



# PEACEWATCH: YEMEN



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## Peacebuilding, politics and the war

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The crisis in Yemen shows no sign of ending. The UN Envoy to Yemen, Ismail Ould Cheikh, continued travelling throughout the region in January 2017. Concluding his visit to Saudi Arabia, he said that [“We are working with the Yemeni parties and the states in the region to ensure a rapid restoration of the cessation of hostilities and the resumption of dialogue to find political solution.”](#)

In mid-January, Ould Cheikh went to Aden to meet with Yemeni President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi, Prime Minister Ahmed bin Daghr and Foreign Minister Abdul-Malek Al-Mukhlafi. He said there needed to be a truce to allow in humanitarian aid, and that he was urging all parties [“to commit to restoring the 10 April 2016 Cessation of Hostilities and take immediate measures which will prevent further deterioration of the economic and humanitarian situation.”](#)

It is clear that the formation of an inclusive government is the only way to end the fighting. But no one has come up with any constructive ideas so far, regardless of the Envoy's recent travel. Therefore, as in other conflicts but especially in the Middle East, the UN has not been able to support any productive engagement between rival groups. The conflict is almost indescribably complex, with so many regional and international stakeholders and interests. Oil, the arms industry, the 'new cold war' – these are all factors in this awful proxy war.

Nonetheless, there has been growing interest in the Yemeni disaster in several western countries, including the UK. Development, humanitarian and human rights NGOs are trying to increase their involvement, and the British media and press have provided some coverage. Even the House of Commons discussed Yemeni affairs.

Related to this, on January 9 Andrew Mitchell - a British MP and former Secretary of State for Development - went to Sana'a to see the impact of the war for himself. Mitchell met with officials from the Supreme Political Council and Yemeni Parliament, as well as former President Saleh, to discuss humanitarian and peacebuilding issues. He also made several field visits, including one to the



*An air strike hits Sana'a in 2016.*

Sa'adah region, where he would have seen massive destruction.

However, the Saudi-led Coalition – supported by the US and UK – continues its military operations and airstrikes. The day before Mitchell arrived, on January 8, the Coalition began a new military operation, Golden Spear, which opened a new front along the Red Sea Coast. As with the other operations, this will undoubtedly result in many civilian casualties.

A few days after this operation began, Human Rights Watch said that [“the coalition has unlawfully attacked homes, markets, hospitals, schools, civilian businesses, and mosques.”](#) Quoting the United Nations human rights office, it noted that “As of October 10, 2016, at least 4,125 civilians had been killed and 6,711 wounded, the majority by coalition airstrikes.”

## The humanitarian situation: a catastrophe

The 21-month conflict in Yemen has had a disastrous effect on what was already the weakest health system in the region. The closure of Yemeni airspace and the ban on commercial flights to and from Sana'a International Airport make the situation even more catastrophic. The closure of the airport is denying an estimated 20,000 people access to life-saving healthcare abroad. Hundreds of health facilities have been destroyed by coalition airstrikes,



The destruction of transport and other infrastructure has left health facilities in Yemen short of medical supplies. Image credit: [UN OCHA](#).

and health workers have been killed and injured. Where facilities are still operating, they do so only partially because of a lack of supplies, staff and resources. This means that many Yemenis are dying of preventable diseases.

Different UN agencies continue to urge all sides to take steps to de-escalate the violence on the ground. According to its latest humanitarian bulletin, 14 million people are food insecure, and more than three million children are acutely malnourished.

The other key development is the move of the Yemeni Central Bank from Sana'a to Aden, as it struggles to deal with a financial crisis which means that salaries for many are going unpaid. Combined with ongoing import restrictions (despite a UN verification mechanism that is supposed to allow essential goods through), this means that the overall situation continues to deteriorate.

## Attempted peacebuilding

The NGO sector in Yemen has shifted dramatically in the last decade, and especially since 2011, in favour of new youth- and women- focused organisations. They are attempting to shake off the so-called 'big brother' organisations and their attempts at



This workshop aimed to raise awareness of the role of women in peacebuilding. Image credit: Yemen Forum for Peace and Development.

political control.

But developments since March 2015 have narrowed the chances for peacebuilding to be carried out by local NGOs, regardless of the growing interest in the topic.

Any real peacebuilding initiative must engage all conflict parties, from different social, regional, political, and sectarian backgrounds. But there have been so many challenges since March 2015. The working situation is devastating. There is a lack of resources, multiple logistical problems, ever more divisions and boundaries, frequently-changing territorial control, and a basic policy of fear from all sides. This says that 'if you are not with us, you will be considered as against us,' and make any kind of cooperation extremely difficult.

With the environment still this difficult, a few, small voices have been raised from time to time, and some modest and indirect initiatives have been carried out in an attempt at some kind of peace work. Any positive news might



Despite the conflict, some peacebuilding workshops have been able to take place. Image credit: Yemen Forum for Peace and Development.

encourage people to try and heal wounds, but it is going to be an extremely difficult, if not impossible task. Two organisations currently active are the [Yemen Forum for Peace and Development](#) (YFPD) and the [For Yemen Foundation](#). They recently concluded a short peacebuilding programme. The first component was series of drawing workshops for female primary school students in Amran governorate. The sessions were on the role of women in peacebuilding, attempting to educate the students as well as the surrounding communities about peace, tolerance, and co-existence.

The second component was a training session in crisis management for local NGOs in Sana'a intending to work on peacebuilding issues. This was an attempt at basic capacity building for managers, youth initiatives and some government entities.

Waleed Ahmed from the YFPD said that this work aimed to provide civil society organisations and youth initiatives with the basic knowledge and some practical methods to diagnose the crisis scientifically and accurately. He added that it was meant to support the organisations involved to deal with crises efficiently, as well as raise social awareness of what can be done.

The conflict continues.

## Background

Follow the links below for reporting and research on the conflict in Yemen:

[Al Jazeera](#)  
[Civilians in Conflict](#)  
[ECFR](#)  
[Freedom House](#)  
[The Guardian](#)

[Humanitarian Response](#)  
[Human Rights Watch](#)  
[Reuters](#)  
[UNOCHA](#)

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