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## **Toward A More Effective Peace Process in Yemen**

### **Hikma Fellowship for Public Leaders**

The members of the Hikma Fellowship convened for a dialogue meeting in Cordoba, Spain, from 2 to 4 June, 2021. Their discussions centered around the complexities of the current situation in Yemen and the status of the peace process in light of regional and international developments and the renewed efforts of the UN and US envoys in recent months.

The Hikma Fellows reiterated their conviction that no party to the conflict is capable of achieving a military victory that would end the conflict in Yemen, and that the resolution of the conflict in Yemen should be reached through a comprehensive negotiations process. This process should be Yemeni-owned and Yemeni-led, and it should include all relevant Yemeni political parties and ensure the meaningful representation of women and youth.

As a new UN Special Envoy is being appointed to replace Martin Griffiths, and given the deadlock of the peace process in its current structure, the Hikma Fellows highlighted the following key shortcomings of the political process:

- The current crisis is being defined as a political dispute, which limits the scope of the UN Envoy's mediation efforts to power-sharing solutions. However, the realities on the ground show that the nature of the crisis has long surpassed being a political dispute over sharing power, and has developed into deeply contradicting visions of the state. Yemen is currently torn between multiple powers that carry these different visions, with the most visible being:
  - o The vision carried by Ansar Allah and the parties aligned to it
  - o The vision carried by the Government of Yemen and the parties aligned to it
  - o The vision carried by the Southern Transitional Council and the Southern Hirak movements

The core differences between these visions lie in how they define national identity, the form and nature of governance systems, and the concept of the state in Yemen, in addition to how they define Yemen's relations with the region and the international community more broadly.

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- The current negotiation efforts have focused so far on reaching an agreement between the Yemeni Government and Ansar Allah. However, the influence of regional countries on the Yemeni crisis cannot be ignored, and it is evident that the conflict cannot be resolved without addressing the regional dimensions of the crisis.
- The current peace process has avoided addressing the complex and multi-faceted nature of the crisis in Yemen. The adopted approach has been to limit the issues and parties of the peace process to a minimum, in order to accelerate reaching solutions and avoid getting stuck in complex issues, as articulated by the previous UN envoy and reiterated by many international community actors in various discussions. Therefore, the envisioned solution to the crisis has continued to be limited to reaching a quick ceasefire and power-sharing agreement together with the associated military arrangements. This limited view ignores the pre-requisites for reaching such a stage, and the complexities emerging from the rise of various diverging powers during years of conflict and the vast differences in the visions of these powers, as noted above.
- The current peace process has not effectively addressed the economic dimensions of the Yemeni crisis, including the war economy and its role in financing the warring parties and inhibiting peace efforts, as well as the impact of the conflict on the economy and what can be achieved through the peace process to save the Yemeni economy from total collapse.
- The absence of trust between the parties, and each party's fear of exclusion, retaliations, and the domination of the other party and its imposition of its vision for Yemen on the rest. In addition, significant concerns have surfaced among Yemeni elites that the model that appears to be taking shape in the peace process is based on apportioning public positions among the parties based on a quota system. These concerns stem from the negative consequences witnessed in other countries that adopted this model, such as Lebanon that is always discussed in Yemeni deliberations. The peace process has not succeeded in dealing with the mutual concerns and absence of trust between the parties, and attempts to address this lack of trust have remained limited to transactional procedures (such as prisoner exchanges) with the assumption, now proven wrong, that these transactions will build trust. The peace process has not created any space for discussions on how to address the consequences of the war, and how to ensure through mechanisms of transitional justice that it is not repeated.

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- The absence of direct meetings between the Yemeni parties in recent years, as the peace process has relied on the UN Envoy's shuttle diplomacy to meet with each party separately. This has entailed an almost complete absence of transparency and inclusion in what is being discussed, and it has contributed to limiting the discussion and restricting the ability to influence the process to a handful of people within each party.
- The peace process has not been able to present a clear and comprehensive vision for the guarantees that can provide assurances to the Yemeni parties and address their fears. This shortcoming has resulted in each party approaching any agreement as a temporary truce that will enable the other party to adjust and reinforce their positions and prepare for a new round of conflict.

The inability of the peace process in its current structure to achieve any tangible results for a conflict entering its seventh year, and the significant change in the dynamics of the situation in Yemen during these years, calls for a rethinking of the parameters and structure of the peace process. In this regard, and with the aim of having a more effective peace process with a greater chance of success, the Hikma Fellows recommend the following:

- Redesign the peace process to be more inclusive and multi-tracked, with a clear timeline for each track and identifying the issues and participants in each track, in order to address the different issues and parties in the Yemeni conflict under a more organised approach.
- The new UN Envoy should present a roadmap after consulting with all relevant Yemeni parties, instead of asking the parties to commit to a vaguely defined political process as has happened so far.
- Form an international support group, made up of the permanent members of the UN Security Council and the European Union, to closely coordinate positions and actions in an ongoing and continuous manner. The international support group should convene monthly meetings to push forward the different tracks of the peace process, and to communicate more extensively with the Yemeni and regional parties and provide greater transparency of ongoing discussions.
- Increase the frequency of direct meetings between the Yemeni parties in the different tracks to allow Yemenis to engage in direct dialogue on key areas of disagreement, and explore areas for potential compromises in the different visions and the required guarantees.

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- It is important that any comprehensive ceasefire should be accompanied by an agreement on the most important aspects of the political process that would follow the ceasefire. This is not only to avoid previous experiences in the Yemeni conflict of ceasefire agreements collapsing due to the lack of a political process, but also to avoid such agreements (in the lack of a clear political process) leading to a normalisation of the current situation and enforcing it on the ground, which could remove any incentives for some of the parties to engage in a political process afterwards.
- The political process has to address the regional aspect of the Yemeni crisis, and the key role played by the countries of the region, especially Saudi Arabia, in the Yemeni crisis and in any potential solution to it.
- To avoid repeating previous experiences of power-sharing cabinets in Yemen or other countries which have failed to achieve stability, it is important that the political track of the peace process not be limited to discussing how to split the future cabinet's seats. Instead, the political track should also include agreement on the priorities and program of any future power-sharing cabinet, and more importantly to agree on the entity that will carry the partnership in political decision-making and in overseeing the work of the cabinet in the transitional period.

The Hikma Fellows reiterate their willingness to meet with all Yemeni parties and with the international champions of the peace process to discuss these recommendations and how best to implement them in the coming period.

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## About the Hikma Fellowship Program

The inaugural cohort of the Hikma Fellowship for Public Leaders was [launched](#) in July 2020. The one-year program brings together 15 of the top leaders under 40 from Yemen's major political parties and movements, in addition to independents. The program consists of advanced leadership training delivered by international experts, discussions with renowned peacemakers and authorities, and facilitated dialogue on critical issues of importance to youth.

The program aims to build bridges between youth from divergent parties and backgrounds and equip them with the skills and knowledge to lead with integrity in the public sphere. Through the [Hikma Platform](#), the program is designed to bring a much broader array of Yemeni men and women into public discourse, and share outputs and information relevant to the peace process and other topics relevant to youth.

The Hikma Fellowship comes as part of a broader initiative led by DeepRoot and supported through the European Union Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP). The 18-month initiative, *A New Generation of Public Leaders in Yemen*, is structured to strengthen the role of youth in decision making processes and peacemaking efforts at the governorate, national and regional levels.

For more information about Hikma Fellowship, visit the program website at [hikmafellowship.org](http://hikmafellowship.org).



**DeepRoot** is a leading social enterprise working on advancing inclusive, sustainable solutions to a range of political, economic, and developmental issues in Yemen. DeepRoot has extensive experience in providing platforms for dialogue on peacebuilding, producing in-depth reports and expanding stakeholder understanding of the local dynamics in different areas of the country. DeepRoot has implemented multiple track II initiatives in direct and indirect support of the Office of the UN Special Envoy to Yemen's efforts to negotiate a political settlement to the conflict.

A New Generation of Public Leaders in Yemen is supported through the **European Union** Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP), and implemented in close coordination with the European Delegation to Yemen.



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## The Hikma Fellows



### Hanan Abbas

Hanan is a professor of criminal law at the University of Sana'a and a researcher on terrorism. She is a political and rights activist, heading the Women's Department for Rehabilitation and Skills Development in the General People's Congress (GPC), and is a member of the party's Standing Committee and its General Secretariat. Hanan also works as the executive director of the Forum for Advancement and Progress, and she is the editor-in-chief of the Progressive Media Center. Additionally, she is the director of the Kana'an Association for Palestine, which advocates in support of the Palestinian cause and provides assistance to Palestinians in Yemen.



### Mutlaq Al-Akhali

Mutlaq is a lawyer, politician, and human rights activist. He is a member of the Central Committee of the Yemeni Socialist Party, and has held various positions within the party since joining at a young age in 2004. A graduate of the Law College of Taiz University, Mutlaq previously led the party's student sector and youth union. Mutlaq was one of the most prominent activists in the 2011 revolution, serving as the official spokesman of the Revolutionary Council in Taiz city's Freedom Square. He represented the Socialist Party in the Transitional Justice and National Reconciliation group in the National Dialogue Conference in 2013, and he is the director of the Studies and Documentation Department in the Civil Aviation & Meteorology Authority.



### Huda Al-Sarari

Huda is a lawyer and one of the most prominent human rights defenders in Yemen. She heads the Defense Foundation for Rights and Freedom (DFRF), which since 2015 has provided legal defense for cases of arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance in the governorates of Aden, Lahj, and Abyan. Huda has made significant contributions to identifying and recording severe rights violations, including extrajudicial killings, in part through her work with the National Committee to Investigate Allegations of Human Rights Violations. She contributed to the establishment of the Mothers of Abductees Association in Aden, and she established an association to support the families of victims of assassinations in Aden. Huda was awarded the Aurora Prize for Awakening Humanity in 2019 and the Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders in 2020.



### Ammar Al-Aulaqi

Ammar is the Deputy Minister for Environmental Affairs in the Ministry of Water and Environment, a position he has held since 2014, and the recently-appointed chair of the Environmental Protection Agency. Ammar received a degree in environmental engineering from Dalhousie University in Canada and worked in the private sector in the oil and gas field before entering the public sector. He has contributed to many civil society initiatives in his native Shabwa governorate and throughout Yemen, including as a founding member of the "People Want" movement in 2011 and as founder and chairman of the "Change and Build" forum in 2012. Ammar is one of the founding members of the Development Champions Forum.

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### **Akhlaq Al-Shami**

Akhlaq is the Secretary General of the Higher Council for Motherhood and Childhood, and a member of the Political Office of Ansar Allah. Her early political and human rights work focused on the six rounds of war and accompanying arrests that took place in Sa'ada governorate between 2004 and 2010. Akhlaq participated in the peaceful youth revolution in 2011, served as a member of the National Dialogue Conference (NDC) in 2013 representing Ansar Allah in the Sa'ada Working Group, and participated in the 2014 popular revolution. In addition to her political work, Akhlaq has also been engaged in numerous initiatives to preserve Yemen's cultural and intellectual heritage.



### **Salem Al-Awlaqi**

Salem is a member of the presidency of the Southern Transitional Council (STC). He served as the official spokesperson of the STC between 2017 and 2019. Salem has been politically active from a young age, and as a member of the student union in Aden University he participated in the formation of the university's Coordination Unit for the Liberation and Independence of the South in 2010. Salem was actively involved in the Peaceful Southern Movement from 2008 to 2015, and he served as a member of the Preparatory Committee for the Inclusive Southern Conference in 2013. He also worked as programs director for the Democratic Youth Foundation from 2013 to 2015, and as the spokesperson for the Southern Resistance Council in Shabwa governorate in 2015.



### **Shadi Basurra**

Shadi is an associate professor at Birmingham City University, UK, and head of the master's program in computer science. Shadi is a founder and board member of the Al-Rashid Center for Research in Aden, and has served as the center's chairman since 2018. He has also worked as a research consultant specializing in Yemeni affairs with numerous international institutions, including the Future Center for Advanced Research Studies in the UAE, the Berghof Foundation in Germany, and the Geneva Center for Security Sector Governance, among others. He previously worked as a researcher for Sony, and many of his scientific research papers have been published in international conferences in Canada, China, America, and Britain.



### **Hisham Al-Maswari**

Hisham is a Yemeni writer, journalist, political activist and prominent member of the Yemeni Congregation for Reform, also known as the Islah party. Hisham currently works as a program producer and runs political programs for the Yemen Shabab Channel. A graduate of the Faculty of Political Science at the University of Sana'a, Hisham has been politically active since an early age and he was a prominent activist during the 2011 revolution, where he was a leading member of the "January 15 Gathering," a youth-led incubator for young leaders from different parties. Hisham has written for many news websites and he has been a frequent commentator on various Yemeni and Arab channels, including Al-Arabiya, Al-Jazeera, and BBC.



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### Yasmin Al-Qadhi

Yasmin is a human rights defender. She is the chairperson of the Marib Girls Foundation, which specializes in peacebuilding and sustainable development for women, and she also serves as Director of Girls' Education in the Education Department in Juba district of Marib governorate. Yasmin has a long track record in volunteering and working with civil society and non-governmental organizations, including as head of the Anti-Corruption Unit in Women Journalists Without Chains (WJWC). She is also a member of the Women of Peace Initiative. For her longstanding efforts to counter child recruitment, resolve local conflicts, promote peace and develop local strategies to reject extremism and terrorism, Yasmin received the US State Department's International Women of Courage Award in 2020.



### Akram Al-Ameri

Akram is the acting Secretary General of the Inclusive Hadhramout Conference, and president of the Court of First Instance in Hadhramout governorate since 2017. He has represented the Conference in numerous political dialogues and workshops in Yemen and abroad, and served as Vice President of the Drafting Committee for the preparation of the Hadramout Inclusive Conference in 2016. From 2017 to 2019, he served as Vice President of the Conference's Political Department, then Assistant Secretary General, and throughout 2020 he was the official spokesperson for the Hadhramout Inclusive Conference's delegation for the implementation of the Riyadh Agreement. Akram has been a judge since 2013, having received his master's in Judicial Sciences from the Higher Judicial Institute in Sana'a in 2013. He received his bachelor's degree in Law from the Faculty of Law, Aden University, and since 2015 he has also headed the Shaheed Bin Habrish Foundation for Development in Hadhramout.



### Husam Qasem

Husam has been actively involved in development, peacebuilding, political participation and good governance in Yemen since 2004. He worked recently with UN Women as a counselor for advocacy and networks, and during the Kuwait negotiations in 2016 he was a member of the national delegation's technical and logistical support team. Husam was one of the independent youth representatives during the National Dialogue Conference in (2013-2014) and a member of the Transitional Justice and National Reconciliation Team and a chairperson of the Recovering Funds and Looted Land group. He holds a bachelor's in Business Administration from the University of Aden, and has worked with several international and local organizations and governmental institutions including USAID, the Advisory Committee for Childhood and Youth, and held the position of Director of the Youth Care Center at the University of Aden.



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### Samah Radman

Samah is the director of the Planning Department in the Women's National Committee (WNC) and a political activist interested in women's issues and empowerment. Samah was an active member in the peaceful youth revolution of 2011. She is a member of the Central Committee of the Nasserist Unionist People's Organization, and represented the party in the National Dialogue Conference (2013-2014), where she was a member of the Transitional Justice and National Reconciliation group. Samah has participated in many political conferences and civil society activities in Yemen. She is a founding member of the Yemeni Women's Pact (Tawafuq) that supports Yemen's peace process, and a member of the Women's Solidarity Network that addresses women's issues. She is also a member of the youth advisory committee of the Arab Women Organisation, and a member of the Arab Youth Conference.



### Ahmed Alshami

Ahmed is an economic researcher, human rights activist and executive director of Arabian Rights Watch Association (ARWA). Ahmed graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Economics from George Mason University in the United States, and has 15 years of experience working in the oil, banking, real estate and investment sectors in Yemen and internationally. More recently, he was a civil society representative in the Economic Committee in Sana'a until the end of 2019. Ahmed is now dedicated to humanitarian and human rights advocacy and has participated in advocating a number of initiatives that focused on confidence building, peace building and neutralizing the economy.



### Yahya Al-Thulaya

Yahya is the Chairman of the General Authority for the Book at Yemen's Ministry of Culture, a position he has held since 2019. He has been involved in political work since a young age, including as chair of the Unified Media Committee for Political Parties in Amran governorate in 2012. He has worked with several human rights organizations, and headed the National Organization for Defending Rights and Freedoms (HOOD) office in Amran. As a journalist, Yahya covered the Sa'ada War from 2004 to 2010, and he worked as a media official for the Youth Revolutionary Council in Amran. He has chaired and participated in a number of election management committees, and served as secretary to the governor of Amran, director of the Ministry of Culture branch in Amran, and in 2017 he served as a special advisor to the chief of staff in the Defense Ministry. Yahya received his bachelor's in political science from Sana'a University.