



Mwatana for Human Rights

### **Statement by Radhya Almutwakel**

**Chairperson of Mwatana Organization for Human Rights,**

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Contact: Email: [Ralmutawakel@mwatana.org](mailto:Ralmutawakel@mwatana.org), Mobile: 0012404866702

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#### **Mr. President**

Your Excellencies, Member States Representatives

First, thank you for the opportunity to bring civil society's voice to the UN Security Council. Many Yemenis hope that you will make a positive impact on their war-weary lives.

I come to you from the forgotten Yemen, overburdened by bearing witness to the grave human suffering of millions of Yemenis as a result of the war. My country is in a state of total collapse. On my shoulders I bear the weight of the stories that have been gathered over the last three years by Mwatana Organization for Human Rights. Mwatana operates across Yemen in extremely difficult and complicated conditions and we do everything possible to document and give voice to the victims and survivors of human rights violations that are happening daily by all parties to the conflict, in all parts of the country. One of Mwatana's goals is to build a human rights memory that will provide the foundation for future justice and accountability for the people of Yemen.

Most Yemenis are not involved in fighting in this war. The most common refrain we hear from people in our field work is: "We hate war. We want to live."

War in Yemen has not happened suddenly, it is a result of accumulated mistakes by all parties throughout the past years. However, there are real opportunities to end this war and realize a fair settlement that puts Yemenis on track to build a state grounded in the rule of law.

For those who counted on war to bring solutions: What has war achieved except for thousands of civilians killed and injured, many of them women and children? War destroyed the basic and limited infrastructure that Yemen took decades to assemble. War led to the collapse of the health system. War is stopping hundreds of thousands

of Yemeni children from going to school, undermining the development of an entire generation. Hundreds of children are forcibly recruited to serve on the front lines. War led to a humanitarian crisis that is so acute that famine is imminent. Millions are invisibly internally displaced. And, recently, the outbreak of cholera has infected thousands of Yemenis.

If you put your lens closer to Yemen, you would easily catch the terrifying absence of State institutions, in areas controlled by de-facto authority of Ansar Allah armed group (Houthis) and allied former president Saleh, as well as in areas controlled by authority of President Hadi and his allied parties and armed groups. Yemenis aspire to a strong administration capable of providing security and basic services. Instead, they have only found armed groups engaged in conflict over power, at their expense.

War is providing an ideal environment for extremist groups to take hold and flourish. These groups have been working tirelessly amid the war to strengthen their power at the local level. They are virtual landmines in Yemen's future and they cannot be weakened unless a state of law and order exists.

Yemenis today need the international community and the Security Council to fulfill their responsibility to protect them. Throughout the last three years of war, all parties to the conflict have committed grave violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. This cannot be allowed to continue unchecked.

Mwatana Organization has documented grave violations by the Saudi and Emirates-led coalition that has led to the killing of thousands of civilians mostly women and children. This coalition has struck residential compounds, public markets, cultural and heritage sites, hospitals, schools, bridges and factories.

We have also documented extensive violations by Ansar Allah armed group (Houthis) and their ally Saleh, especially in Taiz, including the use of landmines in different areas in Yemen. Furthermore, we have documented violations including extrajudicial executions by the forces of president Hadi and allied parties and armed groups.

Both parties share the responsibility of indiscriminate shelling of civilians and civilian facilities, child recruitment, denial of humanitarian access, in addition to arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, torture, violations against freedom of speech and the disappearance of a free press, harassing minorities and other grave violations.

This war is taking the greatest toll on the Yemeni women. They have become prime civilian targets for all warring parties. They have lost their bread winners, forcing them to suffer an even greater level of poverty than was evident before the conflict. They are living in increasingly dangerous and insecure situations that restrict their movement and their ability to fight poverty. Observing mothers, wives, and daughters running from one prison to another in hope of hearing about their detained and forcibly disappeared loved ones, has been one of hardest scenes in this war to witness.

The people of Yemen look to the international community to ensure accountability for these serious violations of international law. Yemenis expect to see serious steps to restore the confidence of the people in the capability of this institution to maintain peace and security and promote justice.

## **Excellencies,**

During war, peace-building becomes an act of courage .

I call on the Security Council to come together to revive the peace talks so there can be an end to this senseless war.

I call on the Security Council to support the Special Envoy for Yemen to be strong in the face of warring parties and to embrace an inclusive peace plan that is not biased to one party's vision..

I call for the comprehensive inclusion of all Yemeni parties in the peace talks and to give serious space for the participation of civil society, women and youth.

I call on Security Council members to stand beside Yemenis and to halt support for any party to the conflict, and to stop arms transfers to all warring parties in Yemen.

The sufferings of Yemenis cannot come to an end unless war ends. Long-term commitments are needed to promote peace. The Security Council also needs to take urgent, concrete actions to mitigate suffering immediately. These actions will require the Security Council's courage, commitment and resolve. Urgently, the Security Council should:

- Establish an international independent commission of inquiry to investigate violations by all parties to the conflict;
- Stop the sale of weapons to parties involved in violations of human rights in Yemen;
- Demand an end to the targeting civilians and civilian objects through aerial and ground attacks;
- Ensure the release of all civilian detainees who are arbitrarily held and those forcibly disappeared under the authority of the Houthi-Saleh alliance and under the government of President Hadi and his allies.
- Demand that there be unhindered humanitarian access to all areas and all people in need;
- Ensure that Sana'a International Airport is reopened;
- Insist upon immediate agreement amongst the parties for a mechanism to pay salaries to public sector employees;
- Ensure the protection of Hodeida Port from the armed conflict and ensure it is restored to full functionality so it can better meet the needs of millions of Yemenis;
- Demand that restrictions on the operation of civil society organizations are lifted, press freedoms restored and all detained journalists released.

**Mr. President, Your Excellencies,**

There is an opportunity before the Security Council to take action to protect the people of Yemen and support us to find the path to a sustainable peace. Despite how tough the situation is on the ground, it is still possible to turn around, and chart a path toward peace, democracy, and economic development.

However, as the war continues, we need to keep in mind that what is possible today may not be possible tomorrow. Thus urgent action is crucial.

Thank you