planning;
- Initiate a national program to combat corruption; and
- Allow for real, not symbolic, participation in international political discussions.

^[29] "Civil Society: Transitioning from Humanitarian Relief to Early Recovery," YIF workshop, Stockholm, June 18, 2022.

Trade Unions and Syndicates

Like political parties and CSOs, trade unions and syndicates have faced security threats to members and their facilities, and resilience is gauged by mere organizational survival. Political polarization and interference by local authorities in union activities has resulted in the dismantling of trade unions or the erosion of their work, the creation of parallel entities and the suspension of leadership elections.^[30] The Yemeni Journalists Syndicate, whose members are on the frontlines of monitoring and documenting wartime abuses, was singled out as one of the few unions to remain a cohesive entity; it has adapted somewhat to meet and function, although it struggles with attracting new members, holding elections, funding and the security situation.

Unions and syndicates can rebuild but require the political space to do so, which a union activist said will only exist when armed groups are no longer in control on the ground.^[31] Further consultations with unions and syndicates could clarify prospects for revitalizing memberships and resuming election activities. Developing strategies that will ensure sustainability and funding streams, and creating trade union networks that collectively promote union activities, would contribute to unions and syndicates regaining a more prominent role in Yemen's once-vibrant political life.

Tribes

In exploring roles for Yemen's tribes in peace and conflict resolution, several tribal sheikhs participating in a YIF panel discussion acknowledged that tribes' political roles and influence have diminished, leaving a peace settlement to political parties and groups. Opinions differed on whether this was problematic, with one sheikh saying tribes' more important roles related to humanitarian and human security issues. He spoke of reviving customary rules that preserve dignity, such as those barring violence in public spaces, and said that tribes could help displaced people to resettle.^[32] Another spoke of their political marginalization as puzzling given the important role of tribes in Yemeni society, saying tribes have worked, and can continue to work, to free prisoners, open roads and secure truces. A politician, he said, works in accordance with party affiliation, whereas the tribe works to benefit a region.^[33]

Other roles cited by session participants included preserving truces and preventing terrorism. A tribal woman spoke about how it is customary for violence to stop in women's presence, noting that tribal women often resolve conflicts.^[34] Members of tribes work within Yemeni institutions, and while tribal roles may be minimized when the state is present, tribes step up on the national and local levels when the rule of law is absent. Multiple participants said that

^[30] A participant said 104 unions have closed during the war.

^[31] "Syndicates and Trade Unions," YIF panel discussion, Stockholm, June 18, 2022.

^[32] Prominent tribal figure, "Role of the Tribes in Peace and Conflict Resolution," YIF panel discussion, Stockholm, June 17, 2022.

^[33] Tribal sheikh, "Role of the Tribes in Peace and Conflict Resolution," YIF panel discussion, Stockholm, June 17, 2022.

^[34] YIF participant, "Role of the Tribes in Peace and Conflict Resolution," YIF panel discussion, Stockholm, June 17, 2022.

although political forces can be adept at exploiting tribes, the tribes also are able to exert some leverage on conflicting parties and armed groups to advance security and stability and curb fighting in their areas.^[35]

Tribal sheikhs' differing ideas about the roles they can play suggest coexistence between tribal and party systems will manifest in varying ways based on local and regional needs and circumstances. Capitalizing on what tribes can offer is likely to require tailored responses at the local or regional level to define their roles in the political, security and/or humanitarian spheres.

³⁵ "Role of the Tribes in Peace and Conflict Resolution," YIF panel discussion, Stockholm, June 17, 2022.



03. THE SOUTHERN FILE

Panelists discussing southern governance and relations at the YIF on June 18, 2022, seen left to right: Fadi Baoum of the political bureau of the Supreme Council of the Revolutionary Movement for the Liberation and Independence of the South; political activist Huda al-Attas; the vice president of the Southern National Coalition, Kawthar Shazly; head of the Supreme Council of the Revolutionary Movement Fouad Rashid; and the Southern Movement's Yassin Makkawi. //Sana'a Center photo.

The YIF sessions on the Southern File brought together a broad range of figures from formal political parties and political movements across the southern governorates, including many who consider themselves marginalized from the current political setup. The southern issue is rarely afforded such a forum for discussion and debate, and despite the absence of a few southern political actors, fruitful discussions on a wide scope of issues contributed to a positive atmosphere at the end of three days of deliberations. The main takeaways were:

- The creation of the PLC is a game-changer in terms of southern actors' representation within the highest level of government and decision-making, despite its military makeup and lack of full southern inclusivity;
- The PLC needs to avoid marginalizing any southern constituency, and must respect local identities, be transparent about its appointments, end armed groups' control of territory and quickly provide public services;
- Attention should focus on local control of resources and decentralization, possibly drawing on gains made in the 2013-14 National Dialogue Conference; and
- An inclusive, intra-southern dialogue is a priority.

The PLC: An Opportunity for the South?

YIF participants expressed concern about the extent to which the April formation of the PLC accorded with external interests. One participant described it as a war council rather than a civil authority,^[36] and in another session, it was portrayed as effectively consecrating the current political-security reality and the interests of Saudi Arabia and the UAE.^[37] Still, there was significant political support voiced in the southern sessions — as there was in those involving political parties more broadly (see 2. *Political Life, 'Reviving and Reforming Party Activity'*) — for dealing with the PLC constructively and influencing it for the benefit of the country as a whole. Among participant suggestions were to:^[38]

- Actively participate in PLC-affiliated committees;
- Arrange more opportunities, including a formal, internationally supported and possibly externally mediated, intra-southern dialogue, where southern stakeholders could focus on unifying positions on long-term goals; and
- Transition away from “governance” by dominant local groups exerting informal authority in areas they control to institutionalized governance led by the PLC. Doing so would require communication between political leaders and social movements to ensure community representation, which YIF participants said could only be effective after local forces lay down their arms.

^[36] “Inclusion of the South in the Peace Process,” YIF plenary, Stockholm, June 19, 2022.

^[37] “Mechanisms of Including Southern Groups in the Peace Process,” YIF, Stockholm, June 18, 2022. Although four out of eight PLC members are southerners, affiliated with the STC, Islah and Emirati-backed forces, some southern actors were left off of the PLC-affiliated committees. In the cabinet, PLC head Rashad al-Alimi replaced four ministers in July with southerners acceptable to the STC, although none were from unrepresented or underrepresented groups, see: Casey Coombs, “PLC Announces Cabinet Reshuffle,” *The Yemen Review*, July 2022, Sana’a Center for Strategic Studies, August 12, 2022, <https://sanaacenter.org/the-yemen-review/july-2022/18395>

^[38] “Mechanisms of Including Southern Groups in the Peace Process,” YIF, Stockholm, June 18, 2022, and “Governance and Managing Relations within the South,” June 17, 2022.

Making southern actors formal partners in the PLC and its affiliated advisory panels has given them a significant stake in the PLC's success. But if the PLC is to successfully manage southern relations, Yemen needs to move away from decisions being made by heads of armed groups, or appointments being made through behind-the-scenes negotiations. If the country is to shift toward good governance, transparency and public input are needed to ensure accountability.^[39] Another element key to the PLC's success will be whether it delivers better services to the public. As one participant put it, Yemenis sacrificed their president and accepted outside intervention, and in return they expect to see tangible improvements in the economic situation and provision of basic services.^[40]

Socio-Economic Issues

Popular protests over economic conditions flared most recently across southern Yemen in June, spurred by rising fuel prices, electricity and water shortages, and unpaid salaries.^[41] A YIF participant said the economic crisis was incubating extremism in his region, where he had observed men struggling to find jobs joining up with armed extremist groups.^[42]

YIF participants discussing the socio-economic dimensions of the southern issue agreed that it is no longer possible for political forces, especially those demanding independence, to ignore the priority that must be accorded to improving living standards. But improving standards and services will require uniting security forces and ending the control of armed groups.^[43] Some panelists noted that better delivery of services will require the PLC to build government institutions, which will require professional administrative tools and dealing with corruption.^[44] Another YIF participant, noting past pledges to rebuild Aden following the damage it sustained early in the war, said that the city's reconstruction and restoration of services would, taken together, be an important sign that southern concerns are being treated seriously.^[45]

^[39] Panelist, "Governance and Managing Relations within the South," June 17, 2022.

^[40] Panelist, "Mechanisms of Including Southern Groups in the Peace Process," YIF, Stockholm, June 18, 2022.

^[41] Casey Coombs, "PLC President Faces Aden Protests After Regional Tour," *The Yemen Review*, June 2022, The Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, July 11, 2022, <https://sanaacenter.org/the-yemen-review/june-2022/18142>

^[42] Panelist, "Mechanisms of Including Southern Groups in the Peace Process," YIF session, Stockholm, June 18, 2022.

^[43] "Governance and managing relations within the South," YIF session, Stockholm, June 17, 2022.

^[44] "Mechanisms of Including Southern Groups in the Peace Process," YIF, Stockholm, June 18, 2022.

^[45] Panelist, "Governance and managing relations within the South," YIF session, Stockholm, June 17, 2022.

Calls for Decentralization, Evaluation and Use of Natural Resources

Reconstruction of infrastructure, including in the hydrocarbon and electricity sectors, was of critical importance to southern leaders at the YIF,^[46] along with the activation of ports and airports in southern governorates. If revenue streams were permitted to be decentralized, these facilities could provide governorates with much-needed funds.^[47]

Participants generally agreed that the current consensus approach to governance is best, but said that it would only be possible to properly exploit resources and combat corruption if all political groups are represented.^[48] Several southern participants said they seek the promotion of Yemen's own economic resources, not foreign aid, but panelists noted that it was difficult to discuss the distribution of wealth when basic information is lacking about what resources exist and who manages them.^[49] Independent collection and transparent sharing of resource-related data could be a near-term step toward a broader southern goal of moving beyond ad hoc, war-imposed decentralization — politically and in terms of revenue streams — and on to a more structured approach.

A Southern Dialogue: The Key to a Viable Peace Deal

Disunity among southern groups is nothing new, and neither are calls for a southern dialogue to bring together disparate factions. But since 2017, political and social fragmentation of the south has deepened as local violence has escalated, political viewpoints have widened and the ability of any single political actor to claim to represent all of the south has diminished. However, southern Yemeni political factions face the challenge of unifying to advocate most effectively for southerners in the event of any formal peace talks. Southerners must deal with polarizing issues such as unification versus separation as well as other military, political and economic questions, a southern official told YIF participants, citing the importance of an intra-southern dialogue.^[50] Most southern groups represented at the forum preferred neutral, international mediation for such a dialogue.

Many panelists across southern sessions shared the view that no party can claim to speak in the name of the whole of the south, expressing concern that claims on such authority will make it difficult to create a united southern front in future peace talks. Nevertheless, all agreed that differences among southern political factions remain largely manageable.

^[46] "Governance and Managing Relations within the South," YIF session, Stockholm, June 17, 2022.

^[47] Panelist, "Mechanisms of Including Southern Groups in the Peace Process," YIF session, Stockholm, June 18, 2022.

^[48] "Governance and managing relations within the South," YIF session, Stockholm, June 17, 2022.

^[49] Multiple panelists made this point in the first two days of the forum, June 17-18, in the sessions "Mechanisms of including southern groups in the peace process," and "Governance and managing relations within the South."

^[50] Fuad Rashed, "Inclusion of the South in the peace process," YIF open plenary, Stockholm, June 19, 2022.

Southern Inclusion in Shaping a Final Settlement

In exploring ways to better involve southern actors in the peace process, YIF participants discussed the frameworks for a political solution envisioned in the 2013-14 NDC and the recent Riyadh consultations, as well as the sort of representation southern Yemenis could expect in future peace talks.

Despite differences of opinion, YIF participants agreed that the southern issue is pivotal to a sustainable peace in Yemen as it speaks directly to the question of the shape and nature of the state, and that the priority right now must be to press for an end to the war. Some panelists suggested revisiting NDC outcomes related to the southern issue to see which parts remain relevant and can be built upon.

YIF participants said they viewed the PLC as not being geared toward resolving civilian problems, and that it was failing to address important socio-economic concerns and insufficiently representing the diversity of southern voices. Further, they expressed concern that even if the PLC oversees a final solution to the war, many southerners will remain dissatisfied,^[51] risking further armed violence.^[52]

^[51] Panelist, "Inclusion of the South in the peace process," YIF session, Stockholm, June 19, 2022.

^[52] Panelist, "Inclusion of the South in the peace process," YIF session, Stockholm, June 19, 2022.



04.

THE ECONOMY

Adil Al-Qusadi, head of the delegation of the Saudi Development and Reconstruction Program for Yemen, right, speaks during a plenary session on economic recovery issues on June 18, 2022, at the Yemen International Forum in Stockholm //Sana'a Center photo.

Sessions at the YIF regarding Yemen's economic dynamics were grounded in the understanding that the country was already in a difficult economic position before the war began. Yemen was severely underdeveloped, poverty was rampant, an elite class controlled the vast majority of the wealth, state apparatuses were ineffective and, in many areas, almost entirely absent; corruption was endemic, and periods of political and social stability were inevitably fleeting. With this in mind, attendees to YIF economic sessions discussed the ramifications of the war, with the general consensus that it has made pre-existing challenges far worse and brought forward an array of new ones that have eroded the foundations of commerce and the economy. Indeed, Yemen's humanitarian crisis was discussed as essentially an economic crisis by another name, one that requires economic and development solutions rather than solely more international emergency aid.

Sessions focused on the economy as a key driver of the armed conflict, its weaponization by the warring parties, and the macro-level dynamics of the war economy as well as its area-specific aspects. Progress was viewed as imperative, given the direct implications it would have on the ability of Yemenis to meet their day-to-day needs. There was consensus among attendees that the ability to address many of the basic economic impairments the country faces – from a technocratic standpoint – already exists and is able to be engaged in short order. Standing in the way of this, however, is the fact that the country's economy has become another battlefield for the warring parties. Thus, without buy-in from the political leadership of the main warring parties to allow for economic challenges to be addressed, the prospects for progress were generally viewed as limited and difficult to sustain.

Recognition of this dynamic was apparent in sessions in which attendees discussed the fracture of the country's central bank, generally recognized as Yemen's most fundamental institutional economic challenge given its cascading series of ramifications across the national economy. The monetary, fiscal and regulatory functions of the Central Bank of Yemen (CBY) were seen as deeply entwined with issues of national sovereignty and therefore rife with political consequences for the warring parties. YIF economic discussions also explored the interlinkages between various security and economic issues, such as impediments to the flow of trade into and within Yemen and the security considerations of the various stakeholders that prevented these impediments from being removed.^[53]

YIF participants discussed the bifurcated national currency and exchange rate instability, the commercial banking sector, national economic priorities, the need to shift the international response paradigm from aid relief to development and other policies needed to prepare for economic recovery. These conversations sought opportunities for economic progress and conflict resolution that have been largely overlooked to date – particularly at the local level – and potential pathways to realizing them. Private sector perspectives to address challenges in the prevailing business climate also were raised.

Discussions centered around smaller steps that could be taken to prepare for larger actions once the political environment allows. The collaborative environment fostered at the YIF among Yemeni stakeholders from across the political spectrum was itself recognized as a significant

⁵³ Panelist, "Private sector vision for addressing business challenges," YIF panel discussion, June 19, 2022.

step toward reconciliation of broader economic challenges. The inherent intersections among critical issues Yemen faces were discussed throughout the forum. For instance, security was discussed as a prerequisite for pursuing sustainable economic opportunities, but security in turn requires a political settlement. Many of the inter-relations were also seen as interdependent: Any political settlement unaccompanied by economic development and improved living standards would be short-lived.

The CBY and Banking Sector

Discussions on the commercial banking industry provided a platform for local actors in or associated with the sector to map out ways to address the challenges facing it. Most prominent among these was the central bank schism, with attendees examining means to support existing initiatives that seek to mitigate its fallout. The significance of the discussions being Yemeni-led and Yemeni-facilitated was apparent. Local stakeholders showed a high degree of buy-in and carried a tone of collective responsibility for the outcomes, particularly in the talks involving experts and leaders from Yemen's financial and banking sector from across Yemen.

Conversations were wide-ranging and aimed at establishing locally led processes to address critical issues. These included de-escalating the conflict between the CBY branches in Aden and Sana'a in relation to the central bank's basic monetary mandates, such as exchange rate maintenance, currency issuance, foreign exchange management and import financing, as well as banking sector regulation, oversight, data sharing and compliance. Also discussed were efforts to promote the global reintegration of Yemen's banking system and the use of correspondent accounts abroad; public sector salary payments; public debt management; double taxation and customs policies; and e-money.

Participants agreed on a three-point vision to address challenges in the banking sector and their wider economic fallout. The first initiative centered on the development of a national road map to improve Yemen's performance in anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing (AML/CTF) compliance, which would help restore Yemeni banks' capacity to facilitate foreign trade and reduce the cost of imported goods.

The second initiative aimed to coordinate technical efforts between the CBY Aden and Sana'a on issues such as:

- Managing the supply and demand of foreign currency stocks, particularly in relation to financing basic imports;
- Managing and monitoring the money exchange industry, in particular exchanging data on licensed outlets and refraining from issuing new licenses; and
- Reducing the inflated monetary base and addressing issues related to the schism in the national currency.



Sharaf al-Kebisi, general manager of the Financial Services Company and executive director of the National Microfinance Corporation, participates June 18, 2022, in the YIF in Stockholm //Sana'a Center photo.

These measures would greatly assist in stabilizing the Yemeni rial, improving liquidity management and reducing currency speculation, narrowing the divergence between old and new rial banknotes, and preparing the groundwork for the eventual reunification of the currency.

The third initiative centered around addressing the banking-sector liquidity crisis through releasing Yemeni commercial banks' foreign currency balances, which have been frozen in CBY accounts since early in the conflict. In return, Yemeni banks would grant their customers access to cash to restore confidence in banking services and finance essential commodity imports.

While committed to the process being Yemeni-led, participants in the talks agreed that the proposed three-point vision would need to engage key stakeholders in order to generate strong buy-in and technical and financial support from the international community as well as direct support from the office of the UN special envoy. Beyond practical technical steps, participants noted that the warring parties' concerns would need to be balanced to generate the high-level political backing needed for meaningful progress.

It was apparent as the YIF sessions closed that the platform established at the forum to discuss issues related to the central bank and commercial banking sector had acted as an entry point for many of the attendees to continue engaging with each other on these topics. Participants emerged prepared to continue the process of seeking collective resolutions to common concerns through communication with Yemeni and international stakeholders.

Economic Priorities and Planning for Recovery through Development Aid

While a peaceful settlement to end the war was seen as the most urgent priority for rebuilding the economy, various economic priorities were identified as possible to address immediately, regardless of a political settlement. YIF participants regarded these as opportunities for “quick gains” in improving socioeconomic conditions in Yemen and creating the basis for a sustainable peace. Such priorities included: stabilizing the exchange rate; supporting local food production; improving service delivery resilience; and preserving the capacities of state institutions and human capital for post-conflict engagement.^[54]

A main issue discussed was the need to improve public revenues and dissuade local authorities from seizing revenues intended for the central government.^[55] In turn, a priority for government spending was said to be moving from relief to development aid. Some YIF participants saw it as incumbent upon international agencies interested in increasing stability in Yemen to strengthen the country’s institutions by working in concert with local partners to implement programs on the ground.^[56]

During the conflict, international donors and organizations have largely focused on humanitarian aid and relief. The emphasis has been on supporting programs that provide basic livelihoods and cash assistance related to food security, such as subsidizing fishing, providing water services, improving agricultural production and supporting renewable energy. Though this support has been critical for addressing urgent life-saving needs, it was widely perceived by participants in the economy sessions as coming at the expense of development projects. Little funding has been allocated for development, while stalled peace talks have increased economic costs and prevented the creation of sustainable solutions to improve livelihoods and generate income. With this in mind, YIF attendees discussed existing challenges and opportunities related to shifting the focus of relief activities in the humanitarian-development nexus to respond to the lack of a skilled workforce, innovate in the delivery of humanitarian aid, and make aid more responsible to the people it is meant to be serving. This was seen as requiring clear strategic vision, a coordinated approach, and Yemeni ownership of the development agenda. It was noted that the process of reconstruction should not seek to reproduce the pre-existing context, which had seen Yemen lurch through cyclical crises for decades, but rather develop new approaches and be progressive in setting goals.

^[54] Panelist, “Immediate National Economic Priorities,” YIF panel discussion, June 18, 2022. Panelist, “Economic Recovery, from Humanitarian Relief to Development,” YIF panel discussion, June 18, 2022.

^[55] “Immediate National Economic Priorities,” YIF panel discussion, June 18, 2022.

^[56] “Economic Recovery: From Humanitarian Relief to Development,” YIF panel discussion, June 18, 2022.

Empowering the Private Sector

The private sector was perceived as having compensated for many of the failings of the public sector in supplying basic services, such as water and electricity, as well as providing employment opportunities for the majority of employed Yemenis and, perhaps most crucially, having maintained the continual flow of basic goods and medicines into the country. At the same time, discussions noted how the private sector has been neglected by stakeholders in the conflict.

Among the challenges seen to be directly affecting the private sector were barriers to international trade as well as difficulties conducting trade within Yemen due to the many checkpoints and the decrepit inter-city road network. Fuel shortages, a general lack of security, and the dual systems of taxes and customs fees that the warring parties level on traders were seen as further burdens that have raised costs and lengthened transport times.

Among the suggestions put forward to help alleviate the situation were:

- The empowerment of alternative means of conducting trade, for instance expanding operations at the air and seaports of Al-Ghaydah, Al-Mahra, and Mukalla, Hadramawt;
- Restarting large-scale overland trade with Saudi Arabia and Oman where possible;
- Opening, rebuilding and maintaining roads along key trade routes, an area in which participants viewed the support of the international community as vital.

Overlooked Opportunities

Discussions at the YIF economic sessions included exploring opportunities for economic recovery and conflict resolution that have been overlooked. A wide array of potential areas for progress were put forward, including:

- Investing in alternative energy production and further utilizing Yemen's natural gas resources in power generation, which could make electricity cheaper, more reliable, and more widely available, spurring efficiency gains across the economy;
- Economically empowering traditionally marginalized groups to increase productivity by, for example, improving women's and girls' literacy rates and access to education. Tapping the Yemeni diaspora and reversing the "brain drain" that has seen skilled Yemenis emigrate could improve the country's access to human capital;
- Redirecting development policies toward productivity and efficiency gains in food production sectors – specifically agriculture and fisheries – to help increase food security and decrease local price sensitivity to exchange rate volatility;
- Increasing access to microfinance for these areas.

Various obstacles identified as standing in the way of realizing many of these opportunities included the war's continuance, the lack of security, the fragmentation of state institutions and exchange rate volatility. Endemic corruption was seen as a threat to progress, and any gains in the agricultural sector will remain under threat until water scarcity issues are addressed.

Special Session: Water & Environment

A special YIF session, "Water and Environment – Key Questions of Peace and Security," drew attention to Yemen's severe water crisis, noting that water is a frequent indirect cause of conflict. Water-rich areas tend to be settled quickly, and Yemen has more than 100,000 groundwater wells, many of which are polluted by wastewater from hospitals, oil operations and other facilities.^[57] Although some areas have had water systems fail because of a lack of fuel or electricity, an environmental researcher said that the water sector has generally been able to function throughout the war because it is decentralized. Output may be limited, but regions have their own systems, and there is potential for local and international communities to cooperate on water usage issues.^[58] Key to this would be reducing the percentage of water used in agriculture – currently 90 percent – so more is available for household uses. International development policies that have encouraged deep-well irrigation and crop exports were misguided, a panelist said, and development funds would be better directed to rain-fed and fast-maturing crops, the latter of which would be less impacted by climate change.^[59]

Other suggestions for addressing water scarcity included:

- Enforce existing environmental protection policies aimed at preventing the depletion and contamination of water basins;
- When urban water systems fail, international organizations should opt to rehabilitate the existing systems rather than trucking in water; and
- Consider indigenous water harvesting systems.

^[57] Expert, "Water and Environment – Key Questions of Peace and Security," YIF panel discussion, Stockholm, June 19, 2022.

^[58] Environmental researcher, "Water and Environment – Key Questions of Peace and Security," YIF panel discussion, Stockholm, June 19, 2022.

^[59] Panelist, "Water and Environment – Key Questions of Peace and Security," YIF panel discussion, Stockholm, June 19, 2022.



05. RECONCILIATION & JUSTICE

Yemeni film director Sara Ishaq, right, speaks during a June 17, 2022, YIF discussion on the role of the arts in post-war reconciliation //Sana'a Center photo.

Reconciliation & Justice sessions at the YIF aimed to ensure meaningful incorporation of the theme into settlement negotiation processes, so unresolved grievances do not cut short any post-war peace. The enormity, complexity and sensitivity of reconciliation and justice issues have been apparent to Yemenis at least since the 2012-14 transitional period that followed the ouster of President Ali Abdullah Saleh, when Yemenis made their first comprehensive attempt to establish mechanisms to address past grievances.^[60] At that time, the 2011 youth uprising that forced Saleh from power had created enough popular momentum to secure the issue of past grievances on the agenda of Yemen's transitional government and the Gulf countries seeking to stabilize the country. Though criticized as insufficient and aborted by the war, those efforts provided insight into the challenges that will need to be overcome if and when a new process begins. After eight years of fighting, the number of victims, perpetrators, and violations has multiplied, complicating the task of resuming work.

Justice and reconciliation mechanisms are recognized as essential to ensuring that once war ends, peace can be sustained.^[61] Allowing the issue to remain outside formal peacemaking efforts was not considered an option by Yemeni and international experts involved in consultations in preparation for the YIF, a position shared by many of those in attendance.^[62] Based on the earlier consultations, YIF sessions were designed to explore ways to rebuild popular momentum so that political actors cannot ignore the issue, identify potential entry points into the file and their timing, and consider how to design a framework specific to Yemen's needs that is mindful of pre-war work, new realities created by the current war and transferable external solutions.

Building Popular Momentum to Ensure Political Will

The high degree of interest in matters of reconciliation and justice among YIF participants was immediately clear, with well-attended open sessions. These included survivors, lawyers, participants in the 2013-14 NDC, civil society representatives, members of targeted minority groups and diplomats. There was a general sentiment that not only parties to the war but also the international community, donors as well as diplomats, lack political will when it comes to including transitional justice and reconciliation within the peace process, instead remaining focused on cease-fires and securing a peace settlement, regardless of its sustainability.^[63]

^[60] In 2012, then-President Abdo Rabbu Mansour Hadi's transitional government considered a draft law that was criticized as having fundamental shortcomings in terms of accountability; it never received final approval. See: "Law on Transitional Justice and National Reconciliation," English text, March 2012, Peace and Justice Initiative, <http://www.peaceandjusticeinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Yemeni-draft-Transitional-Justice-Law.pdf> and "Position Paper on Yemeni Draft Law on Transitional Justice and National Reconciliation," Peace and Justice Initiative, March 19-20, 2012, <http://www.peaceandjusticeinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/PJI-Position-Paper-on-Yemeni-TJ-law-for-MHR-and-MLA.pdf>. Most notable was the 2013-14 work of the National Reconciliation and Transitional Justice working group, which produced recommendations: "National Dialogue Conference Outcomes Document," full text via the Peace Agreements Database of The University of Edinburgh, pp. 24-42, the "National Reconciliation and Transitional Justice Working Group Draft submitted December 18, 2015," <https://www.peaceagreements.org/viewmasterdocument/1400>

^[61] See, for example: Roger Duthie, "Transitional Justice and Prevention: Summary Findings from Five Country Case Studies," International Center for Transitional Justice, June 2021, https://www.ictj.org/sites/default/files/ICTJ_Report_Overview_TJ_Prevention.pdf

^[62] The importance of inclusion in the peacemaking processes was expressed in sessions including "Future Pathways to Reconciliation," YIF panel discussion, June 17, 2022; "Notions of Reconciliation and Justice: Local Perspectives," YIF roundtable discussion, June 18, 2022; and "Lessons from Other Contexts," YIF panel discussion, June 19, 2022. However, participant perspectives varied significantly in regard to what elements should be included and when.

^[63] This sentiment was voiced in the June 17, 2022, panel discussion "Future Pathways to Reconciliation," as well as in the roundtable session, "Notions of Reconciliation and Justice: Local Perspectives," June 18, 2022.

A Yemeni expert involved in organizing these sessions also noted that despite having invited several foreign diplomats to a private session centering on survivors' experiences and what they deem essential to any reconciliation and justice mechanism, few chose to attend.

A participant suggested improving political will among international mediators by actively lobbying for support from the office of the UN special envoy to Yemen, and enlisting CSOs, youth and women in these efforts.^[64] Exploring how to effectively engage and coordinate such efforts would be an area for follow-up, especially as it intersects with the challenges of involving civil society and Track II actors. In sessions on Political Life, representatives of CSOs noted that community activists lack security and protection;^[65] many of them have been targeted by warring factions. These participants spoke about the need to focus on activities and mechanisms to promote cohesion and tolerance in society.^[66] Progress on these fronts could benefit efforts to build popular momentum for reconciliation and justice to be included in Track I and Track II processes.^[67]

^[64] Panelist, "Reconciliation and Justice: Future Pathways to Reconciliation," YIF panel discussion, June 17, 2022.

^[65] "Civil Society: Transitioning from Humanitarian Relief to Early Recovery," YIF workshop outcomes, June 18, 2022.

^[66] Ibid.

^[67] In the workshop, "Political Life: Track II," held June 19, 2022, participants noted that CSO involvement in Track II is essential to ensuring a sustainable peace, and that the ability for Track II to influence Track I is greatest when Track II actors have some independence to drive and shape processes rather than passively submit ideas or participate in advisory groups or joint interactions. A participant noted there are few examples of Track II initiatives driving and shaping processes in Yemen.

Supporting Artists to Build Momentum, Memorialize Experiences

One significant way to begin rebuilding popular momentum for reconciliation and justice efforts is to support and promote creative work, including film, visual arts, poetry, street art and storytelling. At a well-attended plenary session,^[68] a poet, actor, street artist and filmmakers shared how the war has influenced them and their art. The artists drew attention to the impacts of the war on ordinary people, and emphasized the importance of memorializing civilians' experiences in the nation's collective healing process. The nature of the session did not lend itself to charting a specific course forward, but participants noted:

- Art is important for documenting daily life and telling personal stories that show how the war has impacted people;
- Art can be used to build support among local populations for truces;
- Art is important to the national consciousness; and
- Art is able to raise awareness across societal divides. As one artist said: "We have a responsibility to bring people into the same room to humanize them in front of one another."

Deciding What to Include and When

Cognizant of a need for realistic approaches given the general lack of political will surrounding transitional justice, YIF participants explored initial entry points to the file primarily in the areas of memorialization and in incorporating local mechanisms. There was, however, significant concern, especially among survivors and advocates for victims, that the peace process should incorporate formal justice, not only elements of reconciliation (*see below: 'A Victim-Centered Approach'*).

In the opening-day panel discussion, "Future Pathways to Reconciliation," speakers noted a dearth of recent research on what Yemenis seek in terms of reconciliation and justice as well as a general lack of funding to support work on the issue. At this point, one said, donors remain focused on stopping the fighting and securing a peace settlement.^[69] In a separate session, "Local Reconciliation and Justice Mechanisms," participants looked to examples of local mediation for potential application to reconciliation and justice work. Potential roles for tribes were discussed in broad terms,^[70] and local mediation mechanisms found in other social

^[68] The June 17, 2022, plenary session, "Practices of Memorialization through Art and Creative Methods," facilitated by Kate Nevens of the Yemen Policy Center, included poet and educator Saba Hamzah, actor and writer Sali Hamada, street artist Thiyazan al-Alawi, and writer and director Yousef Assabahi.

^[69] Panelist, "Future Pathways to Reconciliation," YIF panel discussion, June 17, 2022.

^[70] Panelists in a YIF session within the Political Settlement file, "Role of the Tribes in Peace and Conflict Resolution," June 17, 2022, noted that tribes are well-positioned to offer humanitarian help in areas likely to be part of any reconciliation process. For example, they could ensure displaced people are able to reclaim their homes. Speakers and some panelists, however, appeared wary of having tribes take on roles traditionally held by the state. A YIF participant acknowledged tribes' help in maintaining security, but voiced concern that a tribal role in resolving grievances could result in blood feuds revenge supplanting reconciliation and justice.

contexts, such as in Taiz city or the more rural areas of Ibb governorate, also were considered. Local mediation typically has dealt with disputes about land or has been employed to break cycles of revenge. Mediation efforts in Taiz may be particularly worthy of further investigation because they have been employed there in a wider variety of situations.^[71] Roundtable participants suggested:

- Ensuring support is not only focused on city centers;
- Building networks to facilitate adapting local mechanisms for national use; and
- Creating avenues of communication among local mediators and CSOs and enhancing support for local mediation efforts.

Time constraints prevented thorough or specific discussion of the limitations of such mediation efforts and their legal status. This meant it was not possible to delve into potential drawbacks, such as whether informal local mediation encourages state dysfunction or inherently favors the person of higher standing in the existing social hierarchy.

A Victim-Centered Approach

Within a smaller, invitation-only setting, survivors told their stories and what, for them, was essential to include in any reconciliation and justice process to achieve resolution and allow for individual and collective healing. In this setting, participants made clear that a peace that fails to deal with people's grievances would be shallow and temporary.

Many survivors and victim advocates were adamant that accountability, truthful revelation of wrongdoing and legal recourse should not be put aside in favor of a reconciliation process that focuses solely on compensation, memorialization and informal justice mechanisms.^[72]

Thoughts on what is essential included:

- From an activist whose child was killed: To know who killed her child and why; for that person to be punished along with the perpetrator's militia and the state that supports the militia with money and weapons; an international mechanism to address violations; and the reinstallation of Yemeni law enforcement and judicial structures.
- From a survivor of torture in detention: To know not only who ordered their arrest, but also accountability for those who "brainwashed these people to be so brutal" and those who remained silent. In a pointed remark directed to international mediators and the international community, the survivor asked, "Are you just looking for peace and settlement? What about what happened to us?"

^[71] A speaker noted past efforts by Taiz women to resolve water access disputes. Other Taiz mediation initiatives in recent years involving locally respected community figures have facilitated prisoner exchanges and opened roads.

^[72] "Notions of Reconciliation and Justice: Local Perspectives," YIF roundtable discussion, June 18, 2022.

- From a man forced to flee Yemen whose property was confiscated: For those abroad to be able to return and have their properties restored; prosecution of accused violators in international and Yemeni courts.
- From various speakers, both survivors and advocates: Rebuild a judiciary free of politicization; draft a law to criminalize abuses, and allow for harsh penalties not only for direct perpetrators but also for judges who go along with politically predetermined convictions and sentences.

The session also drew attention to the importance of mental health treatment, with speakers urging victims as well as advocates who document violations to seek therapy.^[73] A speaker in the earlier “Future Pathways to Reconciliation” session said the desire for mental health support also came through in a 2021 needs survey.^[74]

In a separate session on lessons from other contexts, a speaker involved in Colombia’s transitional justice and reconciliation process spoke about the importance of taking a victim-centered approach for a successful outcome.^[75] “We trusted the stories of the victims and designed mechanisms to make them part of the peace process,” the speaker said, noting that a “roundtable of victims” in every municipality, along with regional and national roundtables, gave survivors an institutional framework in which to be heard.^[76]

Documentation and Lessons from Other Contexts

Documentation needs differ for purposes of memorializing wartime experiences and for legal accountability. No consensus emerged on the best time to strengthen efforts related to legal accountability, though lawyers in some areas have been documenting cases.^[77]

Some YIF participants expressed concern about the quality of existing documentation, including non-standardized recording methods and issues such as families having been forced to sign off on false causes of death. A suggestion raised was to ready a national database;^[78] this could be pursued along with identifying data collection needs and methods. In the session, “Lessons from Other Contexts,” a panelist noted that an institutional response would require a budget and a plan to understand the size of the problem.^[79]

While further research is required on how other countries handled framework-related questions, the panelist relaying Colombia’s experience said survivors reported violations to

^[73] “Notions of Reconciliation and Justice: Local Perspectives,” YIF roundtable discussion, June 18, 2022.

^[74] Panelist, “Future Pathways to Reconciliation,” YIF panel discussion, June 17, 2022.

^[75] That same session, “Lessons From Other Contexts,” June 19, 2022, also heard a cautionary report about how detrimental ignoring survivors’ grievances and cutting them out of the settlement process had been to Lebanon.

^[76] Panelist, “Lessons From Other Contexts,” YIF panel discussion, June 19, 2022.

^[77] Speaker, “Notions of Reconciliation and Justice: Local Perspectives,” YIF roundtable discussion, June 18, 2022.

^[78] Panelist, “Future Pathways to Reconciliation,” YIF panel discussion, June 17, 2022.

^[79] Panelist, “Lessons From Other Contexts,” YIF panel discussion, June 19, 2022.

local offices, and the state was required to prove a person had not been wronged in order to deny compensation or restitution. The Moroccan model, which addressed forced disappearances dating to 1956, acted on two levels. On the individual level, reparations were based on civil, not Islamic law; women received the same amount of compensation as men, and specific programs were designed for marginalized communities. On the collective level, an apology was deemed crucial. With further research to inform follow-up discussions on other models, transferable ideas could inform Yemen's reconciliation and justice framework.



06. SECURITY

Facilitator Sama al-Hamdani, left, and panelists, left to right, Omani Ambassador Humaid al-Ma'ani, US envoy to Yemen Tim Lenderking and GCC Ambassador to Yemen Sarhan al-Minaikher listen to questions and comments from YIF participants on June 18, 2022//Sana'a Center photo.

Power elites^[80] have used Yemen's military and security sectors for personal and political gain for decades, and the resulting weakness of the sectors has, in recent years, nearly destroyed the state. The aim of Security sessions at the YIF was to examine the imbalances existing within these sectors and to consider reforms that would allow them to become national institutions that enhance political stability without hindering economic and social development, rather than a catalyst for war and conflict and a haven for corruption. Doing so while the country is still at war poses challenges, but YIF participants agreed organizational reforms could begin immediately, and improve accountability and better protect communities.

Participants entertained an array of possibilities for the post-war restructuring of Yemen's armed forces. They opened conversations on the need for national defense and security strategies and for effective civilian oversight of the military-security sector, and they began identifying ways to begin the task of integrating fighters. There was a clear desire to continue these discussions, and to draw more people, particularly military commanders, into such consultations.

Reinventing Yemen's Armed Forces

YIF participants sought to initiate broad thinking on the best strategies to address the security threats facing Yemen in the post-war era. However, no consensus emerged on the appropriateness of grappling with security and military strategies prior to a peace agreement. One participant expressed concern that doing so now would result in neglecting urgent needs, such as preventing civilian atrocities; another said these should be post-war concerns for political leaders. Others spoke of a need to start now, so that the groundwork is in place for reforms after the war is over.^[81]

This uncertainty impeded discussion of whether the Yemeni military should remain centralized, or if it would better serve the country and its citizens to decentralize it to the governorate level, with an ability for the central authorities to summon forces for national crises. Decentralizing the armed forces sparked interest when first broached as part of a discussion on integrating fighters. A proposal brought forward called for establishing reserve forces at the governorate level under the command of the local government. Fighters from any armed group could enlist in the reserve force of their home governorates. The local government would fill its needs for active-duty security personnel from those reserve forces, with remaining reserve members required to report to the base on weekends for professional and vocational training; during the rest of the week they could work in the civilian economy. The proposal envisioned a guaranteed basic military salary to reserve personnel to provide them with the safety net to exit armed groups.^[82] When initially discussed, a YIF participant noted that many of the

^[80] The term "power elites" is used for the purposes of this paper to denote the segment of the Yemeni elite who are involved in extorting benefits from the state. The power elites in Sana'a rarely included top government officials such as the prime minister or members of the cabinet, but did include many prominent sheikhs of the northern highlands who were able to secure economic concessions, licenses and monopolies in recent decades.

^[81] "Developing National Security/Defense Strategies," YIF session, Stockholm, June 18, 2022.

^[82] The proposal was laid out in the first YIF Security session, "Integrating Fighters," June 18, 2022, and discussed in various sessions throughout the forum.

laws that would allow for decentralizing the security sector are already in place; they just have to be operationalized.^[83] However, he, like others in the later session, said that political negotiations would impact the structuring of military and security apparatuses.^[84]

In an effort to identify the needs that national security strategies must take into account, participants briefly discussed the nature of existing and anticipated threats, noting two broad categories: low-tech and high-tech.

- Short-term threats are mainly internal, with external threats having internal dimensions;
- Pirates, smugglers and other less advanced threats will require land and sea border security;
- Threats to infrastructure and resources must be guarded against; and
- Strategies should account for technologically advanced threats, which may be mitigated by diplomatic tools such as mutual defense treaties and alliances, and can be countered by asymmetrical defense methods and the massive mobilization of citizens.

As Security sessions progressed, there was a growing ease in discussing alternative military structures and steps toward national defense and security strategies, such as developing criteria for employing security-sector personnel in preparation for a political deal. One speaker suggested continuing discussions on more concise questions after the YIF so a collective vision for moving forward could develop.^[85] Defining concepts and framing them more clearly, and drafting potential steps with options at each juncture, could ease uncertainty and misunderstanding in future dialogues.

Ensuring Civilian Control

Yemen has existing constitutional provisions and laws regarding management and accountability of the military and security sectors, which have not necessarily been enforced.^[86] While civilian oversight of the military is constitutionally enshrined, and would remain so under the draft Constitution of the 2012-14 transitional era, security oversight varies. Local authorities are responsible for some security functions; others are accountable to national authorities and subject to various provisions aimed at protecting against their misuse, though these laws have not necessarily been operationalized.

YIF participants, working from the assumption of continuing civilian oversight of the military in the post-war era, considered the sort of accountability and transparency mechanisms needed to ensure Yemen's leadership makes good military and security decisions.

^[83] "Integrating Fighters," YIF roundtable discussion, Stockholm, June 18, 2022.

^[84] Participant, "Integrating Fighters," YIF roundtable discussion, Stockholm, June 18, 2022.

^[85] Facilitator, "Developing National Security/Defense Strategies," YIF session, Stockholm, June 18, 2022.

^[86] Two participants, "Civilian Control and Accountability in the Security Sector," YIF panel discussion, Stockholm, June 19, 2022.

A panelist emphasized the significance of wisely managed military-security apparatuses, given how critical they are to providing the stability needed for economic health. He noted reform is needed – long- and short-term – to end rampant corruption, cronyism and the “extreme centralization” that turned the security sector into a sword wielded by Yemen’s leadership for its own protection.^[87] Panelists emphasized that reforms can and should begin immediately; one observed that some commanders appear concerned about abuses and how their political parties’ reputations may be affected, disciplining offenders with jail or loss of rank.

Various participants in the session suggested short- and medium-term organizational reforms and ways to improve accountability:

- Strengthen retention criteria;
- Build transparency into reforms (in budgets and processes);
- Promote early retirement and job rotation;
- Emphasize community policing;
- Urgently address fragmentation in the security sector that has left women especially vulnerable to sexual harassment, with the longer-term aim of building a sector that serves and protects communities;
- Seek out examples of local civil society improvements to security, such as the work in Taiz on community safety programs, and strive to replicate them elsewhere;
- Fund CSOs’ programs related to accountability, such as those providing legal aid to prisoners;
- Transition from the idea of national security to human security, or work out a way to address both; this will require focused dialogue between civil society organizations and military and security organizations;
- Address the issue of irregular salaries (see below: ‘[Paying Fighters as a Means of Accountability, Preparation for Peacetime](#)’); and
- Address the issue of untrained civilians who were recruited during the war to fill officers’ ranks, with no experience or awareness of laws or discipline.

^[87] Participant, “Civilian Control and Accountability in the Security Sector,” YIF panel discussion, Stockholm, June 19, 2022.

A comprehensive approach to governance based on the rule of law requires a level of political will that does not currently exist. Still, panelists discussed the importance of envisioning how the civil state could look, given that the laws and constitutional provisions governing accountability within the military and security sectors have not yet been translated on the ground. Views varied on how specific guidance should be with regard to civil-military relations.

Another panel, “Central Questions in the Security Sector,” took a more macro-level look at security sector reform, with the aim of spurring ideas that, in time, would create a balance in which the army is just one of many components interacting to provide security and stability. One speaker emphasized the need to restore a national identity, not only institutions, if there is to be security. Another spoke of addressing what he described as a massive overlap between the security and military sectors, suggesting separating their functions but unifying their commands. Others discussed the still-unfulfilled military requirements of the November 2019 Riyadh Agreement, including the possibility that any peace deal would meet a similar fate — a general fulfillment of political requirements, but a failure to integrate military structures.^[88]

The broad nature of the discussion did not lend itself to specifics on the sort of army that Yemen needs, but one participant suggested it be small — perhaps 40,000 strong — and that resources be allocated elsewhere. Another, a military officer, said a military doctrine is needed to guide its purpose.^[89] Further dialogue on national and governorate-level needs could clarify what military resources would be required for stability and security in post-war Yemen.

Integrating Fighters

Stabilizing Yemen’s armed forces and reducing their further fragmentation requires charting a path for the integration of fighters affiliated with the various warring parties. A point of disagreement on the subject concerned the number of people in the military-security sector and how many fighters will need to be integrated.^[90] Some insisted that when “ghost soldiers” are removed from the equation — those existing only on paper for salary purposes or to bolster a commander’s negotiating position — the size of the security sector is much more manageable from a payroll perspective. However, the number of ghost soldiers is not known.^[91]

A lively Q&A session involving participants with an array of expertise and perspectives — a former military commander, an intelligence official, a university professor, a chief editor, a security sector reform expert, a sitting judge — was especially concerned with the threat ideologically motivated fighters pose and the challenges of rehabilitating them. Ideas to overcome this included:

^[88] “Central Questions in the Security Sector,” YIF panel discussion, Stockholm, June 19, 2022.

^[89] “Central Questions in the Security Sector,” YIF panel discussion, Stockholm, June 19, 2022.

^[90] Published estimates in the past year have varied widely, with figures from 800,000 to 2 million, including part-time and “ghost” personnel: Alkhatib Alrawhani, “Public service jobs in Yemen: A legacy of conflict that politicians ignore,” Almasdar Online, March 2, 2022, <https://al-masdaronline.net/national/920>, and Yezid Sayigh, “Stabilizing Armed Groups in Yemen: Payment Scheme,” OSESGY, September 2021 (confidential paper).

^[91] A YIF participant in the panel discussion, “Civilian Control and Accountability in the Security Sector,” June 19, 2022, spoke of one military region having 400,000 troops on the payroll and estimated only 20,000 on the ground.

- A national rehabilitation fund;
- Teaching fighters vocational skills;
- Creating economic opportunities to absorb fighters and make it easier to regulate their numbers to suit security-sector needs; and
- Channeling some former fighters into the military engineering corps, which could play an important role in reconstruction.

To facilitate progress on such ideas, clear criteria for integration into the ministries of Interior and Defense are needed, along with accurate numbers of actual fighters.^[92] Planning for the costs of such measures, many of which are typically part of post-settlement Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) processes, will require coordination with donors as well as economic experts. As various participants noted, steady salaries provide the key incentive, and the state payroll would likely need to expand substantially to absorb fighters, at least temporarily.

During the roundtable YIF participants explored what groundwork could be laid and potential paths for integrating fighters that do not require waiting for a final settlement or a stable economy, both of which are among the conditions of a traditional DDR process. These more immediate opportunities focused on:

- Instituting an interim payment scheme that supplements or replaces the irregular paychecks many fighters receive,^[93] without waiting for a peace deal, as a way to begin integration and impose a degree of accountability; and
- Planning for the integration of fighters in tandem with any decentralization of Yemen's armed forces.

Paying Fighters as a Means of Accountability, Preparation for Peacetime

Interim payment schemes provide fighters with regulated, conditioned payments with the aim of incentivizing accountability. When used within a DDR process, after armed groups have disbanded or fighting has ceased, they allow former fighters to be paid regularly while giving the civilian economy time to develop so it can absorb former combatants. However, instituting such a scheme prior to a settlement could help rein in Yemen's armed groups by payments being conditional on the proper treatment of civilians or on refraining from interacting with extremist groups.^[94]

^[92] Participant, "Integrating Fighters", YIF roundtable discussion, Stockholm, June 18, 2022.

^[93] Many fighters report receiving one month's salary only two or three times per year. Gregory Johnsen, Casey Coombs, Ghaidaa al-Rashidy, Manal Ghanem and Salah Ali Salah, "Prospects for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) in Yemen," Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, unpublished.

^[94] Participant, "Integrating Fighters" roundtable discussion, June 18, 2022.

Engaging the security-military sector and civil society in working groups could help ensure any interim payment scheme meets diverse local and regional needs in terms of standalone programs specifically for fighters and community-based approaches.

Integrating Fighters into a Framework Tailored to Governorate Needs

Participants discussed how to encourage fighters to return to work in their governorates, with the idea of creating opportunities in civil defense and local security generating interest. While there was no consensus on the idea of governorate-level reserve forces as a complement to a small national army, engendering some degree of decentralization was viewed as beneficial to prospects for integrating fighters.

Such forces could be trained to respond to natural disasters and security issues, but each governorate's personnel needs would vary and the nature of such forces' training would be region-specific. For example, densely populated rugged highlands would require vastly different structures and approaches than sparsely populated lowland areas. Assessing individual governorates' personnel needs for such structures could begin immediately. If an interim payment scheme is implemented ahead of any peace settlement, then, as a participant noted, it could be used to begin testing the idea of some degree of decentralization of military and security forces along with other longer-term strategies and frameworks.

Integrating fighters will require a short-term expansion of the security sector that, especially because of Yemen's humanitarian and development needs, cannot be permanent. Decision-makers should expect criticism from the outside when it expands and from inside when it shrinks, a YIF participant said, adding that managing the expectations of fighters, society and external donors will be crucial.^[95]

^{95]} Participant, "Developing National Security/Defense Strategies," YIF session, Stockholm, June 18, 2022.

CONCLUSION

Since the war began, the voices of Yemeni citizens, analysts and political stakeholders have been marginalized in international mediation efforts, which instead have been largely shaped by the interests of regional and international actors. What has been lost, then, is a deep understanding of the conflict's dynamics and with it an ability to create implementable agreements. Within each of the themes considered at the YIF, participants began to sort what could be best addressed within the formal political process, when and how Yemeni-led processes may be more successful, and what measures can be taken ahead of a political settlement to improve Yemenis' lives now and to prepare for the immediate post-war period.

That process played out across the themes. It meant looking at the applicability of local mediation methods to elements of a transitional justice and reconciliation framework. It prompted civilian and military actors to think creatively about how a post-war military structure would need to look in order to provide security and stability, with its future personnel drawn from competing armed groups loyal to at least three regional powers. It led Yemeni bankers to work together on concrete steps to de-escalate the conflict between the CBY in Aden and Sana'a, and identify where they would require international support. Political leaders considered together how to influence the peace process through the newly established PLC and ensure that the war-focused presidential council does not neglect immediate civilian needs. Civil society actors and Track II organizations discussed the need to bring decision-making closer to the local level, with meaningful local involvement in planning to ensure programs' relevancy.

The 2022 YIF was conceived as a model for future platforms for Yemeni perspectives to be heard and incorporated into formal settlement processes. Work developing and refining the outcomes is continuing through follow-up consultations with YIF participants and others. Ultimately, when a final settlement emerges it should be built on a framework shaped by Yemenis, realistic in what it is asking parties to concede and cognizant of the local complexities and interests that would be integral in determining whether the peace is lasting or a prelude to further conflict.

KEY RESULTS

Potential areas for follow-up discussions, research and refinement identified through the YIF sessions:

Political Settlement

- A common vision of a secure future for Yemen, established through dialogue between the warring sides, could facilitate intermediate steps en route to a final settlement.
- For the best chance at security and stability, a settlement agreement must:
 - address the national security concerns of regional powers, especially Saudi Arabia;
 - dismantle non-state forces and require them to give up their weapons;
 - deter external threats by grounding a deal in international law; and
 - be shaped in an inclusive manner, considerate of Yemen's political, societal and regional diversity.
- Tap tribal leaders to document truce violations, secure roads and public spaces, and ensure stability within their local areas. Consult directly with tribal figures on how they can best support peace efforts in local and regional contexts.

Political Life

- Assess changes needed to party leadership, organization and programs in light of the truce and the new PLC governing structure.
- Address the insufficiency of data available for defining the scope of community needs in areas such as electricity and infrastructure.
- Invest in virtual tools for communication between party members and officials in and outside Yemen, and among parties more broadly.
- Address the lack of meaningful representation of women in the political sphere by:
 - assisting women in attaining positions of decision-making authority, locally and nationally;
 - creating zero-tolerance gender discrimination policies to ensure a unified response from civil society to harmful gender-based policies;
 - pressuring the international community to integrate women into decision-making processes in all areas rather than bringing them in only to discuss "women's issues";
 - protecting women peace-builders from security threats; and
 - ensuring wartime gains, such as the broader acceptance of women working outside the home, are not lost when the war ends.
- Address the exclusion of ethnic and religious minorities in political processes by:

- setting up advisory panels on diversity, which can act in a consultative role with UN agencies or others on matters such as ensuring curriculums incorporate a better understanding of Yemen's minority communities;
- reviewing legislation to criminalize racism and discrimination, and ensuring constitutional protections for minorities are included during state-building; and
- establishing a neutral state judicial system, while ensuring access to international courts and laws when discriminatory practices are ignored.
- Improve the selection process for, and diversity of, Track II efforts, and create platforms for Track II organizations that are free from donor pressures or dictates, allowing local groups to coordinate among themselves.
- Initiate strategic planning, training and capacity-building among CSOs that promotes financial independence, prioritizes partnerships, and emphasizes sustainability and alternative funding schemes.
- Encourage Yemeni authorities and the international community to involve local communities in needs assessments and program planning, and to allow for real, rather than symbolic, participation in international political discussions.
- Develop funding strategies and create trade union networks that collectively promote and sustain union activities.

The Southern File

- Convene and support an inclusive intra-southern dialogue with international support to build trust, unite southern factions around common understandings, and address long-term southern Yemeni goals.
- Focus on local control of resources and decentralization, possibly drawing on gains made in the 2013-14 National Dialogue Conference. Toward this end, undertake independent collection and transparent sharing of resource-related data, so potential revenue streams are fully understood.
- Create mechanisms to transition from dominant local groups exerting informal governing authority to formal governance led by the PLC to improve services.
- Advise the PLC on improving living standards and basic services, recognizing this will require ending the free reign of armed groups, building institutions of government and dealing seriously with corruption.

The Economy

- Create an inclusive mechanism to engage key stakeholders and generate political buy-in for a three-pronged banking initiative, drafted by YIF participants primarily from Yemen's banking sector, to address central bank divisions, the currency crisis and liquidity issues.
- Empower the private sector by directly confronting barriers to international trade and obstacles to domestic commerce by:
 - expanding operations at the air and sea ports in Al-Mahra governorate and in Mukalla, Hadramawt;
 - resuming large-scale overland trade with Saudi Arabia and Oman; and
 - opening, rebuilding and maintaining roads along key trade routes, which will require support from the international community.
- Consider, through further research and consultations, where and how best to:
 - invest in alternative energy production;
 - improve access to microfinance opportunities;
 - engage the Yemeni diaspora to help reverse the “brain drain” the country has experienced during the war; and
 - redirect development policies toward improving productivity in agriculture, fisheries and other food-related sectors.
- In support of development policies, address water scarcity by shifting to rain-fed, fast-maturing crops less impacted by climate change and enforcing environmental protection policies aimed at preventing the depletion and contamination of water basins.

Reconciliation & Justice

- Explore ways to effectively engage in and coordinate efforts by CSOs, youth and women to actively lobby the UN special envoy's office for support on inclusion of justice and reconciliation issues in the formal settlement process. This exploration could be done in conjunction with CSOs' planning to promote activities to build tolerance and cohesion.
- Support and promote artistic efforts to draw attention to the impact of war on ordinary people and memorialize civilians' experiences.
- Take a victim-centered approach that combines formal justice with reconciliation to ensure accountability.
- Seek international funding to offset the costs of documenting violations, providing mental health support and meeting other locally determined needs.
- Capitalize on the interest among youths and women to advance reconciliation and justice, and ensure support is not only focused on city centers.

- Create networks to adapt effective local mediation techniques and channel them for use in other communities or nationally.
- Identify potentially transferable elements of transitional justice frameworks used by other countries.

Security

- Refine ideas on decentralizing the armed forces, integrating fighters and providing basic salaries by establishing reserve forces under local control at the governorate level. Options exist at each juncture, which may vary based on regional needs, and should be fully considered in focused research and consultations. Elements to explore include:
 - fighters from any armed group could enlist in their home governorate's reserve force;
 - local government security personnel could be drawn from reserve forces, with remaining reservists working in the civilian economy while receiving professional and vocational training;
 - some former fighters could be channeled to the military engineering corps, helping it to play an important role in reconstruction;
 - a national fund to help rehabilitate fighters;
 - a guaranteed basic military salary as a safety net so reserve personnel are financially able to leave armed groups;
 - how to work with the Interior and Defense ministries on clear criteria for integration and accurate numbers of actual fighters; and
 - when and how to engage donors and economic experts given that absorbing fighters is likely to significantly expand the state payroll, at least initially.
- Reform the Yemeni armed forces to address the security sector fragmentation that has made communities less safe. Possible short- and medium-term steps toward accountability and professionalism include:
 - instituting an interim payment scheme to supplement or replace the irregular paychecks many fighters receive so integration and a degree of accountability can begin;
 - strengthening retention criteria;
 - building transparency into reforms to budgets and processes;
 - promoting early retirement and job rotation;
 - emphasizing community policing;
 - seeking out examples of local civil society improvements to security, such as Taiz's community safety programs, and striving to replicate them;

- funding CSOs' accountability-related programs, such as those providing legal aid to prisoners;
- transitioning toward prioritizing human security, through focused dialogue between civil society and military-security organizations; and
- addressing the issue of untrained civilians who were recruited to fill officers' ranks, without knowledge of laws or discipline.



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