



Public protest and visions for change

Yemen: People's Peacemaking Perspectives



November 2011



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SAFERWORLD

NOVEMBER 2011

Acknowledgements

This report was written by Saleem Haddad and Joshua Rogers of Saferworld. They would like to thank Murad Algharati and colleagues from Saferworld and Conciliation Resources for support and comments. Research was conducted by Tamkeen Development Foundation, with support from Saferworld. The publication was designed by Jane Stevenson, and prepared under the People's Peacemaking Perspectives. The views expressed by youth interviewed for this report do not necessarily reflect the views of Saferworld.

The People's Peacemaking Perspectives project

The People's Peacemaking Perspectives project is a joint initiative implemented by Conciliation Resources and Saferworld and financed under the European Commission's Instrument for Stability. The project provides European Union institutions with analysis and recommendations based on the opinions and experiences of local people in a range of countries and regions affected by fragility and violent conflict.

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This document has been produced with the financial assistance of the European Union. The contents of this document are the sole responsibility of Saferworld and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the European Union.

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Yemen



This map is intended for illustrative purposes only. Saferworld takes no position on whether this representation is legally or politically valid.

Acronyms

AQAP	Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula	PDRY	People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (former South Yemen)
EU	European Union	UAE	United Arab Emirates
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council	UN	United Nations
GPC	General People's Congress	US	United States of America
JMP	Joint Meeting Parties	YAR	Yemen Arab Republic (former North Yemen)
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs	YSP	Yemeni Socialist Party

Executive summary

YEMEN IS GRAPPLING WITH COMPLEX CHALLENGES on a number of frontiers. The economy is facing a downward spiral, with declining oil and water reserves, budget shortfalls, and pervasive poverty and unemployment. Politically, the Yemeni government is facing a severe crisis of legitimacy, civil conflict, regional fragmentation, and an increasingly aggressive militant jihadist movement. While the country's peaceful protest movement has given unprecedented hope to millions of Yemenis, it has also become a cause of trepidation, as a stand-off between factions of the divided military has driven the state to the brink of collapse.

This study comes at a time when international efforts to end the bloodshed and negotiate a peaceful transition are running out of time. The international community must ensure that perspectives of Yemen's diverse communities inform their efforts to reach a negotiated settlement. Understanding how young people in Yemen, who make up about 75 percent of the population, perceive the drivers and solutions to the conflict should be an integral aspect of finding a lasting settlement to the crisis. There cannot be a process that is good enough or inclusive enough that does not include youth at all stages.

This study brought together youth from diverse backgrounds in four major cities in Yemen to offer a snapshot on their perspectives on the challenges facing the country. Youth discussed the main grievances driving the protests in the country, and their ideas on transition and priorities for reform. These perspectives have been reinforced by interviews with politicians, religious and tribal authorities, businessmen, youth and women leaders, and experts on Yemen. The final section of the report provides detailed policy and programme recommendations to the international community, focusing on the following six principles:

- **Stronger, better co-ordinated, and more transparent international engagement** has the potential to end violence in Yemen and contribute to a rapid and peaceful transition.
- **Supporting Yemeni livelihoods is a priority**, and the international community must scale up immediate humanitarian assistance and promote longer-term economic growth.
- **Inclusion should not just be an end goal** but the beginning of an ongoing process that is systematically ensured at all stages of national and international engagement.
- **The Southern issue must be given appropriate priority** in transition negotiations in order to prevent future conflict.
- **The Sana'a-centric outlook** of the international community threatens to overlook urgent peripheral concerns and fosters a dangerous disconnect to concerns of Yemenis outside the capital.
- **The protest movement represents an unprecedented opportunity** for Yemenis to negotiate and build a more stable and inclusive political settlement.

1

Introduction

YEMEN'S CIVIL PROTEST MOVEMENT is the largest in Yemeni history and the longest-running of the Arab Spring uprisings. Young protestors across the country have come together, demanding that President Ali Abdallah Saleh leave office immediately. But while this movement has given unprecedented hope to millions of Yemenis, it has been overshadowed by a military stand-off that has driven the country to the edge of economic and humanitarian collapse.

In a country where 75 percent of the population is under the age of 25,¹ Yemeni youth have been instrumental in challenging the country's exclusionary politics. Though regime forces have shot hundreds of protestors, the protest movement has created unprecedented opportunities for young people, including women, to debate the future shape of Yemeni society and politics. Yemeni youth are not just voicing a set of grievances; many have begun to articulate visions for a more inclusive political system they feel would guarantee long-term peace and security.

This research takes these observations as its point of departure and critically analyses youth perspectives on grievances and expectations mobilising protests. It is built on the belief that any attempt to support long-term peace and security in the country must begin by addressing the grievances that have driven hundreds of thousands of Yemenis to protest. Past experience with peace negotiations show that an agreement that is not considered legitimate by aggrieved populations is rarely a stable or successful one, and thus any attempt to negotiate Yemen's political transition must be rooted in the aspirations and perceptions of legitimacy of the Yemeni people.

Beyond specific grievances, this research offers a stock-take of young people's perceptions about political legitimacy, stakeholders for change and the dynamics of the protests to date. Overall, despite the hardship Yemenis have faced on a daily basis, their perceptions are remarkably positive. The squares are used as rare public spaces for discussion and learning, and women have played a highly visible and important role in the protests.

Findings and recommendations in this report were generated from consultations with youth from diverse backgrounds in four major cities, in Sana'a, Taiz, Aden and Al-Mukalla and supplemented by interviews with politicians, religious and tribal authorities, businessmen, women and youth leaders, and experts. Research was conducted in July and August 2011. Within each location, the research team tried to ensure a balance of opinion that includes politically independent youth, those associated with a range of political parties, tribal youth, rural youth, and those who did not engage in any form of protest. The sample size was small due to the nature

¹ Assad, R et al, 'Youth Exclusion in Yemen: Tackling the Twin Deficits of Human Development and Natural Resources', (Dubai School of Government, November 2009), p10.

of the project. As such Saferworld recognises the limitations of the research and has not attempted to generalise findings to the national level. Nevertheless, the research allowed for in-depth discussion on various issues, providing a snapshot of the issues in various regions and contexts at a time when there was limited access to these target groups. More information on the methodology and validation is available in the appendix.

2

Exploring youth grievances

“We are not rejecting Saleh and his family personally. We are rejecting the administration and its rule over the past 33 years, and where it has taken the country.”

Young woman in Sana’a

This section offers an analysis of the top five grievances that young people feel drove the protests in Yemen. It complements a ‘classical’ analysis focusing on the drivers of conflict by providing perspectives of Yemeni youth on the key issues that they are concerned about and their perspectives on the character and motives of the different conflict actors.

The most striking feature to emerge from discussions was the broad similarities in key drivers of protest throughout all four cities. With the exception of Al-Mukalla, which listed the Southern issue as the driving grievance, the issue of corruption consistently topped the list of youth concerns.

Corruption

“Corruption blocks all arteries of life in Yemen.”

Young man in Sana’a

Corruption was seen as underlying a number of issues. It was usually associated with the issue of exclusion, particularly outside Sana’a and in the South, where youth characterised marginalisation and the exploitation of local resources as a form of institutionalised corruption.

The dominant perception was of corruption as a deep-rooted system that affects all aspects of society. According to a young man in Sana’a, “corruption is an integrated system connected to the leadership and tribal-military elements that have been entrenched for years.” Even members of the ruling party believe that the situation has reached a critical turning point. One Taiz-based member of the General People’s Congress (GPC) – President Saleh’s ruling political party – said that corruption is “a disease in government departments and elsewhere, with people profiting from their own interests without considering society at large.”

At the macro level, youth participants discussed how international aid reinforced corruption by making national leaders accountable to international actors rather than local people. The roles of specific actors, such as the United States (US) and Saudi Arabia, were highlighted as contributing to the entrenchment of a corrupt system through financial assistance and formal and informal payments made through

individuals within the state, military commanders, and tribes. “[The regime] should have a budget and its primary duty is to preserve the nation, but as long as it receives money from outside then they can do anything they want with no consequences,” said a young man in Sana’a.

The lack of accountability helps create a system where elites within the regime’s inner circle have access to key sectors of the economy, and have been rewarded through government contracts and the allocation of resources from the government budget to their home regions.² This promotes the practice of receiving unearned income based on standing, which in the words of one participant “drives corruption at all levels”.

On a day-to-day level, corruption affects youth most strongly in education and employment opportunities, as well as everyday transactions related to dealing with the public sector, the justice system and the police. Youth spoke of jobs being bought and sold, exam questions being provided to those with connections, and frustrations with the day-to-day need to pay bribes to ensure that public officials complete paperwork on time. “I refused to give a bribe once and instead of taking three days the process took three months,” said one of the youth participants in Sana’a. A young woman in Taiz echoed these sentiments, “Bribery is necessary to do anything. You cannot get a paper signed without paying a bribe.”

Youth talked about how everyday complaints about corruption were often ignored or, in some cases, met with reprisals such as threatening failure in exams or ‘blacklisting’ for certain jobs. “What am I supposed to do? Who do I complain to? The local councils are also corrupt. There’s nothing I can do when I see corruption everywhere,” said one young woman in Taiz.

While frustrated at the deep-seated system of corruption, youth also feel that individuals contributed to it through their everyday actions. “God does not bring change until you change yourself,” said one young woman in Taiz. “If we come up against corruption and we all refuse to give in to it, I’m sure that corruption will stop.” Another participant highlighted the recent petrol crisis in the country as an example of how individuals choose to participate in corruption. “Instead of people going out to demand petrol and getting petrol the right way, we instead choose to buy and sell petrol in the black market, so everyone at all levels participates in the culture of corruption.”

Unemployment and poverty

“There is a Yemeni saying that says that at the root of all problems is poverty. Out of poverty comes bribery and nepotism.”

Young woman in Taiz

Unofficial estimates usually place unemployment at around 40 percent. In the current unrest, unemployment is estimated to have risen to between 60 and 70 percent of the population. Most Yemeni youth have little hope of finding work abroad, where external labour markets have been closed off to them for political and security reasons.³

Many youth complain of difficulties in accessing economic opportunities, being unable to afford a house or dowry. This is exacerbated by unequal and insufficient access to education. The low standards and quality of education has meant that youth lack necessary skills to prepare them both for the domestic labour market, but also for more lucrative opportunities in the neighbouring Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries.⁴

Chronic poverty is severe, with an annual per capita income of under US \$900 per year. Nearly half the population earns less than \$2 per day.⁵ The UNDP 2010 Human

² Salisbury, P, ‘Yemen: Oil Imports and Elites’, (Chatham House, October 2011).

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Forsythe, J, ‘Opportunities and Obstacles for Yemeni Workers in GCC Labour Markets’, (Chatham House, September 2011).

⁵ UNDP, *Human Development Report*, (UNDP, 2010).

Development Report ranks Yemen 133rd among 169 countries on its Human Development Index. Given these figures, it is not surprising that unemployment and poverty came second on the list of youth grievances.

While recognised as a factor driving Yemenis to protest, youth feel that economic insecurity provided significant barriers preventing more Yemenis from protesting. According to a young man living in a village outside Taiz, “if we had more food and more secure water and tents then we would be out protesting in our tens of thousands. Families are too busy struggling to make a living, digging their lands; they cannot leave their lands behind and go protest.”

“There used to be more protestors from rural areas,” one young man in Taiz remarked. “They used to come down in buses and trucks. But now with the petrol crisis they haven’t been able to come down and protest as much.” Despite these difficulties, participants feel that many youth from rural areas travelled to the city closest to them in order to ‘represent themselves’. While many may have initially protested under direction from local leaders, participants feel that rural youths’ interactions with others in the protest squares made many of them realise their immediate livelihood demands were linked to broader political processes in the country.

The close, reinforcing link between economic and political grievances was highlighted by some youth. High levels of corruption and exclusion worsened the economic climate and contributed to poverty, but poverty and the lack of resources was also a cause for greater corruption and insecurity. For many participants, corruption, exclusion and the lack of law and order related to issues of livelihoods: education, employment opportunities, land rights are all means to ensure the livelihood of an individual and a family. A young man in Sana’a highlighted this issue with the following comparison: “the difference in Syria is that they are living an economically comfortable life but they have no freedom of expression; here in Yemen we are starving, but we can express ourselves freely.”

Indeed, the Yemeni economy is facing a serious downward spiral: unemployment has increased markedly since protests began, the country has experienced large-scale capital flight, and the government budget deficit, already estimated to be 9.3 percent of GDP in 2010,⁶ has increased further. Crude oil production, the country’s main export, fell 45 percent year on year for March and April 2011, due to disruptions to pipelines. Even before the protests, the government’s operating costs were expected to exceed its income by around 30 percent,⁷ and since then, decreasing oil revenues combined with wage increases and direct payments to individuals and tribes to secure loyalty have exacerbated the situation. Moreover, it appears that funds earmarked for investments are being used to finance protestors and secure loyalty of the armed forces, making these outlays doubly debilitating for the Yemeni economy.⁸

Exclusive political system

“The political, social and economic system has become closed off to most people. The system is not delivering or working for its people.”

Female youth in Taiz

Exclusion, articulated in different ways by different participants, emerged as another major grievance driving the protests. The Yemeni regime’s patronage system has generated an uneven distribution of resources, and has also increasingly isolated areas that traditionally lacked access to power, or were unable to mobilise the collective bargaining of influential figures.⁹ In discussions, young people feel that marginalised

⁶ Economist Intelligence Unit, *Country Report: Yemen*, January 2010.

⁷ Risk Watch, ‘Yemeni Parliament Approves 2010 Budget’, 4 January 2010, www.riskandforecast.com/post/risk-watch/yemeni-parliament-approves-2010-budget_373.html, accessed 7 November 2011.

⁸ Author interviews with World Bank staff in Sana’a.

⁹ Yemen Armed Violence Assessment, ‘Fault Lines: Tracking Armed Violence in Yemen’, Issue brief Number 2, October 2010.

groups included, but were not limited to: young people, women, rural communities, religious minorities, Southerners, non-tribal citizens and those not associated with the GPC. "In all sectors there are qualified people who can do great work, but they are not used in the right way and are not given the chance," said a journalist in Taiz.

Exclusion, also articulated by youth as "unequal citizenship", "marginalisation", "injustice", "colonisation" (in the case of the South), and "monopolisation and centralisation of power and authority", was linked to a certain type of political order in which the large-scale appropriation of public funds was used to maintain, through patronage, a narrow ruling coalition. Such a system produces what can be described as a 'limited access order', a political system built on the use of rents from public office to distribute benefits to a narrow elite to the exclusion of the majority of the population.¹⁰

In such a system, incentives for developing the productive capacity of society are minimal and, for elites, power and survival are so intimately linked as to make giving-up power an almost unthinkable proposition. For ordinary citizens, such a system "hinders the achievement of equal citizenship" and equal opportunities, according to a young woman in Taiz, and "promotes a system where people forge university degrees, get jobs by who they know rather than putting forth the best person for the job, all the way to rigging elections and using the military to support the family."

A significant facet of this exclusion is that many youth feel that they are not judged according to their achievements but rather on the degree of power or influence they and their networks have. One young woman in Sana'a gave an example: "I graduated with a score of 96 percent and came first in my class, and a colleague of mine graduated with a score of 60 percent. We both applied for a job but he ended up with the job because he has personal connections." Similar stories are heard throughout the country. "Educational institutions don't place any importance on how smart you are," explained one young man in Taiz, "they only care about who you know or what you can pay."

Both youth and authority figures highlighted that exclusion was a deeper problem that needed to be addressed. As one young man in Aden said, "when it comes to exclusion, I protested against the regime and I'm prepared to go out again against the Socialists or Islah or the Nasserites or the tribes if any person denies me. I am not out to protest against Saleh, I am out to protest against exclusion, and I am fully aware that I could face similar exclusion under Islah or the Socialists." Similarly, those interviewed argued that exclusionary processes continue to exist between competing grassroots coalitions vying for influence and voice within the protest movement itself.

Gender and exclusion

"Women immediately went out into the squares to show that they too are suffering."

Young woman in Sana'a

Yemeni women experience the greatest levels of sexual discrimination in the world, according to a global gender gap study.¹¹ Child marriage, violence against women, and discriminatory laws are just some of the burdens faced by Yemeni women and girls. In addition to this, women have faced extreme levels of marginalisation and exclusion from political processes. During past elections, women who stood as candidates faced major obstacles in running effective campaigns, including social pressures, intimidation of women who wanted to vote for women candidates, spreading of falsehoods and rumours against women candidates and violations, as well as bribery and election fraud directed against women candidates.¹²

¹⁰ North, D C, J J Wallis and B R Weingast, *Violence and Social Orders: A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting Recorded Human History*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

¹¹ World Economic Forum, 'The Global Gender Gap Report', 2010, www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GenderGap_Report_2010.pdf, accessed 7 November 2011.

¹² Al-Thaibani, K, 'Women candidates exposed to violations', *Yemen Observer*, 29 September 2006.

Young women discussed the exclusion of women from political processes as a factor driving their participation in the protests. “Without exception, women have not been able to participate in political decision-making, within any party, other than at a superficial and basic level,” said one young woman in Taiz. While participants spoke less about women’s marginalisation in the private sphere, many said that exclusion cuts across all aspects of socio-economic and political life. “Women enter into the judiciary and study everything and yet are never at the same level as a male judge. A woman can be a judge on personal issues, but she isn’t allowed to touch issues such as inheritance,” explained a young female lawyer in Taiz.

In addition to exclusion, women complained how gender issues have been co-opted by the regime to secure national and international legitimacy. “The regime used women to appear to the world as a democratic system that empowered women, but the truth was that women were never able to make political decisions,” said a young woman in Sana’a. Similarly, political parties often used the issue of women’s rights to score points among various factions, whether liberal or conservative. Women’s issues, for many political actors, were seen as being “merely window dressing”, “a polarising tool”, and nothing more than a “shallow representation.”

For many women, the widespread public protests that erupted in February 2011 provided an opportunity for them to express discontent about their own exclusion in the political sphere. “Men did not have an idea of the political dimension of women’s issues or the legal dimension,” said one woman in Sana’a. “Through interacting with and being exposed to these issues in Change Square they have become more aware, and we are a stronger community now.”

Among young women in Sana’a, discussion around the role of women as actors in the revolution brought up the issue of whether women protestors were protesting as ‘women’, or whether they were seen as part of the youth movement in general. Participants on the whole feel that embedding women’s issues within the wider context of exclusion was a better way of guaranteeing that these issues would not be side-lined or brushed away.

Most participants highlighted the role of customs and traditions as obstacles to greater participation of women in the political sphere. Community perspectives, issues of shame and honour, and a lack of understanding of their rights were also listed as reasons that keep women away from the political arena. “Society should be rehabilitated in order to accept women as a minister or a manager,” one young man in Al-Mukalla said.

Despite their large turnout, women continue to be marginalised. The president of the Yemeni Women’s Union in Hadramaut expressed concern that in the current context, “women in Hadramaut are unable to go out to express their feelings because they continue to be incarcerated in the house.” This was echoed by a young female protestor in Sana’a: “as women, we have two struggles obstructing our ability to protest: the struggle with our family for our right to protest, and the struggle with the regime on our right to protest.”

Security and justice

“We have no protection and no rights, and laws are not used to protect us”

Young woman in Sana’a

On 21 March 2011, following one of the largest massacres of peaceful protestors by the regime’s forces, a section of the military, the 1st Armoured Division under the command of General Ali Muhsin al-Ahmar, defected from the regime and officially declared its allegiance to protect the protestors. This signalled the split within the military and the beginning of the military stand-off that continued as this report went to publication. Resolving this stalemate, within a wider and more long-term reform of the military and security apparatus, was highlighted by many youth as being an integral component to achieving long-term peace and stability.

The Yemeni government and security institutions are segmented, with minimal communication and co-ordination between, and within, the ministries of Interior, Justice and Defence. Consequently, there is extensive overlap and duplication of functions between the Police, Army and Central Security Forces in urban areas; in rural areas and along land borders, rivalry results in ineffective or insufficient policing. This was confirmed by rural youth within focus groups, who feel that repression by security personnel, and a general lack of security, was particularly pronounced in the periphery. “Many people in rural areas have been kidnapped for years and no one knows where they are,” explained a young woman in Taiz.

The common perception of rural Yemen as a lawless land beyond the reach of the state does not often consider the effect such lawlessness has on the insecurity felt by many rural Yemenis. One young woman in Taiz expressed this: “over the past ten years the amount of murder and injuries to people in the countryside is terrible, and yet how do they resolve it? The vice minister goes to the tribal sheikh and gives him 300,000 riyals or a car, and that’s the end of the case. Young people in the countryside see how ugly this system is and how easily blood is lost because of the lack of laws and sovereignty.”

The lack of credible justice provision and government violations of political and human rights is another key grievance against the regime’s legitimacy and lawfulness in the eyes of the protestors. Stuck between a corrupt judiciary, deteriorating customary conflict management systems, weak enforcement of the rule of law, and a state security apparatus that has increasingly exerted a disproportionate level of force under the guise of ‘stability’ and ‘counterterrorism’,¹³ many Yemenis find themselves in a vacuum when it comes to law enforcement and the provision of security. Youth are particularly vulnerable as they lack the means and connections perceived as necessary to get ahead in life and stave off abuses of power.

The lack of rights and freedoms, sometimes framed using words such as ‘dignity’ and ‘injustice’, is felt to be a legitimate grievance by all youth consulted in all regions, and was often closely linked to corruption within the security and justice sector and their failure in providing effective and independent law enforcement. Participants consistently referred to the lack of accountability at all levels of government as a major factor in the absence of effective security and justice mechanisms that would protect their social, economic and political rights and freedoms.

“If the law is binding and enforced and the security and justice sector is able to follow through in a strong way to implement the law,” observed a young man in Sana’a, “then reform would be possible.” But, he hastened to add, conditions in Yemen were far from this vision of a rule of law. Another participant from Sana’a gave a personal example to illustrate the effects of corrupt judicial practices: “Seven years ago my uncle was killed in a *souq* in Sana’a. But, even though we have a lawyer, someone from higher up froze the case and so no decision has been taken.”

In addition to grievances associated with judicial corruption, youth, particularly young men, feel the effects of daily repression at the hands of security forces. This encouraged some people to protest, but discouraged others from doing so for fear of repression. This factor came up significantly more often among participants in Taiz and Aden. As one male participant from Taiz stated, “the grip of security forces, as well as the persecution, oppression and torture practised against young people in their communities by these forces is enough reason for a revolution.”

Reports of security forces arresting and subjecting hundreds if not thousands of Yemeni citizens to a wide range of abuses, including disappearance, prolonged detention without charge, torture and unfair trials,¹⁴ were substantiated by many participants’ own experiences. “A friend of mine was detained without charge and tortured in brutal ways,” a young woman in Sana’a testified. “We organised a sit-in

¹³ Amnesty International, ‘Yemen: Security at What Price?’ (Amnesty International, August 2010).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

and we read the Quran, and then [the security officer] insulted us and the Quran. Forget that he is a security officer, but as a Muslim, how can one do this? We were simply requesting the release of someone who was not guilty and had not been charged. When I see the military or police do this then I feel that I have lost all my rights and the least I can do is go out against this person and this system that got us to where we are at today.”

A female participant associated with the Houthi movement spoke of first-hand abuses suffered at the hands of security forces on an ongoing basis. “During the war in Sa’ada we were targeted because we were Zaydi or Hashemite families; all you had to do was express an opinion at a *qhat* chew and the next day you disappear. We participated in sit-ins and as women we were beaten, and I myself have been beaten. Rights and freedoms are the foundations we go by, and once my rights and freedoms begin to shrink I feel oppression and injustice and I feel like I want to explode and revolt, be it a social or political revolution.”

In Al-Mukalla, one young woman spoke of a similar incident. “One time they stormed my house while we were asleep and I woke up and there were 30 military men in our house. I couldn’t sleep for a week because of that. I’m scared because they imprison people without charge.” The government’s violent response to youth protestors is deemed particularly inflammatory and has exacerbated allegations of its unlawful oppression of people and their rights.

The Southern issue

“For 20 years we’ve been excluded politically and economically. The Southern issue is in our hearts and remains a big issue.”

Young Adeni woman

For many Southerners, the process of unification was not smooth, and is seen as the beginning of the unequal relationship between North and South. Political instability, civil war and tensions between North and South have increased the psychological distance between youth in the South and the concept of a united Yemeni community. Southerners feel that the neglect of key differences between the political economy of the Northern and Southern states at unification, as well as the side-lining of economic issues for political issues, contributed to the marginalisation of Southern governorates.

In 2007 this growing discontent found a more formal voice with the founding of the ‘Southern Movement’, or al-Hiraak as it is commonly known. Although it receives little international attention compared to other non-state actors in Yemen, al-Hiraak arguably represents the most serious threat to the Yemeni state. The movement refers to a number of loosely affiliated organisations and activists in the Southern governorates that are protesting against the perceived injustices of the Northern-based regime. What began as protests by a group of army pensioners, spread over the course of 2007 to include civil servants, teachers, lawyers, academics and broader sections of society and even came to include historically ‘Northern’ governorates such as Taiz and Ibb. As protests were met with violence, support was consolidated and demands became more radical. By 2008 some had begun to openly call for secession.¹⁵ Therefore, for many Southerners, protests did not begin in 2011 but have in fact been ongoing for a number of years.

The ‘Southern issue’: grievance and mythology

There was consensus among those consulted from Aden and Hadramaut that the deteriorating economic and security situation, combined with the central government’s response to these issues, has catalysed secessionist sentiment in the Southern provinces. Protest supporters from both cities largely express themselves in secessionist language

¹⁵ ICG, ‘Breaking Point: Yemen’s Southern Question’, Middle East Report no. 114, (ICG, October 2011).

or at least convey a strong sense of 'separateness' in the language they employ. However, it should be noted that all focus groups emphasised the separateness and uniqueness of their own region, its details, and the extent to which it has been impacted by recent conditions in relation to the rest of the country.

Grievances in the South took three main forms. The first related to the exclusion of Southern governorates and the desire for greater participation in the political system. "There is a feeling among Southerners that we are second-class citizens and have been badly treated," said a young member of the Southern Movement in Hadramaut.

The second form relates to the control and provision of resources. Many Southerners continue to believe that Northern elites have built their survival on the extraction of the South's natural resources, while entrenching a system that excludes Southerners from government employment and other benefits.

Youth from Southern governorates complained about the reduction in the role of public institutions in education and healthcare, linking it to the general fall in standards of living. A young woman in Hadramaut discussed her frustrations with the privatisation of previously public spaces such as beaches, which were now privately owned by Northern elites. "Public tourist places have also been neglected. They are broken, and sewage water is running through them. We were promised large-scale projects but we don't have access to any of them."

Land rights emerged as a particularly strong grievance. Participants discussed cases where Northern elites stole land and resources and manipulated the judicial system to ensure that such claims were not dealt with effectively. A young woman in Al-Mukalla gave one such example: "In Al-Rayyan region, next to the airport there was a residential building planned for the people of Hadramaut, but the 27th brigade came and built houses randomly without permission and now almost 90 percent of the population of the region are Northerners. Now, only 64 out of an original 1,000 apartments belong to Hadramis. They built it and got it by force through orders issued by the leadership. They promised the people of the area compensation, but nothing. This is my land and it is my right."

The third form of 'otherness' expressed by Southerners relates to their distinct historical and cultural identity, often referred to as 'civic' compared to the 'tribal' North. This came out the strongest in Hadramaut, where youth discussed, with pride, their distinct civic Hadrami identity, which they juxtaposed with the 'tribal' rule of the North. "The Hadrami community and Southern community in general is more civilised and is a more civic society than the North," claimed one young woman in Al-Mukalla. Another young woman complained that "they [the North] bring Northern teachers to come teach us while our women have been sitting at home unemployed for the past five or seven years; and the history that they teach us is not our true Hadrami history."

Participants harked back to past glories of South Yemen as a civic state, with the socialists being the pioneers of the notion of a 'civic state'. For many in the South, the former People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) provides a blueprint and a model for a future civic state. As one participant from Mukalla said, "in the former state a citizen could earn a living from the state. Now, after unity, we have nothing. You don't see any resources and that's enough reason to go out and protest."

However, most Yemenis are in their twenties and therefore have no memory of life before union in 1990. "Much of what youth know about life in the PDRY is from listening to the memories of the older generation, on how life was before the union. When they hear about health provision and education being better, they feel they want to return to that era," explained a young lawyer and activist from Aden.

Diversity of voices in the South

The diversity of perspectives among youth in the South was vividly illustrated in the consultations. In Aden, some youth saw the Southern issue as means to address grievances, rather than as an end in itself. “Threaten them with a fever and they’ll accept a headache,” explained a young man in Aden. One young woman in Aden stated that “the Southern issue is a means to an end, not an end in itself. It’s a way to address all of the other issues, and that’s why people on the streets are bringing it up.” Urban youth feel that demands for secession were greater in more remote and rural areas of the South, as opposed to major cities. Others, particularly in Al-Mukalla, saw no correlation between the protests in their areas and those happening in Northern cities, and saw demands for greater decentralisation as merely one step towards the eventual goal of independence.

However, all Southerners agree that attempts to brush the Southern issue under the table, both by Northern Yemenis and by the international community, obfuscate genuine Southern grievances that should be addressed. “These are more than just economic and political grievances, but also sociocultural and historical differences,” argued a leading activist within the Southern Movement. Many Southerners expressed concern that their perspectives and concerns are not given equal weighting both within Yemen and at the international level. Such neglect by Northerners and the international community, they argue, strengthens extremist views among the Southern Movement.

Conclusion: protest drivers are conflict drivers

Rather than seizing the potential of this sizeable youth population, a noticeable generation gap has been left to build, with young people – despite making up the majority of the population – having only minimal say and limited opportunities. Youth exclusion contributes to violence and extremism¹⁶ and plays a major role in sparking new conflicts and exacerbating existing ones.¹⁷

A common response towards efforts to promote greater youth inclusion is that the level of power they hold in Yemeni society is relatively minimal, and their capacity to effect or obstruct peace processes is dwarfed by those of elite actors. However, the argument towards greater youth inclusion in political and transition processes is three-fold. Firstly, the demographic weight of youth in Yemen makes them a majority within the country; secondly, the prominent role youth have been playing in the protest movement that is re-shaping Yemeni politics is considerable; finally, their continued exclusion sends a strong and dangerous message about the limits of peaceful change. Continuous exclusion not only drives many youth towards radicalisation, it also sends a strong message that only men with guns will have their voices heard.

¹⁶ EDC, *Yemen Cross-Sectoral Youth Assessment: Final Report*, (USAID, November 2008).

¹⁷ NDI, *Yemen: Tribal Conflict Management Program Research Report*, (NDI, March 2007).

3

Visions, stakeholders and leadership

Transition and reform

IN ADDITION TO DISCUSSING GRIEVANCES, youth also expressed strong concerns about ongoing transition plans. Despite driving the civil protest movement in the country, Yemen's youth have remained excluded from backroom elite negotiations on the transition of power. Youth stressed the importance of inclusive negotiations that would ensure a transition was legitimate in the eyes of Yemenis and realistic in its timeframe and demands. For many youth, elections themselves are not a sign of success if they are rushed, or if they are carried out in a manner that is not seen as legitimate and fair.

Youth consulted also expressed views on the reforms needed to ensure long-term peace and security in the country. The importance of a strong and enforced rule of law that would ensure justice and equality came up in all group consultations. Similarly, both youth and analysts identified as an immediate priority the need to address the military conflict holding the country hostage. They described a system of fragmented militaries, praetorian guards and abuse of power, and agreed that reform priorities would need to ensure that steps are taken for long-term reform in the military and security apparatus, to ensure they are independent.

Priorities, timelines and processes

According to the GCC initiative for political transition, which has been backed by most international actors, President Saleh will be required to step down from office 30 days after signing the agreement and presidential elections are to be held within 60 days, according to the constitution.¹⁸ The newly elected president would then form a committee to oversee the preparation of a new constitution.

Many of the youth consulted emphasised the importance of elections and constitutional reform as necessary democratic frameworks to ensure a legitimate political process. "The current constitution is considered part of the system. Parts of it have been changed and altered to fit the regime's interests," observed one young woman in Aden, referring to changes made under President Saleh relating to electoral processes and the nominations of the presidency.

They also agreed with the priority placed in the GCC initiative to resolving the current military stand-off as it is crippling the Yemeni economy and destroying lives and livelihoods. According to a prominent female blogger in Sana'a, "we have so many ideas and

¹⁸ A copy of the GCC initiative can be found here: www.ifes.org/Content/Publications/White-Papers/2011/-/media/92100C6DDEC64E7F9C1B41747A0A1AB9.pdf, accessed 7 November 2011.

visions for the future, but as long as the military guns remains pointed at each other in the streets, the entire country is paralysed.”

However, there was concern over the timeframe for transition, which many feel is too short. Calling for early elections within three months is felt by many youth to favour existing political forces in the country, many of whom are perceived as illegitimate, and therefore unlikely to create a stable and representative transitional government. For many youth, a carefully chosen transitional leadership that is representative of the various interests and communities in the country, including youth, the Houthis and actors in the South, was a more preferred approach than a rushed election process, which would inevitably produce a government elected from candidates many Yemenis distrust under rules they want to see changed.

While the electoral process is felt to be a necessary cornerstone of transition, elections in themselves are not a sign of democratic success, and youth consulted feel a number of key processes need to precede elections. Electoral reform and civic education around electoral processes were cited as fundamental prerequisites before any elections could be deemed legitimate. Voter registration systems were out of date, and many youth are not registered to vote. Participants also discussed the importance of raising awareness among citizens about civic duties and the importance and value of state institutions. “People need to know that it’s not simply a matter of giving someone 1,500 riyals and telling them to go write your name on the ballot,” said a young man in Sana’a.

In addition to early presidential elections, another point of contention within the GCC initiative is that it grants immunity to President Saleh and his family. For many young people consulted, transitional justice is a non-negotiable part of the process of breaking with the past. Holding the regime accountable for both the theft of resources as well as the human rights abuses committed against unarmed protestors in office would be part of this process “as a necessary process for positive political change,” according to one woman in Sana’a.

Finally, given its key actors and the process by which it was developed, youth expressed concern that the GCC initiative constituted a continuation of the closed-door system of past political processes in the country. Many youth expressed a desire for a more inclusive and transparent transitional process that would include a wider group of stakeholders beyond the formal ruling party and opposition, neither of which were viewed as representative or legitimate political leadership by a majority of the youth consulted.

Reflecting a view that is strongly held by many within Yemen’s protest movement, a young woman in Sana’a described the transitional process as follows: “It should begin with amendments to the constitution, putting in place an independent judicial council, convicting the corrupt leaders, creating an independent electoral committee to oversee reform of the electoral system, and a committee that would be in charge of changing the constitution. Only after that can elections take place and the constitution implemented throughout the country.”

Visions

“A civic state is one with freedoms and human rights, which are protected, nurtured and maintained by civil society, where all institutions abide by the rule of law, enforced by an independent judiciary and military.”

Independent youth protestor in Taiz

The common demand heard throughout the streets of Yemen in 2011 has been the fall of the regime and its replacement with a modern civic state. Participants in the four governorates were asked what they feel should be the characteristics of a modern civic state. The responses described what should be the cornerstones for a future Yemeni state, and the key reforms needed to achieve these visions.

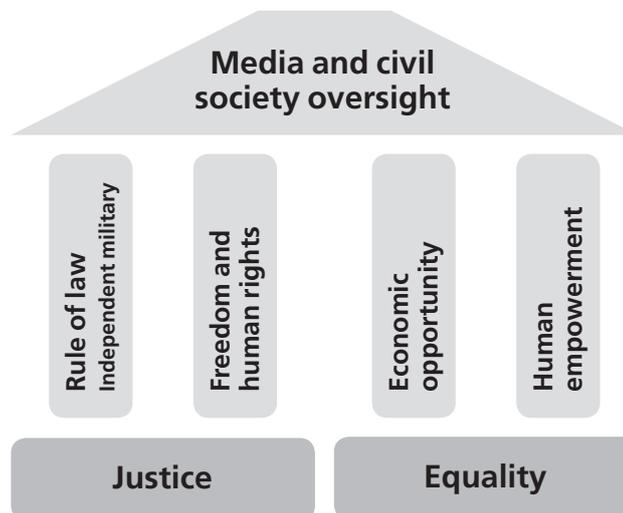
Many youth highlighted justice and equality as necessary foundations of a future Yemeni state. Growing out of this foundation, the rule of law is seen as the basis of a future state, and the instrument most often mentioned by participants as a way to ensure equality and justice for all citizens. For many Yemenis, the problems of weak governance, corruption, and growing insecurity throughout the country were largely due to the lack of law enforcement based on a democratically agreed upon rule of law. “The laws of the state should dictate how things are run,” insisted one participant from Sana’a.

According to many participants, rule of law would ensure judicial independence, promote accountability, enforce laws relating to corruption, and would set concrete term limits for those in power. This view is well articulated by a young man in Sana’a, who explained that the fall of the system “is about ensuring that security and justice mechanisms are independent, so that when I go to the judge with a case against someone who may be a sheikh, I don’t have to worry that I will be discriminated against because the sheikh knows someone.”

Another recurring principle highlighted by youth is that equality is key to coexistence and mutual investment in the decision-making process. Equality must be enshrined in clear and fair legislation and power and wealth must be freed from the clutches of narrow interest groups including factions and families. In the South, economic equality and wealth distribution were mentioned as important, whereas Northerners tended to discuss equality of opportunity as an important principle.

Youth discussed how equality should be nurtured by a state that prioritised human development, based on the idea that the state and its institutions should work for the people, rather than for a specific group in society. Participants in all governorates discussed investment in education for citizens as a necessary prerequisite for improving both political participation and civic awareness, but also enhancing the competitiveness of the Yemeni workforce and promoting economic development.

Visions of a civic state as expressed by youth in focus groups



The Military and the State

The clarification of the roles and independence of military and security forces is highlighted by politicians and community leaders as a priority issue to be addressed for long-term peace and security. According to a religious authority in Sana’a, “the military establishment is split because it is not a national institution, but a familial institution following a narrow family of leaders, symbols and autocrats. These represent a family and when they split they also split the military establishment.”

An excess of military influence within the modern Yemeni state is likewise diagnosed, and for many Yemeni youth, reform is about redefining and de-politicising the role of both the tribes and the military within formal political processes. In highlighting his interpretation of the fall of the regime, one protestor in Aden feels that “the military influences decision-making because our system is built on the military, which means the President is a military man and the Vice President is a military man.” The regime would fall if, according to a participant from Taiz, “the military is no longer divided but is independent under the command of the state, which works for the people rather than against them.”

Political stakeholders: national level analysis

Unanswered questions around political transition, reform, and leadership plague Yemen in light of the events of 2011, and the process of re-negotiating the political settlement in the country has meant that many of these questions are likely to remain unanswered for a long period of time. The elephant in the room of Yemeni politics is that, despite the abundance of kingmakers, there is a noticeable absence of viable and legitimate alternatives to the current leadership able to step up to the plate and lead the country out of the current crisis.

Within this context, youth participants were encouraged to discuss the roles and responsibilities of various actors in the country and their capacity to affect change. Youth expressed disappointment at the lack of credible leadership among elites and formal political actors, but were more positive about localised authorities and saw decentralised systems as a solution to Yemen’s leadership crisis.

Youth were also optimistic about the role of civil society and its capacity to deliver and drive change. While political parties are perceived as self-serving interest groups, civil society actors and organisations are perceived to have the public good in mind, and are seen to be in tune with Yemeni society’s needs and demands.

Elites, legitimacy, and Yemen’s leadership crisis

“When flying, one bird leads the others in the sky, but that bird changes often.”

Young woman in Sana’a

On the whole, youth are highly suspicious of current political elites and their ability to reduce conflict and deliver the changes needed to promote peace, security and development. For many, political elites are driving many of the problems in the country. A young woman in Taiz shared this sentiment: “there is no difference between the regime and the other elite actors, including those who are now siding with the revolution. When the regime was stealing money they stood there watching and saying nothing.”

The lack of credible alternative leadership options emerged as a major problem, as expressed by one woman in Taiz. “When people voted in the 2006 elections there was a feeling of ‘better the devil you know’, even though everyone agreed the President was responsible for many of the problems, and that his removal was a necessary step to reducing corruption.”

For many youth, short-sightedness among the political elite contributed to corruption, divide-and-rule tactics and the lack of investment in human development. It is no surprise then that ‘vision’ is cited by youth as an integral quality of successful leadership.

The importance of a representative and legitimate leader is also rated highly by youth in all governorates as an important quality any leader or collection of leaders should have. Leadership should be “composed of various elements of society, including al-Hiraak and the Houthis,” in order to ensure legitimacy. Further, such legitimacy must come “from the people,” said one young man in Al-Mukalla. “Leaders need to have a popular and legitimate base.”

Participants are wary about charisma and inheritance and highlighted the importance of being 'deserving' of the post rather than inheriting it based on tribal or family ties. "The problem with our society is that we only vote for those people we know personally and are closer to, rather than who is best for the job," said one young woman in Sana'a. This sentiment is echoed among youth in Al-Mukalla, where one young man said: "we are led by characters rather than competences."

The process of selection is often cited as one of the most important aspects of future leadership. "More important than the qualities of a leader is how a leader is selected," one young woman in Sana'a said. "A leader can only come through elections. Instead of discussing qualities, we should be discussing the political programme a leader will have, and the importance of instituting a framework that will guarantee we won't be stuck with someone else for another 20 years." This view is echoed throughout all discussions. Democratic elections and 'the ballot box' are seen as the only legitimate way leadership can emerge.

Finally, youth cite a number of leading authority figures that would need to be brought into the fold: intellectuals are felt to be necessary for articulating a vision, religious authorities are seen as an important moral compass, and technocrats are viewed as crucial for ensuring the machinery of the state functions effectively. "One hand does not clap by itself," a woman in Aden explained to justify the need for a broad range of stakeholders to make decisions together.

Decentralisation and local autonomy

"If Yemenis are left to their own devices they can run their own affairs."

Young woman in Sana'a

Many youth feel that a strong, legitimate and representative central state *should* be responsible for leading the reform process. However, while the agency of current national-level political elites is being called into question, Yemen's formal institutions are not irrelevant and, particularly at the local level, retain a degree of legitimacy in the eyes of those surveyed.

When asked who is best able to address challenges facing the country, youth consistently cited the important role played by local level administration, from neighbourhoods and communities at the very micro level, to local councils and informal local authority figures, in contributing to positive change. The authority accorded to local religious actors is also mentioned, and some participants feel it is necessary to include them in attempts to resolve the current stalemate, though participants also feel that many of them had been co-opted by the regime over the years. One young woman in Aden expressed her frustration with some religious authorities: "In some mosques the clerics have been praising Saleh for years. Before anything else those clergymen will need to be held accountable for what they were supporting." Perspectives on the role of religion and religious actors in the political process are examined in greater detail in box 1.

In general, however, youth consulted feel that governorate-level action has a more popular base than national-level decision-making. While national-level leaders, including the state, are seen to be driving the current crisis, participants feel that if left to their own devices, local communities and leaders are well equipped to effectively deal with their constituents. Participants feel that the situation in Taiz improved when the state withdrew, and youth in Aden also explained that "when there was a power vacuum, we created a council made up of influential figures and if given a chance they can rule effectively." The Houthis in Sa'ada are another example highlighted to show how, when left to the people rather than the central state, a community can consolidate greater security and stability.

Additionally, local councils are perceived as sufficiently representative of their constituencies and may act as a better barometer of popular sentiment, compared to more distant national-level systems such as the major political parties. In Al-Mukalla, participants highlighted that Hadramaut is not well represented in the transitional council proposals put forward in Sana'a. This sentiment is shared by youth in other governorates.

Views vary on the degree of local autonomy that is desirable, and in some cases local exploitation and neglect emerged as a complaint in consultations. However, the concept of greater decentralisation as a means to promote and protect local interests receives considerable support. This is felt most strongly in Southern governorates. "In a federal system, where every region is responsible for decisions relating to their own well-being and territory, you will automatically see improvement in security, health, employment, education and the distribution of wealth," noted a young man in Hadramaut. This chimes with the accountability of local actors for the delivery of basic services such as health, education and security.

The key features of decentralisation cited by youth appears to be elections at the local, regional and national levels, as well as firm legislation enshrining local and regional rights. Federalism is cited as an option by many in the South not requesting secession, and is seen as a system that promotes equality among regions, where citizens can feel they are partners in power and wealth without one region dominating the other. However, the precise interpretation of what federalism involves or how it would be applied in Yemen remains ambiguous and open to various interpretations.

Demands for greater decentralisation are seen as non-negotiable by participants in Al-Mukalla, as a way to reduce conflict, ensure greater control over their resources and as a way to set up a security and administrative system not currently provided by the central state. For some, decentralisation is seen to be a step towards independence, via referendum.

Box 1: Islam and democracy: youth perspectives

The role that religion will play in a future Yemeni state is a highly controversial topic, which is magnified by international concerns about Al-Qaeda presence in the country. *Islah*, a broad coalition of Islamists that combines a number of schools of thoughts, is by far the largest and best organised party within the coalition of the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP). To the dismay of many independent protestors, *Islah* actors have dominated the protest squares in many parts of the country. The political party's more extreme Salafi elements, its reliance on tribal figures like Hameed Al-Ahmar and its continued preference for secretive and exclusionary negotiations has contributed to national and international concerns about Yemen's future.

Some youth feel that Islam is the one common factor capable of unifying a divided Yemen. This is partly due to the socio-politically decentralised structures of tribes, traditionally counterbalanced by Islam. Islam is therefore seen as fostering a common spirit of brotherhood and responsibility, and as a contributing factor to the development of religious institutions embracing administrative functions and preservation of order.

Some youth cite the strong "religious morality among Yemenis" which would require any future political system to have an Islamic framework. At the same time, youth are adamant that there is no contradiction between religion and the civic state. "After all," said one young man in Aden, "the Prophet himself established a civic state founded on justice and equality."

The Turkish model of Islamic governance is often cited as an exemplary model to follow. Some youth are also quick to distinguish between various types of 'Islam': "There is an Islam that is politicised and it is more dictatorial than the current regime. Then you have the more religious or spiritual Islam that does not engage in politics, but has a moderate and positive role that has been supportive of young people."

Youth are highly critical of influential religious clerics in the country who were felt to have supported the regime for a long period of time. "Some religious people said protests were *haram* [religiously prohibited], and when the people came out calling for freedom these religious sheikhs started talking about immorality. That is unjust," said one young man in Aden. "I don't want an Islam that accuses people of being infidels because they have the freedom to disagree. That sort of Islam takes away my freedom and contributes to injustice in society."

While calls for greater local autonomy are more strongly heard in the South, youth in all four cities feel that one strong leader at the centre is not the best model for Yemen's heterogeneous and historically decentralised socio-political structures. "No single person can or should exert control over the whole country," one young woman in Sana'a explained. "People can control the situation at the most basic level through neighbourhoods." At the same time, youth raised concerns about division, and discussed the importance of finding a system that would accord greater authority to these local authority structures while still maintaining a level of central leadership.

Political parties

Perception of political parties

Political parties, rather than being seen as representative of the interests of society, are seen as a self-serving interest group who are out of step with the demands of ordinary Yemenis. Some accused them of playing a demagogic role by fomenting instability and actively prolonging protests in order to maximise their own influence.

Youth consulted feel that the current system of political parties, symbolised by the GPC and the opposition coalition of the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP), is used to legitimise and maintain the regime's rule. "Political parties are now part of the inner circle," said one young man in Sana'a. The GPC and the JMP were perceived to be "dogmatic", "out-of-touch", "corrupt", "unrepresentative" and "exclusionary", preferring closed-door patrimonial bargaining over inclusive and participatory politics.

On the whole, youth feel that the regime had actively weakened political parties, either through co-option or through policies designed to divide the opposition. In Al-Mukalla, this is felt particularly strongly in the context of al-Hiraak. "We had hope in the al-Hiraak movement when it emerged as a popular movement," said a young man in Al-Mukalla. "But the regime succeeded in dividing the movement and creating several streams, and now we are confused between these various demands."

One participant from Taiz felt that "on paper, their ideas sound great, but in practice all they want to do is marginalise and fight each other." Another participant felt that even the ideas themselves were not productive:

"The problem with political parties throughout the Arab world, including in Yemen, is an ideological problem and an inability to be open to other ideas. Those on the left have outdated nationalist perspectives and those on the right exploit the conflict between the 'east' and the 'west', and so the ideologies have moved away from providing for people and have become distorted. Parties need to step away from preaching and proselytising and move towards enhancing and developing cultural and intellectual leaders that have more vision and less propaganda."

The resentment of dogmatism in modern day political parties in Yemen emerged as a strong sentiment in all discussions, both in the South and the North of the country. "You are selected for leadership within the party if you agree with the status quo. Otherwise you are side-lined. When Tawakul Karman¹⁹ crossed the line that Islah drew for her she was accused by Islah members of being part of the establishment."

A young man in Aden highlighted the marginalisation of youth within political parties as indicative of their inability to bring about change: "the leadership in the Islah party has not changed since 1990. How can a political party promote youth leadership if it has not had a change in its own leadership for over 20 years?" Participants in Sana'a and Al-Mukalla shared similar sentiments. For many political parties, youth are not accorded decision-making roles, and youth wings are often only seen as a mobilising tool during elections. "They co-opted youth, and now they are riding the wave of the

¹⁹ Tawakul Karman is a prominent human rights activist and a dominant figure within Yemen's protest movement. She is a member of Islah and falls within the more moderate elements of the party. In October 2011 she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her non-violent participation in women's rights and peacebuilding in Yemen.

protest movement,” explained an independent protestor in Aden. Others shared similar sentiments about political parties being “out of touch”, having an “ancient agenda”, and “not being in tune with the reality on the ground.”

Box 2: The role of political parties in the protest movement

The role of political parties in the protest movement emerged as one of the most sensitive topics at the time of research. Participants cited Islah, in particular, as trying to co-opt and lead the protest movement, often using aggression or force. “I’m living in the squares and you can really see how the Islah security committees act. They are scary and intimidating, and some of their tactics are dirtier than those of the regime,” said a protestor in Sana’a’s Change Square. “Islahi youth are used to their system and it is a system of obeying and not questioning and simply following. You see it play out in the square,” said another woman from Sana’a.

On the other hand, Islah-affiliated youth felt that the party was the one that had driven the revolution, and that its participation has ensured that the movement remains strong, organised and protected. Other youth associated with al-Hiraak in the South felt similarly. “Hiraak started the protest in 2007 while Egypt and Tunisia were still sleeping,” one young man in Aden said, in reference to the protests that erupted in the South in 2007.

Nonetheless, participants highlighted that the domination of political parties such as the Southern Movement and Islah in some of the protests has deterred others from protesting. Common fears around Islah include the connection with Hamid Al-Ahmar, who was felt to be part of the ruling elite, as well as fears over the extremist elements within Islah. One young woman from Al-Mukalla felt that Islah’s emergence in the South had set-back the cause of women’s rights there. “We used to be a civic state with lots of freedoms. Our mothers went to school. Then Islah and the religious issue started entering social processes in the South and things changed.” On the other hand, others felt that, while there were conservative elements in Islah, “there should be no problem if Islah comes to power, but only if it’s done through the ballot box.”

Civil society

“I went out in the streets to tear down and re-build, not to tear down and remain silent.”

Civil society activist in Aden

The reinvigoration of civil society throughout the Arab world as a result of the Arab Spring was felt particularly strongly in Yemen’s long-running protest movement, and participants credited civil society organisations with being drivers for change and key actors in any future reform process. “We should thank civil society organisations because without them we would not have been able to mobilise youth in such a way. It has had a big impact on youth engagement and proved to Yemenis that civil society organisations are the foundation of the civic state,” commented one young man in Al-Mukalla.

The role of the media is also mentioned as an important tool for long-term peacebuilding, both in terms of educating citizens and raising awareness, but also more generally for monitoring and accountability of the state. One female protestor in Sana’a felt that “the media is responsible for influencing decisions, and needs to be used as a mobilising tool for positive change.” This should in turn go hand in hand with civic engagement and education, whereby civil coexistence and respect for the opinion of others is enshrined and enforced by the rule of law.

Freedom and human rights were seen by many as necessary to the maintenance of a healthy relationship between state and society, and youth highlighted the important role a free media and civil society plays in nurturing and protecting these values. “Civil society is the main tool for ensuring the state functions effectively, and is strong and respects the will of the people,” observed a young man in Sana’a.

Underlying all this is the concept of empowerment, which participants feel is a necessary step to discouraging discrimination and corruption. This meant empowering people as decision makers through free and fair elections that would ensure that power remained in the hands of the people rather than a selection of military and tribal elites. “We need to continue to monitor and protest and use laws, sit-ins and the media to advocate for continued change,” said another woman in Taiz.

Tribes

“The tribe is a fundamental and essential support system, and yet I support the revolution wholeheartedly.”

Young man in Aden

A common statement made about Yemen is that its two most powerful institutions are the military and the tribes. While there is agreement among youth that the military would need to be unified under the command of the state, to serve the interests of the people rather than those of specific individuals, there is less consensus about the role and influence of the tribes. Much of the disagreement is regionally-based: in the South, some commented about the weakness of tribal influence on account of the urban populations of the major cities, as well as the legacy of both British colonialism and PDRY Marxism. By contrast in Sana'a and the North tribal influence is felt to be much stronger.

Regardless of regional variations, tribes remain the most pervasive social forces in Yemen, and Yemenis pride themselves on their tribal heritage. Even among those who were critical of tribal influence in the political system, care was taken to first highlight the cultural and historical significance of the tribes in Yemeni society. “I don't believe we should advocate for eliminating the tribes, because they are a component of our society with their customs, traditions and ethics that they can practise under the civic state,” said a young man in Aden.

While only 20–35 percent of Yemenis consider their tribe their primary unit of identity, tribes remain key power brokers and all political parties in Yemen rely on some support from tribes in order to succeed. Moreover, tribes regularly contest the state's claim to the monopoly on the legitimate use of violence even in peacetime and control significantly more small arms than the government.²⁰ Tribal militias played an important role in the war against the Houthis and currently represent the Al-Ahmars' power base and fighting force.

President Saleh's Sanhan tribe are members of the Hashid tribal confederation, which is smaller but more internally cohesive than Bakil, the other major confederation. Both the Hashid and Bakil have disproportionate influence at the elite level, and at the lower levels of the tribal hierarchy, members have disproportionate access to employment in the military and security apparatus.²¹ This is the result of a concerted effort by the regime of President Saleh to bring tribes into the political fold through co-opting sheikhs.²²

“The system we want to remove is one based on corruption and tribalism and military.”

Young man in Sana'a

Patronage ties tribal leaders to the state, yet, by drawing sheikhs to Sana'a and away from the tribes, it also fragments traditional power structures and weakens the legitimacy of the co-opted tribal sheikhs within their own communities. As one young woman in Sana'a explained, “many tribes actually want to be kept separate from politics and political processes associated with the state. Once a sheikh is transformed into a representative responsible for liaising with the state then he might as well burn his tribal card.”

As this critique suggests, the role of sheikhs as interlocutors with the state has been controversial. Patronage has tainted the reputation of some sheikhs who were once seen as 'just' and 'legitimate'. Moreover, the concept of what 'tribal' means is not monolithic, and the role that tribes should play in the political process remains deeply contested.

²⁰ Miller, D B, 'Demand, Stockpiles and Social Controls: Small Arms in Yemen', *Small Arms Survey*, Occasional Paper no. 9, May 2003, p 28.

²¹ Phillips, S, 'Yemen and the Politics of Permanent Crisis', The International Institute for Strategic Studies, (Routledge 2011), p 51.

²² Many tribal sheikhs receive direct budgetary support paid as stipends through the Department of Tribal Affairs, an opaque organisation that is officially attached to the Ministry of Local Affairs, and which distributes money and benefits to tribal leaders deemed politically relevant by the regime.

In the South, including Taiz, youth consulted had a more hostile perception of the role of tribes. For many Southern Yemenis, the current regime is perceived to be heavily dominated by tribal politics. “When Saleh took over power he invited and strengthened certain sheikhs and tribes who were lucky enough to have access to riches and positions,” said a young man in Aden. Thus, many youth in Aden and surrounding areas want to see the “reinstatement of a civic system”, based on notions of a pre-unity Yemen, “before the tribes came and took over the South.”

However, others were more positive about the role of the tribes, as long as they were kept separate from the formal political system. In Al-Mukalla, key community leaders highlighted the positive social and cultural role tribes play, and how their separation from the formal political process in Hadramaut could be used as a successful model to be employed elsewhere in the country. Others throughout the country echoed the importance of making a distinction between tribes as social and cultural entities, and tribes as a political force.

The involvement of some tribes in the protest movement, and their symbolic but very significant disarmament under the ideals of a ‘civic state’, is highlighted by many as an important opportunity for reconciling modern and traditional Yemen. “What is great is that there are some tribes in the square that have bought into the idea of disarming and peaceful protest and I find it so inspiring that Yemenis are slowly buying into the idea of a modern civic state and understand it,” said a young woman in Sana’a.

Others questioned whether this had been merely a short-lived gesture. “But if the protests are successful, do you believe the tribes will hand in their weapons?” one young man questioned. “According to a civic state there should be no weapons in society. In the end violence goes against the spirits of the modern civic state and we should reject people carrying weapons. Whoever carries a weapon belongs to the culture and principles of exclusion and silencing of others and we need to support everyone’s rights and freedoms in every sense of the word.”

While there are no simple answers to the question of the role of tribes in a civic state, the frank discussions taking place throughout the country about these various social forces are a necessary first step in the process of transition.

4

International actors: agents for peace or conflict?

THERE IS A BROAD CONSENSUS WITHIN YEMEN that the international community has a necessary and constructive role to play in resolving the current political stalemate. Participants identified the important role international actors can play in applying pressure on political elites to push for transition and prevent further bloodshed. In discussions around more long-term stability, the international community were also seen as key actors.

Social media and the Internet gave unprecedented access to videos, statements and photos of the revolutions that swept the Arab world in 2011. Events were relayed in real-time onto the world stage, as were the responses of the international community, which in turn had a strong influence on the actions of both the regime and the protestors. Young people in Yemen have been watching the international responses towards events in Yemen, and are aware of past statements and actions. This awareness is coupled with deep disappointment. Many of those interviewed feel that the policies of the international community consistently favour short-term measures to achieve stability, often at the expense of long-term security. They drew attention to differences in the approaches of the international community towards protests in Libya, Syria and Yemen and called for greater pressure to be placed on the Yemeni regime, including targeted sanctions.

Misplaced priorities and lost opportunities

“The regime uses the illusion of human rights and terrorism in our name and against its own people to blackmail the international community into funding and support”

Young woman in Sana’a

There emerged a noticeable disconnect between the priorities of the international community and those highlighted by youth around the threat level presented by Al-Qaeda. In Yemen, legitimate concerns around terrorism and the presence of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) remains a priority for international policymakers. In discussions, youth express the feeling that this threat has undermined international support for the protests.²³

²³ For example, John Brennan, the Assistant to the President for Counterterrorism and Homeland Security, has emerged as the frontman for the US on Yemen since the Arab Spring, giving a clear indication on US priorities in the country.

“The state uses ‘terrorism’ as blackmail abroad for funding and support,” said a young woman in Sana’a. People believe that this framing explained the perceived lack of external support for the protest movement in Yemen. “In general [the international community] does not have a positive view of us because of the bad impressions they have of Yemen, and how President Saleh describes our country as a time bomb because of internal pressures and conflict,” felt a young man in Aden. These views were echoed by other participants, such as a young woman in Al-Mukalla: “international actors don’t see a revolution in Yemen. They only see Al-Qaeda and terrorism.”

International perceptions and stereotypes of Yemenis affected youth in their daily lives. One young woman in Hadramaut gave a personal example:

“When I was younger we had a lot of tourists coming here. We would welcome them and take photos with them. I spoke to them, saying ‘welcome, welcome’, as that was the only word I knew in English. Now if I do see a tourist they usually have armed guards with them, and when I went up to one tourist he was afraid that we were going to murder him in the mountains. It made me think ‘what do they think of us? We are a peaceful people, and yet they accuse us of being extremists.’”

Beyond using the threat of terrorism, interviewees feel that President Saleh is also adept at playing with terminologies dear to donors. One young woman in Taiz felt that “the regime used the issue of women and children to blackmail the West in order to fill their own pockets. We know that there was US money to support the education of girls in rural areas. Have there been oversight committees set up to see how this has been applied and where the money has gone?” A woman in Sana’a made a similar point: “the state uses the question of human rights and freedoms as an illusion to get funding abroad.”

While participants feel that the length of the protests, the longest running in the Arab world, allowed the international community to better understand their grievances, youth expressed frustration at how the protests have been portrayed as a “political crisis”. “Do they admit to themselves that what is happening is actually a very big change?” wondered a young man in Taiz.

Participants in Taiz believe the international community’s focus on Sana’a means that they are ill-informed about what is happening on the ground. This is echoed by a participant in Aden: “When the car bomb in Aden happened a few days ago [there was a series of car-bombings in July 2011], international journalists were calling Sana’a journalists to ask for their opinion. At the very least ask journalists based in Aden what is really happening here.”

Perceptions of Saudi Arabia

“If your neighbour gets new curtains in their house it won’t be long until your wife demands new curtains for your house.”

Young man in Sana’a

Saudi Arabia, which shares a long and porous border with Yemen, has historically been a key player in the country. Among youth consulted, almost all expressed at least some level of distrust of Saudi Arabia’s intentions in Yemen. Participants feel that Saudi Arabia is fearful of a successful revolution in Yemen because of its potential to spill over and inspire similar protests in Saudi Arabia. Others expressed the idea that Saudi Arabia feared “another Somalia” on its Southern border, and therefore its primary interest is to maintain stability in Yemen.

Competing agendas within the Kingdom have meant that it has pursued different and at times conflicting policies in Yemen.²⁴ While opaque and often contradictory,

²⁴ Saudi Arabia maintains extensive transnational patronage networks in Yemen, and succession dynamics within the Saudi royal family affects the calculations of many informal political actors in Yemen. For more information on Saudi policy towards Yemen, see Hill, G and Nonneman, G, ‘Yemen, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States: Elite Politics, Street Protests and Regional Diplomacy,’ Chatham House, May 2011.

what is known about Saudi policy in Yemen is that, for better or worse, it is based on a much stronger awareness of the power of informal networks in Yemen. While western governments and international organisations have focused on enhancing the capacity of the formal state to tackle security threats, Saudi Arabia has opted to work through informal networks.

Many young people feel that by working through these informal links, Saudi Arabia is strengthening and legitimising a political system that contributed to Yemen's political and economic malaise. One young man in Aden felt that the Kingdom "uses its financial resources to support the farce that Yemen is currently in." This includes, he explained, paying money to a number of often competing elite actors, in order to keep them on their side, which has "the effect of dampening any progressive movements that could emerge in Yemen."

Some youth also expressed concern that Saudi Arabia's alleged financial support to Salafist schools throughout the country is contributing to sectarian tensions and religious extremism.

Perceptions of the US

"I think they are just looking for an easy replacement."

Young man in Sana'a

The United States is the most influential Western donor in Yemen and the political legitimacy it has given to Saleh's regime following the September 11th attacks has been a crucial factor in the regime's survival. As Western perceptions of the threat from AQAP increased, so too did the role of the US in Yemen. Youth in all cities highlighted the level of authority the US has in Yemen, with one young man in Sana'a arguing, hyperbolically, that "the US ambassador is currently governing the country."

Unsurprisingly, youth feel that the fear of terrorism determined US policy towards Yemen, and explained its reluctance to embrace the protest movement. "The regime manipulated the issue of terrorism very well, and the US feels that the regime is known to them and they feel that it delivers these interests for them so they continue to provide financial and political support," said a young man in Sana'a.

Many young people feel US and Saudi policy is closely tied. It seemed to some that the US is following the Saudi lead in responding to Yemen: "US interests are with Saudi Arabia, and that's what is keeping the US quiet," said a young man in Taiz.

Perceptions of the EU

"The role of the EU is significant, because it comprises people who believe in democracy and civil rights."

Young lawyer in Aden

On the whole, young people consulted thought that the EU showed more support towards youth and the protest movement in general. However, some youth feel that the EU's role is limited and unreliable, and often subservient to US priorities. "It doesn't matter what the EU thinks because it is a non-actor. It's not important and cannot be relied on," said a young man in Sana'a. "If the EU really wanted to follow international conventions on human rights then international actors would have prosecuted the regime for the human rights abuses it carried out against its own people," claimed a young lawyer in Aden.

Among youth consulted outside of Sana'a, and particularly in the South, there is criticism of the Sana'a-centric outlook and policies of the international community in general, and the EU in particular. "In Aden we have had no communication with the EU mission or with embassies, but in Sana'a we heard there was a lot of contact and they received moral support and felt their concerns were being heard." Others in the South expressed similar sentiments. According to a young man in Aden:

“I went to Sana’a and met with some people in the EU. We told them: organisations, embassies and financial actors sitting in Sana’a are focusing too much on Sana’a as opposed to outside areas. In Aden we have not even been able to produce one brochure because of lack of funding. This creates a gap, not just between us and the international community but also within the Yemeni community. What about Taiz and Aden and Abyan and Socotra?”

5

Yemen: on the brink of what?

'Change Square' as peacebuilding and learning processes

"The revolution taught me how to demand my rights."

Young man in Sana'a

While the protests in Egypt took three weeks to topple the regime of Hosni Mubarak, at the time the research was conducted in July 2011, Yemen's protestors had been camped out in the protest squares for six months. The squares transformed into public spaces for debate, discussion and civic education during this period.

In a culture where public space is rare, this provided an opportunity for Yemenis of diverse geographical, social and political backgrounds to meet face-to-face. According to participants in group discussions, this was significant in bringing Yemen's heterogeneous society together to share and discuss ideas, which promoted positive discussion and debate, and helped bridge gaps and correct misperceptions.

"The interactions of different people with each other in the squares have helped broaden everyone's minds, and made them realise that their grievances and demands are very similar."

Young woman in Sana'a

One young man in Taiz explained the opportunity presented by the squares: "We met each other for the first time: leftists, Houthis, Islamists, tribes, all in one place, and exchanged ideas and thoughts and we saw that our demands are united. The revolution brought us all together."

The squares of 'change' that have been occupied by the protestors are centres for learning as well. Various coalitions produce weekly and daily newspapers and bulletins, and give lectures on civic education, democracy, freedom of speech, and human rights. Participants highlighted the positive boost these squares had given to political awareness and learning among the general populace. They had also helped to deepen protestors' understanding of the political dynamics at national and elite levels.

"We first went out to protest against inheritance and the monopoly of power. At first we had no idea about how Saleh had controlled and divided the military, but through the revolutionary process we discovered even more, which led us to further question the concentration of power within the military and tribes. Before the revolution we didn't know that the army was controlled by one family and it wasn't clear exactly how the tribes were involved with the army and the regime."

Young man in Taiz

A young man in Sana'a described how those who came from tribal areas in Sa'ada or Jawf initially protested because their sheikh had told them to; however, through their interactions with others in the squares their demands had become more nuanced and sophisticated. A young woman in Sana'a explained that through meeting with and speaking to people in these spaces, she had become more tolerant of other opinions, "It's okay to have different views."

In fact, for some youth, the protests represented a social revolution about empowering citizens and changing mentalities as much as a political revolution about toppling leaders and changing the constitution. "As Yemenis, we've learned that we have rights and we have to demand them," said one young woman in Sana'a. "To me, the revolution is about being aware," said one woman in Taiz. "I'm not convinced that if this system falls what comes after it will necessarily solve my problems. This isn't about that; to me what is more important is that people have become aware of their rights and responsibilities."

The responsibility of individuals in reshaping their relationship with the state, and with each other, is highlighted by many as a necessary step for positive change. Chief among these responsibilities is the need to stand up to the day-to-day culture of corruption and impunity. "We are all responsible to fight corruption and it should begin with each of us," said a young man in Taiz. "For example, if I'm stopped by a traffic warden who requests a bribe I can say, 'no, give me a ticket' and accept the ticket. That's how you contribute to eliminating corruption."

A new role for women?

"If a woman can manage the affairs of a household then there's no doubt she can manage the affairs of a country."

Young man in Sana'a

One of the most immediate changes since protests erupted in Yemen has been the increased visibility of women and their participation in the protests. Yemeni women have often been the face of Yemen's revolution, indicative that the protests have become more than simply a demand for a political transition. Young men in Aden discussed how women are "the backbone of the revolution," and talked about how the courage of women to break social taboos to protest in the streets "gave all youth an incentive to go out in the streets in an unprecedented way."

Youth in all governorates feel that the visibility of women in the protests represents a substantial shift from traditional notions of the role of women in political processes and public life more generally. "In the past, women were not allowed to participate in protests. It was considered *eib* [shameful] for a woman to give a speech to men. Now you see women giving public speeches and spending the night in the square. These are very big changes," a young man in Sana'a observed.

In addition to empowering women, the protest movement provided an opportunity to educate men on gender issues. "Men did not really have an idea about the political dimension of women's issues, or the legal dimension of women's rights," explained a female protestor in Sana'a. "Through interactions with lawyers and human rights actors and activists, men have become more aware."

Women remarked that they have already begun to notice the political process opening up to them; and not just since Yemeni female activist, Tawakul Karman, won the Nobel Peace Prize in October 2011. "We are now working with the revolutionary council and the preparatory committee, and women have been participating in developing and drafting the vision," explained a woman in Sana'a. A young woman in Taiz described how women were appearing in the media and working on communications.

Nonetheless, young women feel that there is still some way to go. "There has been a greater awareness, but there continues to be a lack of integration between men and

women in the squares,” a young woman in Sana’a remarked. This corresponds to a number of reports on the harassment and intimidation of female protestors in some of the squares.²⁵ “It’s not complete equality,” said a woman in Taiz, “but it’s a start, and we’ve begun to move forwards.”

There is a recognition that more work is needed to better inform certain segments of society about the important role women can play in political processes in the country. Obstacles to this are community perspectives and the lack of understanding of women’s rights. “Certain segments of society need to be enlightened as to the importance and role of women, particularly some tribal segments of society,” said a young man in Taiz. According to youth, this should go hand in hand with “ensuring women get training in education and giving speeches will make the role of women even stronger in the future.”

The need to build on and promote a greater role for women emerged in all focus groups, including those conducted with young men. “If women are not given leadership roles within political parties, then we must stand with women against these forces,” said a young man in Sana’a. “Women’s demands go hand-in-hand with youth demands,” said another. Some participants feel that more attention needs to be given to women’s ministries and women councils, to guarantee their participation at all levels of the political process. The positive role played by women in Taiz and Aden, where women have served as judges and commanders of police forces, were highlighted by some men in Sana’a as exemplary cases.

Young women in all four major cities emerged as more articulate and conciliatory than their male counterparts, demonstrating a willingness to discuss different perspectives with a view to reconciliation that stood in contrast to the more argumentative and combative debates in discussion groups with men. At the most basic level, such a finding affirms the necessary and important role women must play, not only in contributing to political and social change in the country, but also to contributing to peace, security and reconciliation processes more broadly.

²⁵ *Yemen Observer*, ‘Yemen defected military, Islah face harassment claims,’ 19 April 2011. www.yobserver.com/local-news/printer-10021098.html, 7 November 2011.

6

Conclusion and recommendations

“The problem right now is that, from outside the square, the revolution has become yet another problem rather than a solution.”

Young protestor in Sana’a

Yemen is faced with complex economic and political challenges. Rapidly declining oil and water reserves, budget shortfalls, and pervasive poverty and unemployment have contributed to a growing humanitarian disaster. Politically, the Yemeni government is facing a severe crisis of legitimacy, civil conflict, regional fragmentation, and an increasingly aggressive militant jihadist movement.

To emerge from this crisis, youth consistently highlighted that Yemen needs external help. Despite the initial optimism that drove hundreds of thousands of Yemenis to call for peaceful political change, the violent and destructive military stand-off, political stalemate within the elite, lukewarm response of the international community, and looming economic and humanitarian crises have dampened the hopes of many youth looking for a peaceful transition. “I used to think that the squares had the possibility of change but sadly it has been a burden for the people more than a service, and has given an opportunity for spoilers to spoil and those with destructive intentions to destroy,” said a young woman in Aden. Initial optimism is turning into frustration, radicalisation and violence.

This rising disillusionment in combination with increasingly alarming details about the humanitarian situation, lends special urgency to the recommendations of this report. Stronger, better co-ordinated, and more transparent international engagement, a premium on inclusion in process and outcome, increased attention to the Southern Issue and a movement away from an overly Sana’a-centric outlook has the potential to support a peaceful and inclusive transition towards long-term peace and security in Yemen.

Stronger international approach

Yemen’s multifaceted crisis requires a holistic and comprehensive approach from the international community as a whole in place of the ‘wait and see’ approach many have taken to-date. A positive international approach needs to combine humanitarian, political, security, and developmental efforts that recognises that the current crisis provides an unprecedented opportunity for Yemenis to negotiate a more inclusive and representative political system, better suited to delivering human rights and economic development. The international community should facilitate this process and take a

more vigorous stance to promoting a peaceful transition towards a more inclusive and representative Yemeni polity.

Members of the international community should:

- continue to exert pressure on political stakeholders in Yemen to commit to a rapid and peaceful transition through the UN Security Council and strongly follow-up on Resolution 2014 (2011).
- more forcefully react to regime attacks on protestors and other civilians, beginning with sanctions against those who are responsible for repeated and unprovoked attacks on unarmed protestors.
- support ongoing inquiries into human rights abuses committed against unarmed civilians during the course of the protests.

The United States and Saudi Arabia should:

- adopt a longer-term approach to co-operation with the Yemeni government on international security and counter-terrorism issues, with a sufficient recognition of the impact an illegitimate political settlement would have on the long-term dynamics of radicalisation and conflict.

Support livelihoods

The economy represents the biggest threat to stability in Yemen. The cost of basic commodities has risen by 43 percent since January 2011, while the price of bread has risen 50 percent.²⁶ In the current crisis, electricity, gas and petrol shortages are driving up the costs of basic foodstuffs and mobility with disastrous implications for an already highly vulnerable population.

The grievances driving the protests are the same factors that have contributed to the economy's long-term downward spiral. Corruption, the absence of properly enforced commercial law, poor security and lack of education have impeded economic growth. The Yemeni Government does not have the capacity to address these issues. The longer the economic situation remains as it is, the greater the risk of more regions in Yemen becoming ungoverned spaces. The international community needs to help reduce corruption and increase the number of jobs available as the immediate priority to long-term stability in the country.

Members of the international community should:

- increase humanitarian assistance to vulnerable populations in Yemen, and pressuring formal and informal Yemeni authorities to ensure access to areas such as Sa'ada, Abyan and Aden.
- ensure agreed plans for early recovery are developed now and include support to livelihoods provisions, to ensure effective early recovery and transition support.
- promote strategic engagement between Yemeni youth, civil society, and the private sector, including programmes to improve tactical and vocational skills in young people.

The GCC should:

- work to open its labour markets to Yemeni workers and develop more transparent and accountable recruitment policies for them.

²⁶ OCHA, *Yemen Humanitarian Emergency*, Situation Report No. 9, 14 October 2011. www.tinyurl.com/3aomkzu, 7 November 2011.

Support an inclusive transition

Political exclusion emerged as a major factor driving the protests. On the whole, youth consulted expressed deep distrust of political party leaders in both the GPC and the JMP, which are perceived to have a preference for closed-door patrimonial bargaining over inclusive participatory politics. Given the structure of the GCC initiative, youth consulted expressed concern that such a transition process constitutes a continuation of the closed-door system of past political processes in the country.

Any transitional process needs to be negotiated in a transparent and open manner, and must include various elements within Yemen's diverse protest movement, rather than relying on unrepresentative formal leadership. Yemenis are more likely to support a carefully chosen transitional leadership than a government elected from candidates they distrust under rules they want to see changed. Elections in themselves are not a sign of success. There cannot be a process that is 'good enough' or 'inclusive enough' that does not include youth at all stages.

Members of the international community should:

- view any transition plan as a starting point for an inclusive process of negotiations, not the end point, and encourage Yemeni stakeholders to do the same.
- acknowledge the limitations of the GCC initiative and process, including the largely unpopular clause guaranteeing President Saleh and his family immunity from prosecution.
- adjust the timescale of elections to reflect a longer period of transition, which would ensure that necessary pre-election processes are in place that would support a more legitimate election. Short time-lines will favour existing political forces that are increasingly perceived as illegitimate, and are unlikely to create a stable and legitimate transitional government.
- build the capacity of civil society, especially youth and women, in order to equip them to participate effectively at all levels of the political process, including through supporting the establishment of a civil society advocacy platform that would better connect youth to national and international policymakers.

Recognise the importance of the Southern issue

If the Southern issue is not given priority within the negotiations around political transition, there is a high likelihood of increasingly violent conflict in Yemen. While the international community continues to officially support a unified Yemen, such calls must remain broad enough to accommodate a renegotiation of the relationship between the central government and regional entities. The protest movement has created a space where nationwide discussions around federalism and decentralisation can take place, providing a rare opportunity to redefine the political system that addresses the legitimate demands of the South. However, this space is closing as frustrations grow over the ongoing political stalemate, and Southern support for the nationwide uprisings begins to falter.

Members of the international community should:

- encourage the appropriate prioritisation of the Southern issue within a Yemeni dialogue process through public statements and increased engagement with Southern actors.
- commission and support research into the underlying grievances in the South, and the economic and political costs and benefits of decentralisation and other conflict resolution options.
- increase programming that brings together actors from the North and South of the country to discuss issues of common concern and support nationwide efforts to engage in peaceful debate on these issues.

Look beyond Sana'a

Activities in Sana'a often have little impact on events outside of the capital. This is a reflection of a growing fragmentation of the country into increasingly localised conflict dynamics, which are often only peripherally related to goings-on in Sana'a, and increasingly unlikely to be addressed by an elite agreement at the centre.

The worsening security situation in the country has severely impacted the ability of international actors to travel and engage with peripheral parts of the country. While the deteriorating humanitarian and political situation requires a scaling-up of resources and personnel, many diplomatic and aid missions have repatriated most of their staff and reduced their missions to essential staff only due to the security situation. Staff that have remained in-country are over-stretched and under high security regulations. This has promoted a Sana'a-centric outlook among many within the international community that threatens to overlook urgent peripheral developments and fosters a dangerous disconnect to concerns of Yemenis outside the capital.

Members of the international community should:

- scale up programming and personnel and review security guidelines in order to reach out to a wider selection of the population.
- increase their understanding and awareness of the insecurities and violence faced by Yemenis at local and national levels, their root causes and key actors involved to better inform policies and programmes and to ensure they are conflict sensitive, minimising negative impacts and maximising positive, peacebuilding impacts.
- engage with local stakeholders outside Sana'a, particularly local authorities in more remote areas affected by violent conflict.
- expand local-level projects, including dedicated calls for proposals for local authorities, which have the potential to support the provision of more appropriate and decentralised good governance.

Seize and build on the opportunity for peace

In Yemen, most meetings take place in private spaces, which makes it rare for the country's diverse communities to meet and come together to exchange perspectives. During the protests, the sudden eruption of tent cities in the various 'Change Squares' across the country provided an unprecedented opportunity for Yemenis of diverse geographical, social and political backgrounds to publicly meet and discuss challenges facing the country. The protest movement has re-energised civic engagement, and it is necessary to utilise this opportunity to build on the optimism and enthusiasm expressed by youth towards their participation in peaceful political change, and to ensure that this continues in the future.

Members of the international community should:

- invest in forums for young people to come together, building upon the squares as a space for meeting and learning.
- promote education and debate among youth and women on issues relating to civic issues and governance processes, as well as the role of women in peace, security and governance issues.
- support initiatives to sensitise civil society actors to international policy and best practice on security sector reform in order for them to better articulate and advocate for change, as well as to act as an effective oversight mechanism.
- support dialogue and networks, such as an advocacy platform, between diverse groups of youth drawn from across the country, which also includes women, entrepreneurs, civil society activists, Southerners, and those from rural areas.
- support new and emerging TV, radio, print and online media and social programming by and for youth, building on existing programmes and capitalising on the renewed interest in civic participation and activism.

APPENDIX: Methodology and validation

This study uses a combined methodology of desk research, focus group discussions and in-depth key informant interviews in four governorates to gather youth perspectives on the underlying grievances driving the current political crisis in Yemen and identify visions, actors and priorities for lasting peace and security.

Desk research was carried out by Saferworld that analysed existing data on youth perceptions and participation in current protests, and informed the development of research tools and methodologies. Saferworld developed guiding questions for focus group discussions and interviews, and care was taken to amend standard questions to suit the local context and political sensitivities. Tamkeen Development Foundation conducted focus group discussions and key informant interviews with the support of Saferworld staff.

Focus groups

Twelve focus groups, three each in Sana'a, Aden, Taiz, and Al-Mukalla, were convened between 22 July and 8 August 2011. In each of the four cities, one group was convened with young men, another with young women, and a third with community leaders. Each group consisted of six to nineteen participants, with most including between eight and ten.

Different locations, described in more detail below, were essential to capturing a diversity of opinions. Within each focus group, care was taken to include a diverse and representative selection according to political, socioeconomic and geographic differences. This meant including voices both for and against the protests as well as capturing the diversity of opinion within the protest movement. Interviewees included members of the GPC, the opposition parties, independent civil society activists, young protest organisers and participants, 'undecided', and members of al-Hiraak.

Some participants had a tertiary education and all but one had completed secondary schooling. While this educational background is not representative of the wider Yemeni population, it provides a closer representation to the more politically engaged sector of the population, and facilitated a more active discussion around political and governance processes.

Focus group methodology

Focus groups were conducted in Arabic and structured to encourage maximum engagement from participants. The main themes for discussion were: grievances driving people to protest; actors responsible for the ongoing conflict; actors and processes best able to address these grievances; and, visions and processes that would promote long-term peace and security and support a peaceful transition.

Political sensitivities around discussion topics were taken into account and anonymity of participants and their viewpoints was a cornerstone of the research. Overall, the guiding principle for the focus groups was to 'do no harm' both to participants and the local context and relationships. Given the timing of the research, care was taken to avoid partisan and heated political discussions around immediate concerns and steer participants towards identifying long-term approaches to peacebuilding. Discussions were also structured to encourage participants to think about grievances in a practical, day-to-day way, rather than resort to politicised slogans and headline complaints.

The ideas put forward in the focus groups were validated during a session with 30 youth leaders from across the country that convened in Cairo for a workshop in October 2011. Findings were presented to youth representatives, some of whom had been part of the initial focus group discussions. Findings were also validated through meetings with specialists and international policymakers.

Sana'a

Sana'a is Yemen's political capital and has been heavily affected by the protests and ensuing military conflict. Fighting between the leader of the Hashid tribal confederation, Sadiq al-Ahmar, and troops loyal to President Saleh have transformed Sana'a into a war zone. Tribal affiliations dominate politics in Sana'a and opaque deals between traditional power-brokers pose structural impediments to youth influence.

Six *community leaders* (aged 29–55), two women and four men, all with tertiary education, took part in the discussion. Three came from Sana'a and surrounding villages, one from Dhamar and one from Mareb. Four described themselves as being opposed to the current regime, of which two protested regularly, and two described themselves as being neutral.

Nine *young women* (aged 22–32), six of them from Sana'a and one each from Taiz, Amran and Dhale'a took part in the discussion. All possessed tertiary education, seven described themselves as being against the current regime, one as being in favour and one as neutral. The sample included young women who identified with the Houthi movement, youth activists, a young woman who described herself as apolitical and two supporters of the current government.

Ten *young men* (aged 22–34) participated in the focus group. Seven identified their origins as being from Taiz despite being born and raised in Sana'a; one described himself as being from Ibb; one from Aden; and one from Sana'a. The focus group, which included six people with tertiary and three with secondary education was composed of university students, professionals from the public and private sectors, activists, unemployed youth and a GPC official. All but one participant described themselves as being against the current regime and eight of them described themselves as “regularly protesting”.

Taiz

Taiz is the administrative capital of Northern Yemen until 1962, and remains Yemen's largest industrial base. An urban, middle-class city less influenced by tribal politics than Sana'a with a long-established business community, it has been the main focal point for the youth-led anti-regime protests. Taiz has witnessed significant violence between protestors, local armed groups, and security forces.

Fourteen *community leaders* (aged 27–53) took part in two focus group discussions in Taiz. The groups were composed of three women and eleven men, all but four of whom had post-secondary education. Eight identified with the opposition parties and six described themselves as independent of party affiliation, with one describing himself as neutral between pro- and anti-regime forces.

The 19 *young women* (aged 18–32) who participated in the focus group made this the largest group and the one with the lowest average age at 22 years old. High attendance was due to all invited participants attending the focus group, including one participant from rural Taiz. Ten participants had a secondary education; nine had attended or were attending university. Occupations included journalism, public sector work, teaching and unemployment. Four participants described themselves as politically neutral and as belonging to the “silent majority” of Yemen. Three participants, including one GPC member, described themselves as being in favour of the regime, while twelve opposed it, including three who identified with Islah and the Nasserite and Socialist parties respectively.

Eight *young men* (aged 26–35) took part in the focus group in Taiz, drawn from civil society and protest organisers, as well as individuals who were opposition party members (1), thought of themselves as being for the regime (1) or belonging to the neutral “silent majority” (1). All but two had post-secondary education and occupations included teachers, lawyers, public sector workers, students and involuntary unemploy-

ment. One participant had taken up arms to “defend the square”, while one had been shot and injured in previous protests.

Aden

Aden is the former capital of South Yemen, and has been a site of heavy protests calling for secession. Political instability, civil war, and the ongoing tensions between North and South Yemen have increased the ‘psychological distance’ between youth in the South and a concept of a united Yemeni community. Despite the fact that youth born after reunification in 1990 have no memory of South Yemen as a state, a growing number of youth in the South want to secede from the North.

Seven *community leaders* (aged 26–36), four of whom described themselves as independent, two as belonging to the opposition, and one as belonging to al-Hiraak, took part in the focus group. All were male. One of the independents declared themselves to be neutral in the current protests, while six declared themselves to be opposed to the current regime.

Eleven *young women* (aged 24–35), all describing themselves as independent of party affiliation, participated in the focus group. They included representatives from women’s groups, youth movement leaders, and proponents of devolution, federalist and secessionist streams of al-Hiraak. All described themselves as opposed to the current regime and seven were regularly involved in protests. The focus group included public and private sector workers, unemployed young women, a lawyer, a university teacher and students.

Eight *young men* (aged 18–32), five with tertiary and three with secondary education, participated in discussions. Six were from Aden itself and two from Abyan governorate, including one recently displaced person. Two, the internally displaced man and an NGO worker, described themselves as supporters of the President, one young professional as neutral and five participants, including public sector workers, a journalist and university students, described themselves as being opposed to the regime.

Al-Mukalla

Al-Mukalla is the fourth largest city in Yemen, a main sea port and the capital city of Hadramaut. Historically an independent kingdom and later a part of South Yemen, Hadramaut and Al-Mukalla maintain close ties to Saudi Arabia, an emotional distance to the North and strong hostility to the current central government. Despite this hostility, Al-Mukalla has not experienced very large protests, and most protestors are from the JMP and Islah in particular. The governorate has a distinct Hadrami culture, extensive coastline, an affluent expatriate business community and a significant portion of Yemen’s remaining oil wealth.

Ten *community leaders* (aged 22–50), one with secondary and nine with tertiary education took part in discussions. All described themselves as being opposed to the current regime, with seven regularly protesting and one sometimes protesting.

Seven *young women* (aged 21–35) took part in the discussion in al-Mukalla. Most of participants came without the knowledge of their families, as they feared they would not be allowed to attend otherwise. Many expressed frustration with the limitations on women’s participation in public life. Six of the women in the focus group were unemployed, with one working as a teacher. One had a primary, two a secondary and four had a university education. Most were politically active and militated for Islah (2), or al-Hiraak (2), respectively. Two described themselves as independent activists or civil society organisers.

Twelve *young men* (aged 22–30) took part in the discussion, all of whom had tertiary education. They included an employee in the ministry of education, who regularly protested for the government, and one unemployed young man who described himself

as part of Yemen's "silent majority". A journalist, students, young men looking for a job and private-sector employees rounded-out the group, with political affiliations ranging from independent activism, over identification with the Socialist Party and Islah, to a range of positions from federalism to secession within al-Hiraak.

Key informant interviews

A total of 40 key informant interviews were conducted in all four cities between 22 July and 4 August 2011. Some have requested that their names be withheld for security reasons.

Sana'a

Abdel-Bari Taher, Yemeni analyst
 Abdo Al-Jundi, Deputy Minister of Information and government spokesperson
 Firas Shamsan, journalist
 Hooriya Mashour, former Chairperson of the Women's National Committee and current spokesperson of the National Council of Revolutionary Forces.
 Maha Awad, independent activist and protestor
 Mahmoud Qaiyah, Project Manager, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung
 Dr Mohammad Abdel-Malek al-Mutawakkel, member of the Supreme Council of the JMP
 Mohammad Muftah, member of the religious clergy in Sana'a
 Samah Radman, journalist
 Yahya Mansour Anuisba, Assistant Secretary General of the *Yemen Socialist Party* (YSP)

Taiz

Abdulraqib Alhaboob, businessman
 Anonymous, religious cleric
 Aref Abdulsalam Shamsan, protestor with the Socialist party
 Faisal Saeed Fare Almzhadji, economist and public intellectual
 Kaied Abdo Salem Qahtan, local council authorities
 Mansoor Alsalmi, General People's Congress
 Marwan Almansoob, lawyer
 Nadia Ismail Mahmoud, Principal of Al-Shaheed Al-Darra School
 Shereen Alameri, lawyer
 Sheikh Sultan Al-Samei, tribal sheikh

Aden

Aisha Taleb, independent activist
 Ashjan Soraih, female protestor with the Aden youth movement
 Fatima Al-Mareesi, head of Yemen Women's Union Aden branch
 Intisar Khamis, independent activist
 Mohammad Abdallah Al-Sarari, youth leader in Aden
 Mohammed Saeed Salem, Director of Media, Ministry of Youth and Sports
 Naser Altaweel, al-Hiraak movement (pro-unity)
 Nawar Badeeb, businessman and member of the al-Hiraak movement (separatist)
 Taher Mansour Qassem, lawyer and Chairman of the Bar Association
 Waheeb N, independent male protestor

Al-Mukalla

Dr Adel Bahmid, Executive Director of the Foundation for Development Aid
 Ali Harmal, leading activist
 Fouad Rashed, Southern Movement (Hiraak) representative
 Munira Abdallah, Yemen Women Union Al-Mukalla Branch representative
 Nabhan Abdullah, male protestor
 Omar Doman, President of the Senior Co-ordination Council for the Yemeni Revolution
 Dr Saeed Al-Jareeri, public intellectual and writer in Hadramaut
 Salah Altamimi, businessman
 Sheikh Salem Baqateyan, religious cleric and lecturer in University of Hadramaut
 Sina'a A, Hadramaut Youth Council

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Saferworld works to prevent and reduce violent conflict and promote co-operative approaches to security. We work with governments, international organisations and civil society to encourage and support effective policies and practices through advocacy, research and policy development and through supporting the actions of others.

COVER PHOTO: Youth hold their hands together during a protest in Sana'a in May, 2011. © REUTERS/KHALED ABDULLAH COURTESY TRUST.ORG
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Registered charity no. 1043843
A company limited by guarantee no. 3015948

ISBN 978-1-904833-72-7