



YEMEN  
INTERNATIONAL FORUM  
منتدى اليمن الدولي

# Yemen International Forum 2025

Dialogue for a Stable Yemen and a  
Secure Region

Amman, Jordan



## YEMEN INTERNATIONAL FORUM منتدى اليمن الدولي

*The Yemen International Forum (YIF) is a civil-society-led peace conference organized by the Sana'a Center. The Forum provides a multistakeholder platform for Yemeni-Yemeni dialogue and for regional and international engagement in policy dialogues that support overcoming the current crises and pave the way to a peaceful, prosperous, and just Yemen. These Yemeni-Yemeni dialogues are intended to complement the formal UN-led peace process and Track II initiatives, fostering an inclusive and sustained dialogue process.*

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*Cover photo: YIF participants on the concluding day of the Forum, February 18, 2025.*



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## About the YIF

The Yemen International Forum (YIF) is the largest and most inclusive platform for policy dialogues related to Yemen's conflict and ongoing peace process. Unique in its approach, it serves as a continuous civil society-led peace initiative, providing a space for Yemeni, regional, and international engagement to overcome current crises and pave the way to a peaceful, prosperous, and just Yemen. Since its launch in 2022, the YIF has convened over 500 political representatives, policymakers, peace mediators, experts, and civil society representatives and contributed to multi-thematic peace initiatives, ranging from political and civic engagement to transitional justice, economic de-escalation, and the environment-conflict nexus.

As part of the YIF, consultations with Yemeni experts and stakeholders and extensive regional and international shuttle diplomacy are conducted throughout the year. In parallel, Yemeni-led knowledge production related to the Forum's themes and outcomes seeks to inform domestic, regional, and international policy. These Yemeni-Yemeni dialogues, regional and international discussions, and policy publications complement the formal UN-led peace process and Track II initiatives, with the overall goal of fostering an inclusive and sustained dialogue process.



# Executive Summary

***“There is no alternative to peace, and there is no alternative to peace that is not fully supported and constructed by the people of Yemen.”<sup>[1]</sup>***

The third Yemen International Forum (YIF III) took place in Amman from February 16-18, 2025, gathering more than 300 participants to discuss peace prospects and stability in Yemen. Since the outbreak of the war on Gaza in October 2023, Yemen has been tested in myriad ways. Attacks on the Red Sea and the rising prominence of the Houthis within the “Axis of Resistance” have thrust Yemen into regional conflict, undermining hope for an end to its decade-long war. Since the last YIF held in the Hague in June 2023, where discussions centered on cautious optimism for a potential peace settlement, Yemen has undertaken a dramatic U-turn. Peace efforts have taken a backseat while international attention has increasingly turned toward containing the threat posed by the Houthis. Today, Yemen is grappling with renewed military escalations, worsening humanitarian conditions, and a deepening economic crisis that is putting immense pressure on an already overburdened population.

Amid a stagnating peace process and faltering political dialogue in Yemen, YIF III served as a timely platform to reinvigorate constructive dialogue, while underscoring the fact that peace and stability in Yemen are not only vital for the prosperity of Yemenis but also for the security of the region overall. Over three days, Yemen’s leading political and civil leaders, including politicians, tribal figures, women, minorities, youth, and civil society activists, convened alongside regional and international actors and UN representatives to explore ways to steer the country back toward peace. A rich agenda totalling 29 sessions focused on six key priorities that form the foundational pillars for lasting peace and stability in Yemen: political cohesion, regional engagement, economic recovery, transitional justice, inclusive civic space, and environmental sustainability.

The outcomes of the discussions outlined below, explored in greater detail in the full report, take on even more significance as this report is being published. With regional military tensions at an all-time high, the threat of the Houthis dragging Yemen further into conflict, and widespread protests against living conditions in government-controlled areas, the firsthand perspective of Yemen’s civil and political class on the trajectory of their country offers timely, invaluable insight.

**1. Political cohesion** was identified as the top priority in steering Yemen toward stability, with the role of the Presidential Leadership Council (PLC) coming under scrutiny. Three years since its formation, the PLC is widely regarded as having failed to meet the expectations of the Yemeni people, and struggles with a lack of unified political will, competing agendas, and the absence of a cohesive national project. Civil and political actors attending YIF III expressed an urgent need for serious PLC reform to improve governance, prioritize merit-based technocratic appointments in key public service posts, and combat widespread corruption that has severely undermined public and donor confidence in the government. While many agreed that restoring the state must come to the forefront of any separate political project, the centrality of the ‘Southern Question’ within any government reforms was emphasized again by the southern parties attending this year. YIF sessions also brought together local authorities from different governorates in Yemen to exchange good practices in local governance.

<sup>[1]</sup> Jeanette Seppen, Dutch Ambassador to Yemen, at the Opening Session of YIF III, February 16, 2025.

- 2. Geopolitical interdependencies and regional engagement** discussions expanded the YIF's scope this year to address Yemen's internationalized crisis in the wake of the Houthis' Red Sea attacks. Broader participation from the region (including Oman, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt, Jordan, Sudan, Somalia, and Ethiopia), as well as from Europe, the United States, and the UK facilitated more constructive dialogue on the current trajectory of peace and stability in Yemen, the militarization of the Red Sea, the rise of non-state armed actors, and the increase in cross-border security threats. Yemeni experts cautioned that the current security-focused approach to Yemen, devoid of a more comprehensive strategy addressing the root causes of instability, is misguided. They emphasized that securing stability in Yemen— and in turn the region — requires uniting international efforts to support economic stability and good governance in Yemen, expanding diplomatic and regional coordination, protecting the country's civil society, addressing Yemenis' demands for justice, and ensuring they are driving decision-making about their future.
- 3. Economic recovery** again commanded urgent attention as the effects of a nearly decade-long struggle over Yemen's economy continue to test the population's resilience. The decline in foreign aid, the depletion of government resources, and the repercussions of the US Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) redesignation of the Houthis have raised concerns about a potential worsening of Yemen's humanitarian crisis. Representatives from the finance and private sector, oil and gas experts, economists, diplomats, and representatives of leading development organizations convened at the YIF to discuss the current economic trajectory and strategize measures to alleviate ongoing economic shocks. Among the most pressing priorities addressed was the need to maintain donor engagement in the face of detrimental cuts and reductions in aid for Yemen, mitigate the financial fallout from US sanctions, resume oil and gas exports— the Yemeni government's primary source of income, and reform public revenue mechanisms to improve the delivery of public services to the people.
- 4. Transitional Justice** lies at the heart of the Yemen International Forum and is its flagship initiative. Launched in 2022 at the first YIF in Stockholm, what began as an effort to raise awareness on the urgent need to bring justice to the victims of Yemen's war is now evolving into an ambitious roadmap for transitional justice in Yemen. Significant breakthroughs were achieved this year. War victims, political actors, tribal leaders, civil society, and local and international human rights bodies were convened to strategize on a path forward collectively. Discussions examined foundational pillars for a roadmap, including mechanisms for including Yemen's victims, drawing examples from cases like Colombia, securing the buy-in of political actors to seriously address transitional justice, initiating judicial reforms as a first step to facilitate the process, and exploring the integration of customary laws for a more localized approach.
- 5. Inclusion and civic space** were particularly emotive discussions at the YIF this year, with the stakes never being so high for Yemen's civil society. The Forum took place against the backdrop of a brutal crackdown on civil society actors in Houthi-controlled areas, the echoes of which reverberated throughout the event. Many participants attending the YIF lost colleagues who have died in the Houthis' prisons, been detained themselves, or declared "enemies of the state," or knew loved ones who had been arrested. Civic space in Yemen is rapidly eroding, not only in Houthi-controlled areas but across the country. Today, civil society organizations (CSOs) nationwide face difficulties in obtaining licenses, require multiple layers of approval, and encounter inconsistent regulations across different authorities—difficulties that are even more pronounced for women-led organizations or those focused on women's issues. Reviving Yemen's civil society demands bold political will from the Yemeni government and meaningful, sustained support from the international community.

**6. Strategies for addressing Yemen's water and environmental crises** were discussed at the YIF, as communities across Yemen have increasingly felt the impact of environmental degradation while grappling with the ramifications of war. Water scarcity was given consistent and focused attention this year, reflecting the urgency of addressing the threats to one of the most water-scarce countries in the world. Two topics were introduced at YIF III: a just energy transition focused on renewables and green transitional justice. Their inclusion reflects the growing recognition that environmental sustainability must be anchored in principles of social justice, accountability and human rights. By exploring these interlinked challenges, the Forum underscored the potential for a sustainable green future in Yemen, where the shift to renewable energy is grounded in principles of equity and environmental protection, and where it is acknowledged that environmental harms and lack of access to water are also human rights violations inseparable from broader struggles for justice and dignity.

# YIF Recommendations

## Political Cohesion

- Implement urgent internal reforms within the PLC to improve governance.
- Take concrete and consensus-based actions on the Southern Question to ensure its central role in peace negotiations.
- Invest in and strengthen local governance to support the delivery of essential services to the Yemeni people.

## Regional Engagement

- Move away from short-term thinking to a long-term, holistic strategy for Yemen that addresses the root causes of instability.
- Strengthen regional and international collaboration to de-escalate the militarization of the Red Sea and reduce the influence of non-state armed actors.
- Consider greater economic integration of Yemen within the GCC as a long-term strategy that supports Yemen's development and recovery, while contributing to regional stability.

## Economic Recovery

- Maintain donor presence and engagement in Yemen to avert a worsening humanitarian crisis and align funding with sustainable, locally led strategies for longer-term impact.
- Mitigate the impact of FTO-related sanctions to ensure uninterrupted banking activity, humanitarian access and delivery, as well as the survival of local businesses.
- Establish a track of dialogue and technical support to resume oil and gas production in Yemen.
- Develop a unified, transparent, accountable public revenue management system to reduce fragmentation, curb corruption, and improve resource allocation.

## Transitional Justice

- Establish a mechanism to ensure that Yemen's victims are at the forefront of peace and transitional justice efforts.
- Engage political actors in transitional justice to ensure political buy-in and work toward aligning the approaches of political parties to transitional justice principles.
- Prioritize judicial reform as the basis for initiating credible justice processes to address war crimes and human rights violations.
- Build on Yemeni customary laws that embody reconciliation practices to localize transitional justice mechanisms.

## Inclusion and Civic Space

- Strengthen international advocacy efforts for the protection of civil society in Yemen.
- Enhance legal and protection mechanisms for civil society workers and their families.
- Improve the operational environment of civil society organizations by strengthening government-CSO collaboration.
- Advance and support a coordinated strategy to promote and protect women's rights through unified advocacy.

## Sustainable Strategies for Addressing Yemen's Environmental Crisis

- Adopt an integrated and inclusive water governance framework that combines modern and traditional practices and ensures equitable, transparent access to resources.
- Lay the groundwork for a just and inclusive energy transition in Yemen through decentralized solutions and strong community participation.
- Integrate the concept of green transitional justice into Yemen's transitional justice frameworks to effectively address environmental harms and support ecological recovery.





YIF attendee engages with a panel during Q&A, February 16, 2025

## Introduction

More than 300 participants gathered in Amman from February 16-18, 2025, to attend the third Yemen International Forum (YIF III), the largest annual gathering focused on peacebuilding in Yemen. Over three days, Yemeni political leaders, tribal figures, women, minorities, youth, and civil society activists, alongside regional and international actors, UN representatives, and experts, engaged in candid discussions aimed at restoring peace and stability in Yemen and preventing the escalating threat of renewed conflict.

Participants convened this year amidst a dramatically altered political landscape in the region as a result of the war on Gaza and Houthi attacks in the Red Sea. The optimism for a peace settlement that characterized the first two YIF forums, held in Stockholm (2022) and the Hague (2023), has been undermined by Yemen's entanglement in wider regional conflict. Amid the ongoing tensions, YIF III provided Yemeni stakeholders with a platform to take stock of the recent developments, advance efforts to find a locally-anchored resolution to Yemen's conflict, and engage with regional actors, including neighboring Red Sea states, to collaboratively strategize on lasting stability in Yemen and the broader region.

Twenty-nine sessions were conducted at YIF III, including public plenaries, roundtables, workshops, and closed-door discussions held under the Chatham House Rule, along with over 15 side meetings. Under the slogan “Dialogue for a Stable Yemen and a Secure Region,” discussions addressed six main themes: Political Cohesion, Geopolitical Interdependencies and Regional Engagement; Economic Recovery; Transitional Justice; Inclusion and Civic Space; and Environmental Sustainability. Three main objectives guided the Forum:

- **Objective 1: Strengthened Political Cohesion, Inclusion, and Constructive Partnerships within Yemen.**
- **Objective 2: Regional Engagement with Yemen that Addresses Security and Economic Interdependencies.**
- **Objective 3: Strengthened Multilateral Support for a Comprehensive Peace Process in Yemen.**

This report summarizes the rich discussions held during YIF III and presents recommendations that reflect collective insights and priorities identified during the Forum. To provide a comprehensive overview, the report is organized around the six key themes of this year's YIF, though these were deeply interconnected and often intersected during the Forum's discussions.





Speakers at the YIF panel, "Three Years Since the Formation of the Presidential Leadership Council: What Has Changed and What Needs to Be Done?" February 16, 2025.

## 1. Political Cohesion

Deep political fragmentation and divisions among Yemen's key political components have hindered efforts to end Yemen's war, contributing to widespread insecurity, weakened state institutions, and the near-collapse of basic services. Rebuilding Yemenis' trust in the government underpinned nearly every discussion at the YIF aimed at charting a path forward, with good governance recognized as the foremost priority in steering Yemen toward stability. At the time of writing, Yemen faces the threat of further embroilment in regional war, dwindling aid, and worsening economic conditions driven by prolonged conflict and intensified Houthi economic warfare. Without careful safeguards and mitigation measures, the recent US redesignation of the Houthis as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) and the accompanying sanctions risk deepening the humanitarian crisis. Additionally, ongoing Israeli military actions in response to Houthi attacks against Israel further destabilize an already fragile situation. While it remains unclear how these changes will impact the political dynamics on the ground, the events bring into focus the role of the Government of Yemen in guiding the country toward peace, long-term security, and development. As dynamics on the ground continue to shift, the insightful discussions held at the YIF on political reform and governance are timely, offering invaluable insights from Yemen's civil and political class and a firsthand perspective.

## PLC Reform

***“Who is ruling Aden?  
Where is governance?  
No livelihoods,  
healthcare services,  
potable water, basic  
services, what  
governance is this.”*** <sup>[2]</sup>

What is impeding unity within Yemen's government? What are the key challenges, and where can opportunities for reform arise? These were some of the questions addressed at YIF III, with the role of the Presidential Leadership Council (PLC) brought under increased scrutiny this year. In 2022, President Abdo Rabbu Mansour Hadi transferred power to an eight-man body in an effort to overcome Yemen's political impasse. The PLC “helped move the political actors on the ground to formal leadership, and this led to many positive developments,” said

Judge Akram al-Ameri, Secretary-General of the Hadramawt Inclusive Conference and a vice chair of the PLC's Consultation and Reconciliation Commission, noting how competing armed factions controlling parts of government-aligned territory were brought into the government fold through the PLC. Almost three years after its establishment, participants affiliated with representatives of the PLC and experts at the YIF acknowledged that the council had failed to meet the people's expectations. Since its formation, the body has struggled with a lack of unified political will, competing agendas among its key components, and the absence of a cohesive national project.

Bearing the brunt of inefficiency and division within the government are ultimately the Yemeni people, who continue to struggle, deprived of salaries and essential services, including electricity. To gain a clearer understanding of governance dynamics and institutional realities on the ground, some YIF sessions focused on the role of local governance. Others addressed the significant decline in oil and gas, and tax revenues, which has resulted in increased government budget deficits. While many factors are at play, such as the Houthi blockade on oil exports and the shortage of public revenue, widespread corruption has had catastrophic consequences for public and donor confidence in the government and eroded people's faith in the state.

Civil and political actors expressed an urgent need for serious reform of the PLC to improve governance. They called for prioritizing merit-based technocratic appointments in the government instead of relying on the current political quota system. Reform, participants urged, should incorporate stronger oversight and anti-corruption measures. Securing stability in the interim capital was deemed essential for the effective operation of the government and parliament. “Aden has not been prepared or truly rehabilitated so it can be an interim capital where state institutions can return,” said Abdelrazzaq al-Hijri, acting Secretary-General of the Islah party and an advisor to the President of Yemen, highlighting the irony of a government almost entirely operating from the capitals of neighboring states and noting the reluctance of the political elite to return to Aden. The government's Joint Operations Authority, argued Al-Hijri, must also take a more active role in countering the Houthi threat by improving coordination among various armed forces and, at the very least, ensuring strategic alignment.

The perception of the PLC as a body formed and announced outside of Yemen, and mirroring regional interests rather than local ones, was firmly held among participants, who called for an overdue prioritization of national reconciliation. Launching a Yemeni-Yemeni dialogue to discuss political reform was considered vital for resolving tensions between the various political factions, improving the government's unity, and restoring its legitimacy in the eyes of its people.

<sup>[2]</sup> Participant during YIF session, “Sharing Good Governance Best Practices: A Dialogue with Representatives from Local Authorities,” February 16, 2025.

## The Southern Question

***“The South cannot be treated like any other regional issue... at the end of the day, the South was an independent state that sought unification with the North, and therefore it cannot be put in the same framework as that of other regions.”***<sup>[3]</sup>

While many agreed that restoring the Yemeni state should be the top priority, the centrality of the Southern Question<sup>[4]</sup> within future government reforms was emphasized again this year. There was a coordinated effort among southern components to highlight the need for a “Special Framework for the Southern Question”<sup>[5]</sup> to be included in any peace process. Discussions focused on translating this framework into a set of consensus-based, actionable measures. These measures are intended to both advance a just resolution to

the Southern Question and strengthen the cohesion of the anti-Houthi political front during any potential political negotiations.

One YIF session dedicated to advancing the framework brought together three main groups: political forces calling for the independence of South Yemen—chief among them the Southern Transitional Council (STC)—alongside other Southern Movement factions, including the Hadramawt Inclusive Conference; emerging entities such as the Shabwa Advisory Council as well as major national parties such as the Yemeni Congregation for Reform (Islah) and the Yemeni Socialist Party.

Southern diversity was highlighted as a source of strength, with southern politicians calling for continued dialogue on multiple fronts—within and between these groups, as well as with the broader anti-Houthi camp. Both the international community and southern stakeholders emphasized the need for developing a fair and inclusive framework among southern actors, ensuring that the interests of one party do not override those of others. The STC was keen to clarify its position to all parties throughout multiple sessions of the Forum, with its representatives stating that their goal was to “counter the Houthi threat” and promote southern unity “from Al-Mahra to Bab al-Mandab,” while affirming the STC’s role as a “political umbrella” for the various southern components.

Although it remains too early to assess how the rapid political developments on the ground may affect the goals of the different southern parties, the Southern Question continues to be a central issue in shaping the contours of any final settlement, with direct implications for the future structure and governance of the state. These in-depth, inter-party discussions held annually at the Yemen International Forum—alongside ongoing consultations—are part of a broader objective to build preemptive consensus around a comprehensive framework for the Southern Question. This consensus aims to ensure that the southern perspective is effectively represented in the negotiating strategy of Yemen’s internationally recognized government in any future peace process.

<sup>[3]</sup> Participant during a YIF session addressing the Southern Question, February 16, 2025.

<sup>[4]</sup> The term “Southern Question” is frequently referenced in analyses regarding the political objectives of Southern parties in Yemen. This term has gained popularity through various reports, including one published by the International Crisis Group (ICG). See: “Breaking Point? Yemen’s Southern Question,” ICG, October 20, 2011, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/yemen/breaking-point-yemen-s-southern-question>

<sup>[5]</sup> The “Special Framework for the Southern Question” is a political concept that was referenced in the outcomes of the Yemeni-Yemeni consultations held in Riyadh in 2022. It reflects a national recognition by Yemeni political forces of the need to ensure representation of the Southern Question in any Yemeni peace process through a dedicated political framework. While the concept of a “Special Framework for the Southern Question” is acknowledged by Yemeni political parties, it remains subject to disagreement over its definition. Discussions are ongoing to reach consensus on how to formally incorporate it into future UN-led peace processes, and how to translate it programmatically into the negotiating policy of the internationally recognized government.



## The Role of Local Councils

**“There is a pressing need for monitoring and oversight of governance practices.”<sup>[6]</sup>**

Representatives from local authorities in Shabwa, Hadramawt, Al-Mahra, Taiz, Aden, and Marib came together at YIF III to share their experiences in local governance. Without a functioning state, local authorities in Yemen have stepped in to keep essential services going, demonstrating remarkable resourcefulness. Successful practices were shared, including increased youth involvement in local councils and measures taken to keep schools, universities, and hospitals operational in the face of minimal support from the central government and declining public revenue. Although local authorities have made significant strides in preventing the collapse of key local institutions, they expressed common challenges, not least diminishing sources of revenue, the limited capacity of local councils' staff, and their inability to adequately mitigate the severe impact of the war with limited resources.

While the adaptability and resilience of local authorities were viewed as a positive development, some participants argued that this has proven to be a double-edged sword, given the arbitrary nature with which public revenue is allocated and the fact that the local authorities lack the necessary oversight. One participant noted how local authorities impose their own taxes, leading to inconsistencies in tax regulation across governorates. Another highlighted the need for a new law for local authorities. “We desperately need a local administration law according to a special regulation. We are losing control. If we continue to rely on self-governance, we are heading toward total state disintegration,” one participant warned. “[T]he problem is not with the law but rather a political one,” contended another. “The PLC has neither supported local governance nor promoted a central [governing] law. It has no political vision, no strategy, and the political forces are weak. It is a political issue rather than a legal one.”

<sup>[6]</sup> Participant during YIF session “Sharing Good Governance Best Practices: A Dialogue with Representatives from Local Authorities,” February 16, 2025.

# 1.1 YIF Recommendations for Political Cohesion

## **1. Implement urgent internal reforms within the PLC to improve governance.**

- Establish a shared vision prioritizing the restoration of the Yemeni state over narrow political gains.
- Prioritize expertise and merit in government appointments over political quotas.
- Develop precise accountability mechanisms to support and reinforce effective policy implementation.
- Activate the role of oversight institutions such as the Supreme National Authority for Combating Corruption (SNACC) and the Central Organization for Control and Auditing (COCA) to combat corruption effectively.
- Define a comprehensive legal framework for the PLC to ensure an effective decision-making mechanism.
- Promote political dialogue among Yemenis to establish local and national legitimacy, which was absent in earlier regionally organized dialogues.

## **2. Support efforts toward a joint military command and operations room.**

- Unify the security and military structures by focusing on coordination under a unified command.
- Operationalize and support the role of Yemen's Joint Operations Authority to better manage and coordinate the various armed groups, thus strengthening state legitimacy.
- Bolster security in Aden to support the government's presence and the convening of parliament.

## **3. Take concrete and consensus-based actions on the Southern Question to ensure its central role in peace negotiations.**

- Formalize a structured, transparent, open-ended dialogue process that integrates the Southern Question into national peace processes.

- Continue to strengthen political consensus among southern parties, reduce fragmentation, and build a unified front to engage with national processes and regional and international stakeholders.
- Determine how the Southern Question will be addressed in future negotiations and draw from past lessons to avoid exclusive peace roadmaps that sideline equitable power-sharing.
- Foster greater regional and international engagement to reinforce the commitment of all parties to address the Southern Question. International and regional actors must be actively involved in supporting the dialogue and helping secure commitments to peace and power-sharing.

## **4. Invest in and strengthen local governance to support the delivery of essential services.**

- Strengthen legal and institutional frameworks around local administration, providing clear regulations on resource allocation, including revenue sharing.
- Develop clear legal frameworks for managing and distributing revenues fairly, ensuring all governorates have the resources needed for essential services like healthcare, education, and security.
- Build the capacity of local government officials, including leadership skills, financial management, and service delivery, while promoting youth leadership and engagement, recognizing their potential to bring fresh perspectives and solutions.



Participants meet and greet ahead of the Opening Session of YIF III, February 16, 2025.

## 2. Geopolitical Interdependencies and Regional Engagement

Long described as “the forgotten war,” Yemen’s conflict has transformed into an internationalized crisis in the wake of attacks against shipping in the Red Sea, drawing unprecedented global attention to the country and prompting international military operations against the Houthis. In response to these events and Yemen’s increased embroilment in regional conflict, this year’s Forum expanded its scope to include geopolitical discussions, ensuring broader YIF participation from the region — Oman, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Sudan, Iran, Somalia, and Ethiopia — as well as international participation from the EU, US, and UK, among others. The Forum served as a crucial platform for Yemeni, regional, and international stakeholders to come together, collectively take stock of the current political shifts stalling Yemen’s peace process, and comprehensively address growing regional threats such as the militarization of the Red Sea, the rise of non-state armed actors, and cross-border security threats. Underpinning such multi-stakeholder dialogue, the first of its kind since the Houthis entered regional conflict after October 7, was the search for more constructive and collaborative international and regional engagement in Yemen.

## New Parameters Post Gaza War

***“The security of the region is based on the security of Yemen... this requires regional cooperation and engagement to end the war and achieve peace in Yemen.”<sup>[7]</sup>***

The Red Sea attacks shook the view that Yemen's conflict would remain contained and not have global repercussions. Since 2023, disruptions to global shipping caused by Houthi attacks in the Red Sea, along with strikes against Israel, have prompted military campaigns targeting Houthi positions in the country, spearheaded by global powers such as the US and UK, as well as Israel. Recent developments have signaled a significant shift in the international approach towards Yemen, as hopes for de-escalation and a peace settlement in Yemen have waned.

Yemeni participants cautioned that the narrow focus on security, however, may be misguided. Precedents from the past decade highlight the limitations of military action when a comprehensive strategy that tackles the root causes of instability is lacking. Yasmeen al-Eryani, the Executive Director for Knowledge Production at the Sana'a Center, described the international response to the Red Sea crisis as ineffective, “characterized by short-sighted responses and limited strategies, and a focus on crisis management over long-term strategy.” She warned that quick fixes are not the solution and that Yemen needs an “inclusive and holistic” solution. Yemeni experts advocated instead for a more considered, multi-pronged approach. This would involve uniting international efforts to support economic stability and good governance, expanding diplomatic and regional coordination, protecting Yemen's active civil society, addressing the Yemeni people's demands for justice, and ensuring that Yemenis are at the forefront of decision-making about the future of their country.

“Time and again, Yemenis from across the country have identified three critical priorities — economic recovery, a nationwide ceasefire, and an inclusive political process,” stated Hans Grundberg, the UN Special Envoy to Yemen, echoing the need to prioritize the perspectives of those most affected by the war in Yemen. Jeanette Seppen, the Dutch Ambassador to Yemen, underscored the significance of inclusivity in shaping a path forward for the country. “Any dialogue on Yemen must be inclusive. Through support for the Yemen International Forum, we aim to ensure that local voices are heard and local priorities are better understood.”

<sup>[7]</sup> Shayea al-Zindani, Yemeni Minister of Foreign Affairs, speaking at the Opening Session of YIF III, February 16, 2025.

## Militarization of the Red Sea and the Rise of Non-State Armed Actors

***“The fantasy that Yemen’s conflict would remain isolated and not have global repercussions was shattered by the Red Sea attacks...what’s happening in Gaza, although distant, affects Yemen, and what is happening in the Red Sea impacts Norway.”***<sup>[8]</sup>

The impact of the Houthi attacks against commercial ships in the Red Sea has spread beyond neighboring countries, affecting global commercial interests. In response, costly multinational military operations have been launched in the past two years, including Operation Prosperity Guardian, Operation Poseidon Archer, and Operation Aspides. Following the YIF III, another campaign, Operation Rough Rider, led by the US and launched between March and May 2025, expanded airstrikes against Houthi military targets, personnel, and infrastructure. Several military initiatives have

long existed to address piracy in the maritime chokepoint. But coordination remains fragmented, and the role of littoral states in safeguarding the Red Sea remains inconsistent. Arab states have been reluctant to join new Western-led operations. Notably, Egypt, historically one of the most significant naval presences in the Red Sea, withdrew from the area after the Camp David Accords in the late 1970s. Although it is one of the littoral states most affected, it lacks a comprehensive policy for protecting the Red Sea.

Smuggling operations in the Red Sea and Bab al-Mandab have allowed the Houthis to pursue broader ambitions. By conducting attacks in the Red Sea, the Houthis aim to project their influence beyond Yemen and seek alternatives to their primary supply chains via Iran. During a session on the rise of non-state actors, participants observed how conflict and the weakening of state institutions have empowered non-state armed groups in Yemen and the Horn of Africa, including groups such as Al-Qaeda in the Arab Peninsula and Al-Shabab in Somalia, which have become better connected and strengthened as the Houthis’ international profile has risen. One participant noted that what the Houthis achieved last year “inspired the dreams” of other groups in Yemen and the region, cautioning that with the current trajectory, 2025 holds promise to be the “golden year” for non-state armed actors.

In panels and roundtables discussing the militarization of the Red Sea, experts agreed that addressing the issue requires a coordinated approach, with regional states collaborating to protect their waterways rather than depending on international forces. Investments should be made to strengthen the Yemeni Coast Guard’s capacity and bolster monitoring efforts, including against smaller vessels typically used for smuggling. Increased diplomatic engagement from Western countries with the Red Sea littoral states and regional powers is essential to establish a coordinated multilateral maritime security framework. Discussions also emphasized the importance of engaging with Iran through diplomacy and reducing its reliance on non-state armed groups to project regional influence. Above all, experts unanimously underlined the necessity of building the capacity of Yemen’s state institutions and promoting good governance.

<sup>[8]</sup> Farea al-Muslimi, research fellow at Chatham House and former Sana’a Center Chairperson, speaking at YIF panel, “Peace and Stability in Yemen and the Region: Security Interdependencies and Strategic Opportunities,” February 18, 2025.



## Toward More Positive Regional Engagement

***“There is a significant lack of awareness regarding the contributions of our Yemeni women and men [in the Gulf]. What unique strengths do they provide? Can we create a platform to highlight their contributions? We must also consider social and economic factors to effectively address security issues.”***<sup>[9]</sup>

What role does Yemen play in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) broader economic ambitions? The need for GCC countries to enhance their regional economic cooperation approach to include Yemen was discussed in a YIF session addressing the role of Yemen in the economic priorities of the GCC. Various avenues were explored to shape a different type of engagement in Yemen. Panelist Yousuf al-Balushi, Chairman of the Muscat Policy Council, stated that Yemen, due to its strategic location, abundant human capital, and proximity to the Horn of Africa, could potentially transform into a logistical hub. Encouraging economic integration through special economic zones such as the Al-Mazyuna Free Zone between Oman and Yemen would also promote investment and employment.

Despite the current political deadlock, facilitating private sector engagement and business dialogue could sustain initiatives led by the private sector in logistics, trade, and energy. Investing in and harnessing Yemeni labor within GCC countries could strategically redirect Yemen's large youth population, currently facing high unemployment, away from joining armed groups. These initiatives, among others, can be pursued even amid the ongoing conflict: rebuilding and imagining positive economic engagement in Yemen need not wait until the end of the war.

In parallel, a vision for peace must remain the ultimate goal. Among Yemeni and non-Yemeni participants at the YIF, support for the UN-led peace process was subdued but still alive. Despite its evident shortcomings and failure to reach a political settlement, the quest for peace endures even when confronted with setbacks. “I don’t think we have reached a point where the Office of the UN Special Envoy’s roadmap to peace is no longer implementable; it’s still feasible,” said Al-Balushi. Given the limitations of a military solution to the conflict, bringing Yemeni parties to the table to chart a path forward remains the only viable option. Within this, regional actors have a vital role, as facilitators and not mediators, stressed Farea al-Muslimi, research fellow at Chatham House and former Sana’a Center Chairperson. With all its faults, the UN-led peace process was considered by some as the only viable path to restore the full sovereignty of Yemen. “As a Yemeni, you cannot convince me that peace is worse than war. We can criticize the roadmap and say it needs more or needs to change, but we cannot accept abandoning peace,” said Al-Muslimi.

<sup>[9]</sup> Dr. Abdulaziz Alghashian, a Saudi researcher focusing on the kingdom's foreign policy strategies and Director of Research with ORF Middle East, speaking at YIF panel, “The Ambitious Economic Priorities of the Gulf Cooperation Council Countries: Where Does Yemen Stand?” February 18, 2025.

## 2.1 YIF Recommendations for International and Regional Engagement

### **1. Move away from short-term thinking to a long-term, holistic strategy for Yemen that addresses the root causes of instability.**

- Adopt a unified international and regional front that goes beyond fragmented and short-sighted initiatives and works instead toward a clear, multi-track peace roadmap involving a coordinated multilateral cooperation that includes regional powers.
- Expand diplomatic and regional coordination to promote economic stability and good governance in Yemen, protect its active civil society, address the Yemeni people's demands for justice, and guarantee that Yemenis lead the way in decision-making regarding their future.
- Strengthen local peacebuilding by prioritizing the perspective of Yemeni voices in finding peaceful solutions to the conflict. While external mediation and facilitation are crucial, they must be grounded in local perspectives and solutions.

### **2. Strengthen regional and international collaboration to de-escalate the militarization of the Red Sea and reduce the influence of non-state armed actors.**

- Increase diplomatic engagement with Red Sea littoral states and regional powers, including key powers such as Egypt, to establish a coordinated maritime security framework.
- Improve the capacity of the Yemeni Coast Guard and broaden monitoring efforts to include smaller vessels in the Red Sea commonly used by smuggling networks.
- Invest in and support state-building and good governance in Yemen, encouraging citizens to turn away from non-state actors and back to the state.

### **3. Consider greater economic integration of Yemen within the GCC as a long-term strategy that supports Yemen's development and recovery, while contributing to regional stability.**

- Encourage a shift in discourse on Yemen, highlighting its rich heritage, human capital, and economic potential, rather than focusing solely on security concerns.
- Leverage Yemen's strategic location and human capital to harness its potential as a possible regional logistical hub and expand pilot projects such as the Al-Mazyuna Free Zone between Oman and Yemen.
- Invest in and train Yemeni workers to fill labor needs in the Gulf and facilitate the legal and secure movement of Yemeni workers in the GCC. This approach boosts regional economies and offers vulnerable Yemeni youth alternatives to joining armed groups and potential radicalization.
- Facilitate private sector engagement by organizing business summits to connect Yemeni entrepreneurs with Gulf investors and supporting private-sector-led initiatives.

# Yemeni and International Perspectives: Addressing Aid Policy Shifts and Economic Transition

وجهات نظر يمنية ودولية:

معالجة تحولات سياسات المساعدات الدولية والانتقال الاقتصادي



Speakers at the YIF panel, "Yemeni and International Perspectives: Addressing Aid Policy Shifts and Economic Transition," February 17, 2025.

## 3. Economic Revival

Yemen's economic struggles continue to cast a dark shadow over the country, placing an immense burden on the population. In Houthi-controlled areas, the repressive environment and crackdown on civil society actors have made it increasingly difficult for aid workers to operate. Combined with global aid cuts and a reduction in donor pledges to Yemen, this has led to a concerning decline in aid funding during a humanitarian crisis that shows no signs of relenting. Economic discussions held at YIF III highlighted concerns that the US decision to redesignate the Houthis as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO), if not accompanied by robust mitigation measures and careful implementation, could worsen Yemen's humanitarian crisis. Risks include isolating Yemeni financial institutions further from global networks, disrupting trade finance, and inflating the costs of essential imports. Government resources, meanwhile, are dwindling, and oil and gas revenues have come to a halt due to a Houthi-imposed embargo, making it difficult for the government to provide even the most basic services to its people. The devaluation of the rial has also led to rising food costs and increased food insecurity in the government-controlled areas.

While the outlook appears grim, Yemen still has the potential to revive its economy or, at the very least, avert economic collapse. Economists, bankers, private sector representatives, oil and gas experts, diplomats, and representatives of leading development organizations came together at the YIF to discuss the current economic trajectory and strategize on measures to alleviate the economic shocks expected to hit Yemen this year.



## Declining Aid and FTO Sanctions

**“We absolutely have to move away from humanitarian assistance toward reform... but a large part of the population—17 million people—don’t have enough food to eat.”<sup>[10]</sup>**

Donor attention is waning while Yemen continues to endure an unrelenting humanitarian crisis. In February, the US temporarily<sup>[11]</sup> suspended USAID funding,<sup>[12]</sup> depriving millions of Yemenis of access to vital aid. The United States had been the largest donor to Yemen, providing US\$768 million in 2024, nearly half of last year’s humanitarian response plan (HRP).

As of April, the 2025 plan was only 6.9 percent funded.<sup>[13]</sup> Several donors, including Sweden, Germany, and the UK, have reduced their funding, and others may follow suit. Aid cuts and escalating economic warfare threaten to further deepen the already severe economic crisis. Serious concern was raised at the YIF about donors withdrawing support at this critical time; the backlash could result in new barriers to the aid and remittance flows that sustain millions, job losses in the humanitarian sector and civil society, and a potential exodus from northern regions by those seeking employment.

To mitigate the shifts in the humanitarian field, increased Yemeni representation in decision-making on humanitarian aid policy was deemed a fundamental first step. “For far too long, it has been donors rather than Yemenis dictating the agenda,” noted Julien Harneis, the UN Resident Coordinator for Yemen. Longstanding debates on transitioning from short-term humanitarian aid to development continued this year, highlighting the need to balance immediate needs and sustainable interventions. While recognizing the increasingly complex landscape for donors engaged in Yemen, some participants were critical about the overreliance on humanitarian assistance. Former Information Minister Nadia al-Saqqaf criticized the humanitarian approach to date in Yemen, noting that this dependence, in the absence of local ownership and long-term strategies, undermines local capabilities and hampers economic independence. Members of the private sector concurred.

“We are not suggesting that we want to ban humanitarian assistance from Yemen,” said Mazen Aman, a senior advisor at Hayel Saeed Aman group and a member of Yemen’s Development Champions. “But Yemen is not just a humanitarian file [...] it includes human resources, capabilities, and competencies that have been proven.” Collaboration with and support for the private sector, described by various panelists as one of the most resilient sectors in Yemen due to its proven

<sup>[10]</sup> Charles Harper, Development Director and Deputy Ambassador to Yemen, speaking during YIF panel, “Yemeni and International Perspectives: Mitigating the Impact of Shifting Aid Policies on Economic Development,” February 17, 2025.

<sup>[11]</sup> In early April, the US reversed recent cuts in emergency food aid to several nations but maintained them in Afghanistan and Yemen. See, Samy Magdy, Riazat Butt and Ellen Knickmeyer, “US restores urgent food aid, except in Afghanistan and Yemen, two of the world’s poorest countries,” AP, April 9, 2025, <https://www.ap.org/news-highlights/spotlights/2025/us-restores-urgent-food-aid-except-in-afghanistan-and-yemen-two-of-the-worlds-poorest-countries/>

<sup>[12]</sup> Since YIF III, USAID has been permanently shut down. Ana Faguy, “USAID officially closes, attracting condemnation from Obama and Bush,” BBC, July 2, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c307zq8ppj60>

<sup>[13]</sup> “Yemen: US abrupt and irresponsible aid cuts compound humanitarian crisis and put millions at risk,” Amnesty International, April 10, 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/04/yemen-us-abrupt-and-irresponsible-aid-cuts-compound-humanitarian-crisis-and-put-millions-at-risk/#:~:text=Background,Huthi%20control%20in%20January%202025>

flexibility and ability to adapt to the crisis, was deemed essential, as was the need to strengthen local leadership and build genuine partnerships with Yemenis. A collaborative approach that promotes partnerships among international agencies, the government, civil society, and the private sector was deemed more effective in creating a more integrated and sustainable development strategy.

Economic experts at this year's YIF discussed the implications of the FTO designation and emphasized the critical need for immediate and sustained engagement with the US Department of the Treasury, its Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), and other relevant US policymakers to ensure the cohesive and comprehensive implementation of the FTO's legal framework, while strategically leveraging its inherent general licenses. This engagement is vital to develop and implement robust mitigation measures designed to safeguard the continuous flows of crucial humanitarian aid funds, remittances, and support overall economic stability.

The situation is particularly precarious in a country that almost entirely relies on imports for its food and basic needs. In light of humanitarian aid exemptions explicitly provided within the FTO's general licenses, this proactive engagement would build the capacities of humanitarian aid actors to avoid potential logistical hurdles and delays in aid distribution while navigating the complexities of the sanctions regime. Although it is still too early to grasp the implications of the designation fully, discussions among YIF attendees centered on several key areas. These included examining the experiences of other countries that have faced similar challenges, supporting the capacity-building of local banks and the Central Bank of Yemen (CBY) to lessen the impact of the FTO designation, and engaging with international financial institutions to establish clear financial compliance guidelines with Yemeni businesses, particularly those operating in Houthi-controlled areas.

## Resumption of Oil and Gas Exports: A Critical Revenue Source

***“International oil companies require the security situation to improve, stability in terms of laws and regulations, and guidance from [Yemen’s] oil ministry.”<sup>[14]</sup>***

The oil and gas sector was brought into sharp focus this year. For decades, the Yemeni government has relied on exporting crude oil as its primary source of income and foreign currency reserves. This revenue was crucial for funding critical expenditures, including the public sector workforce, maintaining economic stability, and supporting the local currency. The Houthis' targeting of export terminals in late 2022, however, deprived the government of its prime source of income.

Today, Petromasila, Yemen's leading national oil company, faces challenges due to a lack of operational budget, which is severely impacting its infrastructure and ability to maintain and operate. Maintenance costs have become critical, as the machinery and equipment required for production have been damaged or neglected due to the conflict. Revenue management in the oil and gas sector remains a significant political issue, particularly in striking a balance between the interests of local residents, governorate-level authorities and the central government. Making matters worse, Yemen operates under an opaque petroleum legal framework without a functioning parliament or updated petroleum law, which creates legal ambiguity and political disputes.

<sup>[14]</sup> An international petroleum expert speaking during YIF session, “The Oil and Gas Sector: Options to Ensure the Resumption of Export Operations,” February 17, 2025.



Yemen's hydrocarbon infrastructure requires significant and immediate investment in both its upstream and downstream subsectors to ensure that all crude oil facilities are in a state of full readiness to resume production as soon as a peace settlement, no matter how fragile, is reached. The discussions highlighted the urgent need to actively engage local communities, address the severe operational constraints faced by national oil companies, and establish a transparent framework for managing these vital revenues.

Oil and gas experts and stakeholders agreed that the road ahead would not be easy. The resumption of oil and gas exports relies on dialogue between the conflict parties, local authorities, and the central government, as well as improvements in security, foreign investment, and infrastructure repairs. Transparency and the lack of clear anti-corruption laws are also concerns. Support for economic revival, argued international experts, hinges on rebuilding international trust in the Yemeni government, regional support, improving transparency and compliance, and revising legal frameworks.

## Shrinking Public Revenue

***“We need one consolidated institutional framework with strict procedures for collecting taxes, with government institutions in charge of collecting revenues.”<sup>[15]</sup>***

The Yemeni government's coffers are running dry. Oil and gas revenues have ceased due to the Houthi embargo. Electricity subsidies were described in a YIF session addressing the public revenue crisis as an immense fiscal blackhole, consuming about one-third of the government budget. Pervasive poor governance and widespread corruption have caused systemic dysfunction in Yemen's fiscal management of

public services. The government collects only a mere 20-30 percent of electricity bill payments, creating significant fiscal burdens on the budget deficit. According to one participant, tax revenue constitutes roughly 5 percent of the GDP in Yemen, a figure significantly lower than the global average of approximately 20 to 30 percent. While the challenges in public revenue extend beyond utility fees and tax collection, this year's discussions focused on the government's struggles to collect taxes effectively and its inadequate oversight of fiscal governance across the governorates.

Efforts to implement automated tax systems, such as via computer tablets in Aden, have shown promise but are limited in scope. Taxing an informal war economy that operates outside of government revenue systems complicates the situation. Yet, initiatives toward a transparent tax collection system, where revenues are directed toward improving public services, were deemed essential to reduce the significant fragmentation in public revenue. Tax collection, noted a participant, must go hand in hand with genuine efforts to improve public services, based on a contract of trust between the Yemeni government and its citizens. “You cannot have services without taxes. Nobody likes taxes, but that's the way forward,” said one session attendee. However, another pointed out that government spending is currently unmonitored, with no control over expenditure. “Stop blaming the people,” he remarked, “we need to control expenses before squeezing more revenue from citizens.”

<sup>[15]</sup> Participant during YIF session, “Challenges to Yemen's Economy: The Question of Public Revenues,” February 16, 2025.

## 3.1 YIF Recommendations on Economic Recovery

### **1. Maintain donor presence and engagement in Yemen to avert a worsening humanitarian crisis and align funding with sustainable, locally led strategies for longer-term impact.**

- Sustain donor engagement in Yemen. Disengagement and reduced funding could deepen instability, worsen humanitarian conditions, and hinder peace efforts.
- Integrate long-term strategic thinking into aid interventions in Yemen and shift from short-term humanitarian responses to more comprehensive and sustainable strategies led by Yemenis.
- Support Yemen's private sector. The private sector is vital in Yemen's development, particularly in agriculture, health, and trade. Supporting it can drive growth and economic independence.
- Localize aid and development, focusing on strengthening local governance and empowering local actors to ensure that decision-making and resources are decentralized and Yemeni-led.
- Use a collaborative approach that encourages partnerships among international agencies, the government, civil society, and the private sector to create a more integrated and sustainable development strategy.

### **2. Mitigate the impact of FTO-related sanctions to ensure uninterrupted humanitarian access and delivery and the survival of local businesses.**

- Support the central bank in improving compliance mechanisms for local banks to strengthen their standing with correspondent and intermediary banks and within the global financial system..
- Collaborate with sanctioning authorities (e.g., the US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control - OFAC) to establish clear guidelines for sanctions-compliant transactions involving Yemeni businesses and banks. This clarity is essential to enable international financial institutions to confidently process vital commercial and humanitarian transactions, particularly those involving Houthi-controlled territories, thereby preventing unintended economic suffocation due to de-risking.

- Collaborate with international organizations, such as the International Finance Corporation and World Bank, to provide support in building the capacity of legitimate businesses and banks in Yemen, thereby enabling their participation in global financial and trade systems amidst the escalating conflict and sanctions environment.
- Launch an informative and educational campaign to establish trust with the international business community, demonstrating that there are legitimate pathways for investment in Yemen that do not support armed groups.

### **3. Establish a track of dialogue and technical support to resume oil and gas production in Yemen.**

- Establish a broad-based political agreement among different actors to guarantee oil sector neutrality.
- Negotiate a revenue-sharing framework that addresses local expectations, particularly for governorates with oil and gas resources (Shabwa, Marib, and Hadramawt), and ensures that local communities benefit through job creation and investment incentives.
- Establish a clear legal and institutional framework for hydrocarbon management. This entails clarifying resource ownership, production-sharing agreement (PSA) governance, and contract-awarding authority before resuming or expanding oil operations.
- Secure investor confidence and stability. This depends on transparency and trust within the government, which requires strengthening anti-corruption mechanisms and governance structures under the Ministry of Oil and Minerals.
- Prioritize maintenance and infrastructure investment ahead of plans to restart oil and gas exports.
- Invest in and expand Yemen's domestic petroleum refining capacity—both by increasing output at existing local refineries and establishing new ones—to cover national fuel needs.

**4. Develop a unified, transparent, and accountable public revenue management system to reduce fragmentation, curb corruption, and improve resource allocation.**

- Strengthen tax policy and develop a stringent revenue collection and allocation system in government-controlled areas to significantly bolster the government finances and foster economic stability .
- Cut unnecessary government expenditures, focusing on prioritizing the Yemeni population's basic needs.
- Strengthen financial governance and oversight by empowering and ensuring the effective coordination of all relevant state institutions, including the Ministry of Finance, the Central Organization for Control and Accountability (COCA), the Supreme National Anti-Corruption Commission (SNACC), parliament, and the judiciary, to curb corruption and increase donor and public trust in the state's financial management.





A displaced man and his son carry their belongings on foot for over 4 km amid a road dispute between the villages of Aden and Daimah, June 20, 2021// Sana'a Center Photo.

## 4. Toward A Locally Defined Transitional Justice Process

Transitional justice is one of the YIF's most ambitious initiatives, a topic that previously lost traction after the National Dialogue Conference (NDC) in 2013-14. Defining a local understanding of transitional justice and determining the most effective path to achieving it has not come without challenges. Yet, significant progress has been made since the YIF began addressing the issue in 2022. Resistance and skepticism are now countered by a stronger determination for justice from victims and increased political buy-in.

This year, the YIF dedicated several sessions to the topic, involving victims, political actors, tribal leaders, civil society, and relevant local and international bodies. Building on previous efforts, each session focused on specific pillars of transitional justice. The discussions explored critical topics such as inclusion mechanisms for victims, engaging political actors in a transitional justice process, judicial reforms needed to pave the way for transitional justice, and the feasibility of integrating customary laws for a more localized approach. These critical discussions contribute to developing a locally grounded roadmap for transitional justice in Yemen.

## The Right of Victims to be Heard

***“We believe we are victims of everyone - of the perpetrators and the others who did not take our cases and allow our voices to be heard.”***<sup>[16]</sup>

Since 2015, more<sup>[18]</sup> than 370,000 lives have been lost in Yemen, with thousands detained, and millions displaced. Beyond this, the psychological harm, deprivation of infrastructure and basic services, collapse of the health and educational systems, and the economic and social impact have led to a sense of collective grievance among Yemenis. Adding to their disenfranchisement, Yemen's victims have been excluded from political processes while their stories may be exploited by the warring parties. The collapse of the judicial system has

further hindered their ability to seek justice and accountability. Women, marginalized minorities, displaced persons, and individuals with disabilities are especially at risk, facing systemic barriers that prevent them from accessing justice. Additionally, the blurred lines between victims and perpetrators complicate justice efforts, as impunity and the prevalent lack of accountability have led some victims to seek revenge or retaliation when they gain power, perpetuating cycles of violence. Since its inception, the YIF has consistently advocated for the need to document violations, improve mechanisms for victims to engage in peace negotiations, and support marginalized groups to ensure a victim-centered approach to justice in Yemen.

***“As one of the victims of enforced disappearance, one of the most important elements of transitional justice is knowing what happened. What were my father's last moments? These are simple demands.”***<sup>[17]</sup>

This year, YIF attendees heard about Colombia's experience in navigating over 50 years of conflict, which resulted in more than eight million victims forcibly displaced, disappeared, or killed. Panelist Sergio Jaramillo Caro, the former High Commissioner for Peace of Colombia (2012–2017), played a key role in negotiating the 2016 peace accord between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and described how his country placed victims at the heart of the peace process. “Actually, we never talked about justice,” remarked Caro, “we talked about victims' rights,” emphasizing that the pursuit of justice must prioritize the voices and experiences of victims. During the Colombian peace talks held in Havana, Cuba, in 2016, five delegations of 12 victims each, 60 in total, were invited to speak face-to-face with FARC members. The Colombian case study resonated deeply with Yemeni attendees, inspiring them to imagine a scenario in which victims are genuinely heard and included, and where concepts like justice and redress are not merely abstract ideals but attainable realities.

<sup>[16]</sup> A Yemeni victim speaking during a YIF transitional justice session, February 16, 2025.

<sup>[17]</sup> Judge Hala al-Qurashi, member of the Higher Election Committee and a founding member of the Association of Families of the Disappeared, speaking during YIF panel on “Charting the Path to a Transitional Process in Yemen,” February 16, 2025.

<sup>[18]</sup> Marta Mendes and Yazeed al-Jeddawy, “Engaging Victims in Peace-Making and Transitional Justice in Yemen,” Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, March 24, 2024, <https://sanaacenter.org/publications/main-publications/22094>



## The Role of Political Parties: Breaking the Cycle of Mutual Blame

***“Political parties need to be honest with themselves and their history.”*** <sup>[19]</sup>

On the ground, Yemen's civil society organizations (CSOs) continue to shoulder the brunt of the war, advocating for victims' rights and providing essential support for those maimed, detained, and displaced. But the task of addressing a history of perpetual violence and seeking reconciliation and redress is also a deeply political endeavor.

This year marked a significant breakthrough with a YIF session providing the rare opportunity to bring together representatives from Yemen's main political parties to discuss transitional justice. At the NDC, fear of reprisals led Yemen's political parties to dilute and sideline the topic of transitional justice and victims' demands for redress. The resultant climate of mutual accusations since the NDC has further prevented Yemeni parties from engaging in proactive discussions on accountability further prevented Yemeni parties from engaging in proactive discussions on accountability and transitional justice. As one participant aptly put it during the session gathering politicians, “At this point, everyone has committed violations, and everyone is a victim.”

The Consultation and Reconciliation Commission (CRC), one of the committees formed to support the PLC, was described as an essential platform for promoting political and social reconciliation and allowing parties to work together on transitional justice. Attendees emphasized the need to unite political parties around a shared approach to transitional justice. Political parties were urged to engage effectively with the judiciary, local communities, and CSOs and make meaningful progress in addressing reconciliation efforts. At the same time, they were encouraged to undertake self-reflection, examining their past and being “honest with themselves and their history.” Self-criticism can encourage political parties to accept responsibility and acknowledge their role in past abuses through public statements, apologies, or memorialization. While transitional justice may seem new to Yemen's political landscape, there are precedents for historical redress and reconciliation efforts. Attendees recalled the Yemeni Socialist Party's public apology for violations committed during the 1986 South Yemen Civil War and, later, during the 1994 Civil War.

<sup>[19]</sup> Rana Ghanem, Assistant Secretary-General of the Nasserite Party, member of the Consultation and Reconciliation Commission of the Presidential Leadership Council, and Deputy Head of the Transitional Justice and Reconciliation Commission, speaking during YIF panel on “Charting the Path to a Transitional Justice Process in Yemen,” February 16, 2025.

## Judicial Reform: Promoting Awareness of International Law

**“Judges may have studied Sharia but not human rights, so you are not well educated as a human rights defender.”** <sup>[20]</sup>

This year, the call for judicial reform was prominent as a crucial first step toward implementing transitional justice. Article 149 of the Yemeni Constitution addresses the independence of the judiciary in administrative, financial, and judicial affairs, but there was widespread consensus among attendees that safeguards to protect Yemen's judiciary are lacking, a situation prevalent in both Houthi and government-controlled areas. Today, judicial appointments are often made by the executive authorities, undermining independence; in Houthi-controlled regions, bias in the appointment of judges is becoming more prevalent, reinforcing social hierarchies, while women are prohibited from holding high-ranking judicial positions.

Across the country, law curricula are outdated, theoretical, and lack practical training. Most judges graduate with little understanding of international law and human rights, and have never been exposed to concepts such as transitional justice. “How can I deal with ‘forced disappearance’ when such terminology does not even exist in Yemeni law?” said one participant. A crucial first step is recognizing the apparent demand among Yemeni judges for support and knowledge regarding transitional justice, human rights, and international law. Participants emphasized the importance of updating Yemeni laws and creating a transitional justice law. Although Yemen has ratified many international agreements, many have not been enforced. The ratification of key conventions, such as the Rome Statute, which addresses crimes such as genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes, was considered essential for addressing the level and type of current abuses.

**“In some courts, there aren’t chairs for the judges to sit on, let alone clients. We are moving from a bad situation to a worse one, lagging behind 50 years.”** <sup>[21]</sup>

## Incorporating Yemeni Customary Laws to Support Transitional Justice

Given its current capacity, Yemen's judiciary alone cannot handle all violations. Moreover, in a country where tribal structures and traditional customs are prominent in many parts of the country, customary laws often bypass the judicial system in issues of mediation, conflict, homicide, and property disputes, among other topics. During a crowded YIF session focused on incorporating customary laws in transitional justice efforts, local sheikhs noted that in the absence of a functioning state, tribal laws have upheld social order and served as a deterrent against chaos. They said that in various regions of Yemen, inherent tribal codes revolve around justice and protecting vulnerable individuals.

**“Reconciliation is the key. In tribal norms, this is called sulh... we overcome old grievances and build new norms.”** <sup>[22]</sup>

Tribes in Yemen, they added, have a long history of engaging in mediation, reconciliation, and efforts to secure redress and compensation. Rich examples were provided by local sheikhs attending the session, including hostage exchanges between the tribes to prevent retaliation, compensating victims by ceding land, or paying *diya* (blood money).

<sup>[20]</sup> A Yemeni judge speaking at a YIF transitional justice session, February 16-18, 2025.

<sup>[21]</sup> A Yemeni participant speaking at a YIF transitional justice session, February 16-18, 2025.

<sup>[22]</sup> Sheikh Khaled al-Kathiri, Director-General of the Tribal Affairs Department in the Hadramawt Valley and Desert region, speaking during YIF panel, “Charting the Path to Transitional Justice in Yemen,” February 17, 2025.

***“We have customs, and [these] customs do not forget the vulnerable, the weak, the defeated, especially women, children, the neighbor.”*** <sup>[23]</sup>

Not all of Yemen, however, is tribal, and not all customary laws are exclusively tribal; they can also encompass ethnic and regional practices. There are also differences between tribes in the northern, southern, eastern, and western parts of the country, with each region having its particularities. Some participants expressed concerns that specific tribal laws perpetuate inequality. Others noted that tribes are currently at a crossroads, with one participant observing that some tribes have become “contractors of war,” deviating from their traditional roles. In addition, the Houthis have also polarized tribes and pitted them against one another. To effectively explore how Yemeni customary laws, with their inherent notions of justice, can contribute to transitional justice in Yemen, a thorough examination of their application across different regions and tribes is essential. Such exploration should also aim to align Yemen’s customary laws with international human rights norms, particularly related to protecting minorities and vulnerable groups.

<sup>[23]</sup> A Yemeni tribal sheikh speaking at a YIF transitional justice session, February 16-18, 2025.

## 4.1 YIF Recommendations on Implementing a Transitional Justice Roadmap

### **1. Ensure that Yemen's victims are at the forefront of peace and transitional justice efforts.**

- Involve Yemen's war victims by creating opportunities for them to participate in peace processes and shape discussions on transitional justice, and by examining the mechanisms used in countries such as Colombia to inform the development of tailored approaches for Yemen.
- Continue documenting violations to promote future accountability, and engage community structures and religious networks to help victims share their experiences and be heard.
- Advocate for legal reforms that include transitional justice principles and promote inclusivity, and that criminalize hate speech against specific social and political groups.
- Support and include vulnerable groups, such as marginalized minorities and individuals with disabilities, in justice mechanisms.
- Support memorialization efforts that acknowledge victims and promote reconciliation.

### **2. Engage political actors in transitional justice to ensure political buy-in and work towards aligning the approaches of political parties to common transitional justice principles.**

- Support the CRC by enhancing its capacity to engage political actors in reconciliation and broader buy-in for a transitional justice process.
- Formulate a cohesive national vision for justice and reconciliation that encompasses all political parties and civil society.
- Political parties should collaborate on prioritized issues, such as the plight of detainees and forcibly displaced persons, while working on broader transitional justice efforts.
- Establish internal assessments and accountability mechanisms sensitive to transitional justice to promote reform within Yemen's political parties.

### **3. Prioritize judicial reform as the basis for initiating credible justice processes to address war crimes and human rights violations.**

- Enshrine judicial independence by separating the judiciary from executive control and establishing an independent judicial council.
- Launch comprehensive specialized training programmes for judges and legal professionals on transitional justice, human rights, and international law.
- Revise, update, and integrate human rights discourse into the curricula of law institutions and universities, and support the establishment of a legal research center to update Yemen's laws.
- Increase awareness of traditional justice and past abuses to garner support for judicial reforms and support memorialization efforts that acknowledge victims and promote reconciliation.
- Establish a national database to document violations and support forensic investigations.
- Consider updating Yemeni laws to incorporate principles of transitional justice.

### **4. Build on Yemeni customary laws that embody reconciliation practices to localize transitional justice mechanisms .**

- Conduct and expand upon existing research that examines various customary reconciliation practices in Yemen, considering the regional, ethnic, and tribal differences in customary laws.
- Raise awareness on tribal and customary laws and how they can align with human rights principles and the protection of vulnerable groups.
- Strengthen state-tribe collaboration to complement each other in transitional justice and reconciliation efforts.





Family members of Yemenis detained by the Houthis gather outside Al-Saleh Mosque in Sana'a on May 26, 2024 // Sana'a Center photo.

## 5. Inclusion and Civic Space

Yemen has a long history of civic engagement, the protection of which stands at the core of the YIF's mission. YIF III convened against the backdrop of a brutal crackdown on civil society actors in Houthi-controlled areas, echoes of which reverberated throughout the Forum. Yemen's civic space is shrinking. Women, youth, and civil society organizations have faced increasing aggression and restrictions on their work and movements. While restrictions are particularly severe in Houthi-controlled areas, efforts to limit civic space are also regularly observed in areas under government control. Despite such repressive measures, grassroots movements and CSOs remain steadfast, advocating for the rights of Yemenis and supporting broader national peace efforts. This year, the YIF facilitated dialogue between relevant authorities and civil society organizations to develop strategies toward improving the operating environment for civil society.

## Yemen's Civic Life at Risk

***“A lack of speaking out against the Houthis has led to the death of civil society actors, and the arbitrary arrest of many others – this is a consequence the Yemeni community and the world will live with forever.”*** <sup>[24]</sup>

Yemen's civil society has taken on much of the civic burden of the war, providing essential support to the population where the government has been unable to respond. Yet, their operational environment has become increasingly hostile. Today, CSOs have difficulties obtaining licenses, require multiple layers of approval, and face inconsistent regulations across different authorities. Politicization and interference in their work are rife, and threats and intimidation are not uncommon. These challenges are particularly pronounced for women-led organizations due to rising regulations that restrict their activities and impose limitations on women's mobility, made worse by incitement campaigns against them and activists addressing gender and equality issues.

In Houthi-controlled areas, meanwhile, the level of repression is unprecedented. The mood was somber among Yemeni participants on the last day of the YIF as news spread that a Yemeni mother seeking medical treatment in Amman died without seeing her detained daughter in Sana'a. The campaign of terrifying arrests of civil society actors that started last June and continues to date has seen various activists and peace workers targeted, some of whom are still languishing in prisons incommunicado and under dire conditions. “I have been involved in Yemeni civil society for over 20 years, but I have never witnessed pressure of this magnitude,” said Maged al-Madhagi, the Sana'a Center Chairperson. Julien Harneis, the UN Resident Coordinator for Yemen, described a deeply troubling scene from the ground: “I came from Sana'a yesterday, where three days ago we buried my colleague, Ahmed Baalawi, and we have another 23 UN colleagues detained, and many more from international organizations and civil society.”

Protecting Yemen's civil society demands bold political will and meaningful, sustained support from the international community. Political will is needed to engage more proactively with CSOs, simplify their registration and licensing procedures, establish monitoring mechanisms against intimidation and human rights violations, and curb the appropriation of civil society to serve political agendas, according to participants who attended a YIF session that brought together government officials and civil society actors. In addition, donors and the international community should collaborate more closely with CSOs, invest in their capacity building, and coordinate with one another to ensure maximum impact. A cohesive and principled response from the international community and intergovernmental organizations in Yemen to the repression of civil actors, grounded in respect for human rights and international law, would show solidarity and help reduce impunity.

<sup>[24]</sup> Participant during YIF session on “The Operating Environment for Civil Society Organizations and Relations with Relevant Government Institutions,” February 18, 2025.

## A Strategy to Support Women's Rights and Public Participation

***“Trust women on the ground when they propose an idea. Against all odds, these women are trying their best to push their cause. We need to support them.”*** <sup>[25]</sup>

As the crisis in the Yemen has overshadowed local developments, the worsening situation for women in Yemen, whose rights are eroding largely unchecked, remains a significant issue. Today, the differences in the repression of women between areas controlled by the Houthis and those governed by the internationally recognized government are becoming increasingly blurred. Movement restrictions on women continue and are pervasive across the country. Their marginalization from negotiations and political positions remains unchanged. On the ground, women and girls make up the highest numbers among the displaced, those suffering from malnutrition, and those most vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. <sup>[26]</sup>

The response to the challenges faced by Yemeni women and organizations working to protect them has been, at best, fragmented. Many leaders of organizations supporting women in Yemen agree that engaging with stakeholders individually is a challenging task. Numerous strategies addressing women's rights have been created, but few have been developed collaboratively. The return on investment for these strategies is low, indicating a need for a collaborative approach to maximize effectiveness. At this year's YIF, a roundtable was held to present an advocacy strategy for advancing women's and girls' rights in the public sphere, developed by the Sana'a Center in collaboration with Yemeni academics, artists, journalists, educators, and business professionals. The strategy represents the culmination of two years of work and aims to bridge ongoing efforts to protect women's rights while strengthening existing women's networks. “There is no excuse not to support the women's movement,” said Sawsan al-Refai, an expert in public policy who worked on the women's strategy. Investing in women, she added, yields high returns.

<sup>[25]</sup> Sawsan al-Refai, Yemeni expert in public policy, speaking at the working session on “Advocacy Strategy for Women in the Public Sphere: A Practical Implementation Mechanism and Identifying Areas of Collaboration,” February 16, 2025.

<sup>[26]</sup> Bilqees al-Lahbi, Rim Mugahed and Lara Uhlenhaut, “A Year in Patriarchy: Key Setbacks in Yemeni Women's Rights in 2024,” Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, February 4, 2025, <https://sanaacenter.org/the-yemen-review/oct-dec-2024/24136>



## 5.1. YIF Recommendations on Civic Inclusion

### **1. Strengthen international advocacy efforts for the protection of civil society in Yemen.**

- Exert more pressure to end arbitrary detentions and human rights abuses. International pressure is key to curbing impunity. Silence on human rights abuses can exacerbate the alarming restriction of civic space.
- Provide victims' families with protection against intimidation, as well as legal and psychological support.
- Initiate global solidarity campaigns to highlight the vital work of civil society in Yemen and the necessity to protect it.
- Create a dialogue platform for civil society organizations, governing authorities, and international actors to address pressing violations perpetrated against CSO workers.

### **2. Enhance legal and protection mechanisms for civil society workers.**

- Push for the implementation of national legal protection measures against arbitrary arrests and violence against civil society actors.
- Establish and support existing national monitoring mechanisms for human rights violations in Yemen.
- Work with UN mechanisms, international human rights bodies, and global NGOs to improve protection of civil society workers.

### **3. Improve the operational environment of civil society organizations by strengthening government-CSO collaboration.**

- Develop a regulatory framework that simplifies CSO registration and licensing procedures, standardizes rules across different governing authorities, and enacts fair and equitable funding policies.

- Collaborate to establish a joint strategic vision between CSOs and the government by forming a coordination committee that promotes collaboration, dialogue, mutual accountability, and public oversight.
- Establish clear guidelines for CSO operations and introduce accountability and transparency measures to address the risk of political appropriation and corruption in CSOs.

### **4. Advance and support a coordinated strategy to promote and protect women's rights through unified advocacy.**

- Implement the strategy for advancing women's and girls' rights in the public sphere and create a collective message that women's organizations and donors can rally around. Prioritize two or three key policy demands to focus on advocacy efforts.
- Carry out media and public awareness campaigns to counter defamation campaigns and misogynistic discourse, while promoting women's representation in media and politics.
- Ensure donor commitments align with Yemeni women's needs by encouraging flexible funding for women's organizations, directing financial support to women-led initiatives, and reducing bureaucratic barriers in funding applications.
- Encourage the Yemeni government and international community to offer meaningful support. This requires a genuine commitment from political parties and the Yemeni government to ensure that the inclusion of women is prioritized in diplomatic engagement and peace efforts, and for the international community to advocate for women's engagement in their interaction with governmental and local actors.
- Improve the institutional protection of women by strengthening legal frameworks against harassment and violence, and establishing monitoring mechanisms for violations against women.





The stone-paved Sai'lah Canal near the Old City of Sana'a floods on August 22, 2024, following heavy rains // Sana'a Center photo.

## 6. Sustainable Strategies for Addressing Yemen's Environmental Crisis

Over the past decade, communities across Yemen have increasingly felt the impact of environmental degradation while grappling with the ramifications of war. Water is dangerously scarce and remains the primary cause of local conflict. Climate change has intensified extreme weather events, such as floods, cyclones, rising temperatures, and droughts, resulting in casualties, displacement, loss of livelihoods, and extensive damage to agriculture and infrastructure. Recognizing the urgency of Yemen's combined climate and war crisis, the YIF drew on global and regional expertise in an effort to better address the country's environmental plight. Environment-focused sessions at YIF III aimed to find innovative green solutions while building on long-practiced local adaptation strategies in Yemen. This year, alongside ongoing discussions on sustainable water solutions, two topics were introduced: a just energy transition to renewables and green transitional justice. The discussions contribute to finding ways to mitigate the environmental crisis while supporting peacebuilding and development initiatives in Yemen.

## A Water Crisis Demanding Immediate Action

**“Without energy,  
there is no  
economic growth.  
But without water?  
It is the end.”** <sup>[27]</sup>

Yemen is one of the most water-scarce countries in the world; a decade of war combined with the increasing frequency and severity of climate-related disasters has brought the country to the brink of an acute water crisis. Over 15 million people lack access to safe drinking water. Such scarcity is primarily driven by minimal rainfall, over-reliance on rapidly depleting groundwater, and unregulated and inefficient agricultural irrigation practices, including qat, which consumes 40% of the water used in agriculture. In context, globally, the water scarcity threshold is set at approximately 1,000 cubic meters per capita per year; in Yemen, this figure drops to less than 100 cubic meters. Daily water usage in Yemen is also double the available capacity. Long-standing issues of poor governance and lack of enforcement of water laws have been exacerbated by political fragmentation, preventing effective water management. Additionally, funding for water projects has dwindled since the outbreak of war.

Maeen al-Obaidi, a renowned Yemeni lawyer and local mediator, painted a stark portrait of the water situation in her home city of Taiz. Water services have almost disappeared to Taiz, prompting local communities to adapt by forming collectives. These groups fill water tanks in Taiz by drawing from wells in nearby rural areas and collecting rainwater during the summer months. The influx of displaced communities in Taiz has increased pressure on the water system, resulting in heightened tensions between internally displaced persons (IDPs) and host communities. Wells are often located in dangerous frontline areas, making access hazardous and sometimes deadly. Thirteen women were killed in her hometown while attempting to collect water, said Al-Obaidi, while a child was shot by a sniper while on a water-fetching trip.

Sustainable solutions need a more comprehensive strategy that operates on multiple levels. Historically, Yemen has depended on sophisticated rainwater catchment systems developed over thousands of years, but the use of these systems is in a state of decline. Reintegrating and supporting these traditional methods with modern technology can increase efficiency and reduce reliance on groundwater. Empowering local communities to participate actively in water management and ensuring projects are locally owned would increase the likelihood of projects' sustainability. Water governance is necessary for water laws and updating and applying existing water strategies, which requires improved coordination between the central government and local authorities. Cooperation among Yemen's government, NGOs, the private sector, and international donors is crucial to introduce more up-to-date policies incorporating climate change adaptation.

<sup>[27]</sup> Musaed Aklan, a senior environmental researcher at the Sana'a Center, during YIF panel, "Addressing Water Insecurity in the Context of a Protracted Conflict," February 18, 2025.

## A Just Energy Transition

***“We didn’t have it before, this renewable energy concept, but after the conflict, we had this transformation – this could be a light at the end of the tunnel.”*** <sup>[28]</sup>

Power outages across Yemen are on the rise, and during the summer, when temperatures soar in the southern governorates, the consequences are especially severe, particularly on public health. Fuel shortages and aging infrastructure due to prolonged conflict have had a devastating impact. In Aden, the mismanagement of the electricity sector and the weaponization of electricity provision have led to widespread public anger. Against this backdrop, the introduction of renewable energy, a relatively new concept for Yemen, was described as having transformative potential during YIF discussions about national energy transition.

Yemen's geographical advantages, including abundant sunlight and wind, position it well for renewable energy initiatives. Yemen benefits from exceptional solar potential, with solar radiation levels reaching 6.5 kWh/m<sup>2</sup> daily. Wind energy prospects are also promising, especially in coastal areas. For the most part, solar energy has emerged as a reliable and scalable alternative. With the scarcity of fuel, some Yemeni communities have resorted to solar power; in addition to being climate-friendly, renewable energy is a more cost-effective solution to Yemen's energy crisis. At the YIF, participants heard about regional case studies of energy transitions, including from Morocco, Tunisia, Lebanon, Algeria, Jordan, and Iraq. These highlighted how energy transitions must be tailored to specific contexts. Speakers emphasized that beyond infrastructure and technology, governance structures and justice considerations are equally critical for success.

Participants agreed that a transition to renewable energy presents a practical solution for Yemen, but necessitates careful planning to guarantee equitable distribution, avoiding situations where wealthier communities benefit more than others. Experiences from the region also showed that hybrid governance models - combining centralized planning with decentralized solutions like micro-grids - can help address state fragility and support inclusivity. Sound and transparent governance is key. Lessons learnt from regional case studies highlight that an energy transition is not just about renewables but also about restructuring power dynamics. It requires embedding energy justice principles to ensure access for marginalized communities and integrating environmental considerations such as recycling renewable equipment from the outset. Political will and consistent policy are more critical than technology or financial support. Decentralized energy solutions can empower communities, but must be accompanied by proper regulation. In parallel, investing in new infrastructure and technological capacity must be done in collaboration with the private sector and international partners. This could support the start of an energy transition contextual to Yemen.

<sup>[28]</sup> Participant during YIF session, “Energy Transition: A National and Local Perspective for a Just and Sustainable Transition,” February 17, 2025.



## The Future of Peace is Green

***“I want to live in a healthy environment for me and my kids. This is a simple demand.”*** <sup>[29]</sup>

Green transitional justice is an emerging concept that broadens the definition of transitional justice to encompass environmental damages. These damages could include the destruction of ecosystems, mining in farmland and grazing areas forcing communities to abandon their land and livelihoods, man-made pollution, deforestation, and unregulated development, and the weaponization of natural resources such as water among others. Green transitional justice recognizes that environmental harms exacerbated by conflict are ecological issues and human rights violations. It also provides the opportunity to address the deep intersection between environmental degradation, conflict, and human security, particularly for vulnerable and marginalized communities.

In Yemen, fisherfolk, farmers, and displaced people are particularly affected by the consequences of environmental degradation. Women and girls, who are primarily responsible for collecting water, bear a disproportionate burden. Many of them walk for hours, often alone, under the scorching sun, across dangerous terrain, and amid ongoing conflict.<sup>[30]</sup> At the YIF, a report by the Sana'a Center and the Columbia Law School Human Rights Clinic highlighted what green transitional justice means for Yemen. “The decade-long conflict in Yemen has not only resulted in a catastrophic loss of life but also a calamitous degradation of land and water infrastructure,” said Sarah Knuckey, director of the Columbia Law School Human Rights Clinic. “Yemeni leaders, international actors, and organizations involved in the peace process must consider environmental harms and seek to redress them through transitional justice mechanisms to reflect the depth of the relationship between the land and its people.”

In practice, this means raising the awareness of both policymakers and Yemenis on how environmental harm is deeply connected to conflict and human security. Women, children, vulnerable communities, fisherfolk, and farmers must be recognized as prime victims of water and land degradation. Violations against the environment, including marine pollution from oil spills and discharges from vessels in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, deforestation, and unregulated development, must be systematically documented and addressed. While grassroots engagement and local community involvement are essential, top-down policy reforms and governmental accountability must work in parallel. Yemen has existing environmental laws and is a signatory to international agreements, but implementation and governance are weak. Environmental protection will require legislative review and strong institutional reforms in the long term.

<sup>[29]</sup> Participant during YIF session, “Green Transitional Justice: Addressing Environmental Harms,” February 18, 2025.

<sup>[30]</sup> “Conflict and Climate: The Need for Green Transitional Justice in Yemen,” Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies and Columbia Law School Human Rights Clinic, February 17, 2025, [https://sanaacenter.org/files/Conflict\\_and\\_Climate\\_The\\_Need\\_for\\_Green\\_Transitional\\_Justice\\_in\\_Yemen\\_en.pdf](https://sanaacenter.org/files/Conflict_and_Climate_The_Need_for_Green_Transitional_Justice_in_Yemen_en.pdf)



## 6.1. YIF Recommendations for Sustainable Environmental Policies

### **1. Adopt an integrated and inclusive water governance framework that combines modern and traditional practices and ensures equitable, transparent access to resources.**

- Develop stronger water governance frameworks to enforce laws effectively, eliminate inefficiencies, clarify mandates and responsibilities, and prevent groundwater over-extraction.
- Support sustainable water practices by reviving and promoting traditional water management techniques, such as rainwater harvesting, in conjunction with modern solutions, such as smart agriculture and irrigation systems.
- Provide local communities with the knowledge, tools, and capacity to adopt sustainable practices and encourage women and men's active participation in water management.
- Establish an integrated, sustainable governance framework for the water–food–energy nexus, ensuring the interdependencies of all resources. This includes regulation for solar-powered irrigation and enforcement of laws against unregulated well drilling.
- Implement policies incorporating climate change adaptation into water management strategies to address changing weather patterns and increasing drought conditions effectively.
- Encourage collaboration among international donors, NGOs, and the private sector to ensure that water solutions are integrated and sustainable through national strategies that consider diverse local contexts.
- Address gender-specific challenges related to water collection and incorporate women into water management policies, ensuring they have a voice in decision-making and protection from the dangers of collecting water.

### **2. Lay the groundwork for a just and inclusive energy transition in Yemen through decentralized solutions and strong community practices.**

- Develop a clear, conflict-sensitive, equitable national renewable strategy that addresses long-term and short-term needs.
- Improve governance structures to ensure transparency in the energy sector, especially regarding resource allocation and distribution. Clear, enforceable policies are needed to ensure fairness, prevent monopolization, and integrate diverse stakeholders.
- Delineate clear responsibilities among official entities for energy generation, distribution, and revenue collection.
- Provide international support in financing, infrastructure development, technology transfer, and capacity-building to facilitate an energy transition.
- Combine centralized strategies with local, decentralized energy solutions to enhance resilience and community participation.
- Embed principles of energy justice and social inclusion to reduce inequalities of access and prevent conflict.
- Facilitate the potential of renewable energy by encouraging private sector involvement and the development of decentralized off-grid solar and wind systems, ensuring they are scalable and can be adequately integrated into the national grid.
- Encourage knowledge sharing among regional countries to exchange best practices, models, and policies for energy transition.

**3. Integrate the concept of green transitional justice into Yemen's transitional justice frameworks to effectively address environmental harms and support ecological recovery.**

- Launch a national environmental documentation initiative to record environmental harms across conflict-affected areas.
- Establish a task force on green transitional justice to encourage the integration of environmental justice into broader transitional justice frameworks and learning from other countries' experiences.
- Facilitate community consultations with fisherfolk, farmers, displaced persons, and marginalized groups to identify key environmental priorities and design inclusive solutions.
- Develop pilot community-based projects to promote sustainable livelihoods, environmental protection, and women's participation in decision-making.
- Provide training programs for judges, policymakers, and local authorities on environmental justice principles and legal frameworks.
- Advocate for international funding for community-led environmental projects and flexible funding mechanisms that prioritize local women's organizations.



YIF III Panel on Collective Responsibilities for Achieving Peace and Stability in Yemen, February 16, 2025 // Sana'a Center photo

## Conclusion

Participants at the third Yemen International Forum engaged in discussions of impressive breadth over three days, shaped by Yemen's rapidly evolving political landscape. YIF III stood out in its effort to navigate a delicate balance between discussing the de-escalation of Yemen's internationalized crisis, which has both regional and global implications, and preserving the narrow window of hope for peace in the country.

As this report is being published, Yemen risks being dragged further into regional war due to ongoing tensions in the region. A recent US air military campaign against the Houthis, carried out from March to May, yielded little in terms of quelling Houthi capability, while worsening the suffering of Yemeni citizens. Against this backdrop, this year's YIF messages were predictive and relevant. In Amman, experts cautioned against short-sighted, security-focused responses, emphasizing that military operations without a long-term strategy, as seen repeatedly over the past decade of conflict in Yemen, do not effectively address security threats. YIF participants advocated instead for a more thoughtful, multi-pronged approach that is more conducive to securing a stable and peaceful Yemen.

At the forefront of a path forward was the unifying call for a strong, accountable Yemeni government. The need for good governance was stressed in political cohesion sessions and across all YIF files, from transitional justice to economic recovery, with the understanding that achieving the foundational elements needed for a stable and peaceful Yemen ultimately hinges on a functioning government. Radical reform of the PLC is imperative to transform it into a governing body with well-defined roles, accountability, and merit-based appointments. While a full economic recovery appeared distant, several pressing measures were discussed to mitigate the serious threat of economic collapse. These include refocusing humanitarian efforts so that they are more sustainable, resuming oil and gas production and export, developing a framework for more effective revenue collection and equitable distribution, and supporting the financial and private sectors to withstand the repercussions of the FTO designation.

Transitional justice, the YIF's most audacious and ambitious file, made tangible progress this year. Discussions focused not on the *when* but on the *how* to achieve it. Each of the seven sessions informed the foundations for a locally grounded roadmap for transitional justice. Yemeni stakeholders agreed that efforts towards transitional justice need not wait until a peace settlement is reached. Judicial reform, securing support from Yemen's political parties, and documenting the violations suffered by victims in preparation for future redress were priority measures to act on from now.

The protection of civil society, meanwhile, gained renewed impetus this year in light of the brutal ongoing crackdown on civil society actors in Houthi-controlled territories. Recognizing civil society as a vital lifeline for Yemenis is key. Participants called on the international community to be bold and firm in condemning the repression of civil society actors and supporting efforts to improve their operational environment. Special attention should also be given to women and their organizations, whose challenges are compounded by the intersection of their activism and their gender.

Finally, all of the above efforts will be in vain if Yemen's escalating environmental and water crisis remains unaddressed. At the YIF this year, proposed solutions to mitigate the ecological threat combined innovation with tradition. Along with better water governance, reintroducing centuries-old rainwater catchment systems was proposed to reduce pressure on groundwater and alleviate Yemen's water crisis. Additionally, two topics were introduced this year: a just energy transition and green transitional justice. The exploration of these topics signals a potentially innovative, sustainable green future, where renewable energy takes a more central role in Yemen and where there is recognition that environmental harms are also human rights violations.





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In preparing this report, the Sana'a Center has sought to present a balanced reflection of the key conversations that took place, recognizing the variety and richness of the opinions shared. The report offers a summary of the key themes and insights that emerged during the Forum. It does not, however, aim to be an exhaustive record of all discussions and viewpoints expressed at the YIF.

The drafting and editing of this report was led by Sana'a Center editor Lara Uhlenhaut.