

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Peacebuilding after Yemen's Former President Ali Abdullah Saleh



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Introduction

The ongoing war in Yemen has resulted multiple structural difficulties that constrain governance in Yemen, regardless of which conflicting faction is ruling or controlling a specific area of the country. Poverty, shortage of an educated labor force, lack of electricity and damage to infrastructure (airports, harbors, roads, factories, schools, hospitals, telecommunication, etc.) are the main challenges. On top of that, Yemen is faced with a multi-pronged refugee problem. About 650,000 Yemenis have left their country, seeking shelter in neighboring states. Tens of thousands or more are stranded mainly in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Europe. The figures for internally displaced persons are much higher. By the end of 2017, more than three millions of Yemenis were still internally displaced, seeking refuge with relatives, friends or in refugee camps. Meanwhile, about 350,000 African refugees and migrants, mostly from Somalia and Ethiopia, entered Yemen in 2015 and 2016. As both major conflict factions are engaging irregular troops/militias, an additional challenge has emerged. These fighters need to be reintegrated into either the civilian or the formal security sector but the necessary funds are missing. Bringing food and other items to the country is still difficult even the U.N. Verification and Inspection Mission (UNVIM) became operational in summer 2016.

The most important activities of NGOs were in the second and third decades of the twentieth century in the city of Aden and southern Yemen and their focus were on the construction of schools and the provision of educational services. In the 1940s civil society organizations expanded to include cultural development, youth care and local development. In the 1950s, Trade union and political rights. The interest in women's issues did not begin until 1960 when the first women's association was established in Aden, the Arab Women's Association.

In northern Yemen, the emergence of modern organizations dates back to 1934, when a number of literary and social associations were formed, which were classified and limited in nature. They did not act in a spirit of confrontation against the imamate regime, but the extreme repression exercised by the Imamate authority against its activists and intellectuals in general led to the establishment of non-governmental organizations in the north.

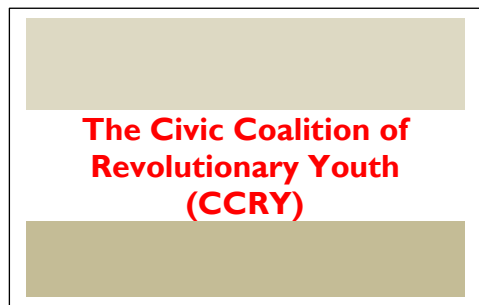
Some political activists moved from the north to the city of Aden in the south where they founded a number of political organizations including the Liberal Party in 1944, the Greater Yemeni Society in 1946 and the Yemeni Union.

Due to the nature of the organizational structures and practices of these associations can be classified as the first forms of non-governmental organizations active in the field of local development. After the outbreak of the revolution in the north in September 1962 and the South gaining independence, in November 1967, the Arab Republic of Yemen (formerly in the north) allowed charitable societies and trade union organizations to establish them under Law No. 11 of 1963, while the ban in the south included associations based on the region, In the north, the state sought to control the trade unions to the extent that they were not in the hands of the trade unions. That the President of the General Federation of Trade Unions was appointed by a decision of the President of the Republic, and the State intervened through the powers granted by the law to the Ministry of Social Affairs, including the right to cancel or freeze the activity of associations and trade unions, and the intervention of state agencies in the affairs of NGOs, A government loyal to the Authority, and paralyzed the role of organizations that tried to defend its independence through its dissolution and the establishment of disputes between its members.

In 2004, the majority of civil society organizations were active in traditional areas, such as social welfare, in which more than 1248 organizations were active, while the literacy and motherhood and childhood care sector has only 96 organizations in a country that suffers from a severe decline in these areas due to the high rate of illiteracy which exceeded 78% of the sexes, including 5 million children. The agricultural and fishery cooperatives were only 661 cooperative societies, taking into consideration that most of these organizations are local in nature. The largest sector was concentrated in Sana'a versus weak spread in rural areas of Yemen, which was more than 81% of the population.

After the revolution of February 2011, Yemen has witnessed an increase in the number of civil society organizations, where they reached more than 8,300 registered organizations, one quarter of which have emerged after 2011

However, the war has further exposed the weakness of civil society. Caught between Scylla and Charybdis, very few NGOs were in a position to maintain independence and stay



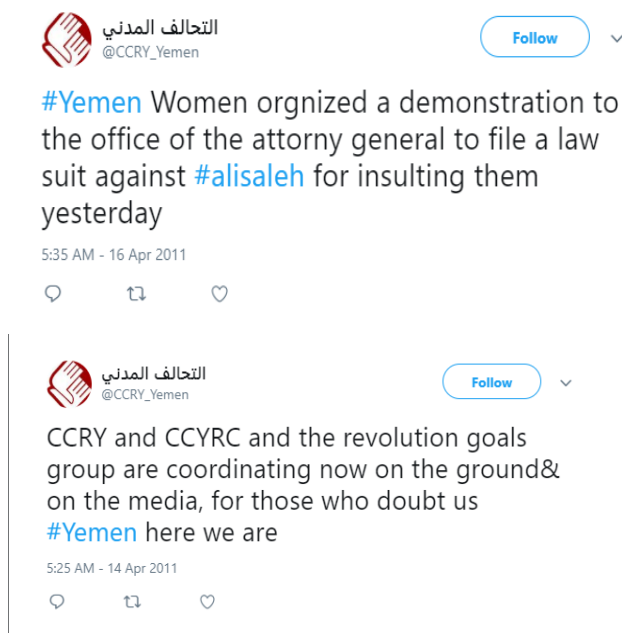
operational without the presence of donors in the country. Conflict intensity reached one peak in Yemen in the first half of 2011 when hundreds of protesters were killed and assailants tried to assassinate then President Saleh, killing several high-ranking politicians in the process. After 2011, fights between tribes and clashes between security forces and various militant groups continued. There were hundreds of assassinations and attempted assassination of members of the security forces, high-ranking politicians, political activists, journalists and intellectuals. Conflict intensity reached another peak in 2014, when the Houthis started an offensive against those who they held responsible for the spread of Saudi-sponsored Salafism and the six wars in Sa'dah between 2004 and 2010. They directly attacked AQAP and its affiliates in several governorates and in summer 2014 invaded the areas of Amran and Arhab close to the capital. Supported by local tribes, they confiscated or destroyed property of the al-Ahmar Sheikh family, General Ali Muhsin and radicals like Abdelmajid al-Zindani. The number of casualties is unknown. When the Houthis took control over the capital Sanaa in August/September 2014, the fighting claimed about another 300 lives. Also, bomb attacks against Houthi gatherings, in Sanaa as well as in other parts of the country, have been carried out, with AQAP as the prime suspect. SLC air raids since March 2015 and fighting between various military units and militias have killed about 45,000 Yemenis and produced about three million internally displaced persons. As – national and regional – conflict parties have been stirring sectarian and subnational conflicts, the worst might still be to come.

The 2011 uprising in Yemen facilitated the development of a myriad of new avenues of political expression, and the proliferation of civil society groups addressing issues across the political spectrum. Despite considerable political challenges moving forward, cultural and social shifts have been set in motion by the energy of the uprising. Women and men, young and old, and urban and tribal came together to overthrow the regime, and now efforts are being made by civil society groups and individual initiatives to maintain this political equity. CSOs have been working to secure women's rights through a ban on child marriage and a law that would set a quota to reserve 30 per cent of all political offices for women. In addition, a myriad of youth groups have emerged to encourage democratic development and political dialogue, and diverse groups have coordinated their efforts to make their voices heard by the Government.

(CCRY), was formed in response to the 16 January 2011 uprising. The group began as a Facebook page created by Yemeni activist Rafat al-Akhali to foster dialogue between youth organizations, coordinate their demands and enable productive dialogue with government representatives. According to the group's founder, prior to the creation of CCRY, more than 465 separate youth groups existed in Yemen, many with less than 10 members, which made it difficult to present a united platform or organize political action. CCRY brought together individuals from diverse groups of activists, CSOs, professional associations and tribal groups.

As a result of the success of CCRY in organizing youth movements and in acknowledgement of the importance of the youth constituency to any successful future political arrangement, the Yemeni Government began to organize meetings to better communicate with youth leaders, leading up to the National Dialogue Conference (NDC). However, it was reported that these meetings routinely descended into "chaos" and physical altercations. Following NDC, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) spearheaded an initiative to develop a political road map in Yemen. Though the so-called GCC Initiative was widely heralded as progress, it "only addressed the formal political parties, and disregarded those who were the fuel for the mass people's revolution: the youth". When the national consensus Government was eventually formed, young and independent participants were absent from more than half of the seats in both the opposition and the leading coalition. This increased political participation, particularly among youth, has not come without a cost. Many activists and protesters were killed or arbitrarily detained before and during the uprising. A further frustration for many young Yemeni revolutionaries is the absence of accountability for crimes committed against them by regime members during the uprising. Many young activists were injured during clashes, and they were subsequently offered medical treatment by presidential decree, but this treatment has not come through. Youth groups have organized numerous demonstrations to protest against this injustice to their injured comrades, receiving promises

from the transitional Government in response, but no serious action has been taken to ensure transitional justice. One major hindrance to the transitional process is the immunity clause offered to former President Ali Abdallah Saleh when he stepped down from power. This prevents Yemenis from seeking justice for the crimes committed against them by the previous regime, and undermines inclusive development initiatives after the uprising.



armed groups or by Saudi Arabia and the Hadi Government and their allies in Yemen.

Many activists, including members of the Mwatana team, have been threatened and detained by all conflicting parties, because of their work. Countless restrictions have been placed on human rights, humanitarian and development-related activities in the field, to the extent that long procedures and several official permits are now required to carry out a single training activity – with a good chance that even after going through all the hassle the activity might end up not being authorized at all. Violations of the freedom of expression are lacking. In fact, civil society organizations lost an independent media outlet that had previously helped make their voice heard.

In 2016, civil society organizations have found illegal violations and abuses against them because of their search for funding, particularly external funding. Among these illegal practices, for example, are the following: The need to submit an annual financial report to the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor of the Ministry, based by a certified legal accountant if the general budget of any civil organization, civil society or charitable organization exceeds YR 1 million. In addition to the requirement that the organization hand over a copy of the official project agreement with any donor to the bank to which it reaches (external money transfer) for the implementation of the project and this procedure with each payment a new amount transferred even if the same project.

In an environment in which all kinds of human and human rights abuses are practiced by the de facto government, Yemeni civil society organizations have found themselves among difficult choices. Where a civil society activist described that working in such circumstances is difficult to adhere to neutrality, especially in the rights side, you may be prosecuted and arrested as soon as you adopt the issue of a political detainee or journalist criticizing even if by rights! You may be pressured to improve its image in front of the community, both domestic and international. This may ultimately force you to give up civilian work, despite the need of the community for all voluntary action and support for relief, especially during the war. Unfortunately, civil society organizations may become targets of and benefit from totalitarian governments and armed groups during the conflict.

In spite of the existence of an international principle that legitimizes civil society organizations to seek and secure funding from legal sources, on the other side there are



Yemen has over than 16,000 registered civil society organizations engaged in a variety of social issues. These local actors have become

even more critical, as regional tensions and divisions preclude the government from operating in a centralized and effective manner. State functions, such as managing resources, resolving local disputes, and liaising with humanitarian organizations, have largely been undertaken by cities, local councils, and civil society organizations.

Houthis has been orchestrating extensive incitement and smear campaigns through social media as well as their own private networks against civil societies. By defaming independent human rights organizations, all conflicting parties have prejudiced the public against the work of such organizations and their employees. Mwatana Organization and its staff have been the victims of many of these campaigns launched by either Houthi-Saleh

inclusive governments and armed groups that classify this right as a charge and employment abroad and that is intended to dominate all kinds of countries through civil society organizations. It is done by agreements, treaties and deals in the form of loans or the adoption of projects and so on, which may make them make concessions or commit to long-term loans with high benefits, such as these projects when funding civil society organizations because of the low cost and clarity of its objectives.

In 2018, A questionnaire conducted by the Center for Studies and Economic Information that al-Houthi group took the first place in the number of violations against the organizations targeted by 70% of the total number of violations, followed by al-Qaeda by 13%, and the rest of the violations were distributed to unknown parties and local parties which have been subjected to a fierce attack by the coup groups as they are considered to be one of the most important tools for monitoring Houthi's crimes and violations, State institutions and weapons of the Yemeni army to blow up houses and mosques and suppress the media in various directions after the seizure of official channels and the government for the benefit of them to obstruct the work of humanitarian organizations and civil society organizations and the hunt and arrest of activists.

The survey, which targeted 61 local organizations that specialize in relief, information, development, education and human rights in 12 Yemeni governorates, said that 60% of the organizations participating in the questionnaire have a valid license for 2016 and 27% of organizations are licensed but have not been able to renew their work permits for this year, while 3 % Of organizations could not obtain a work permission.

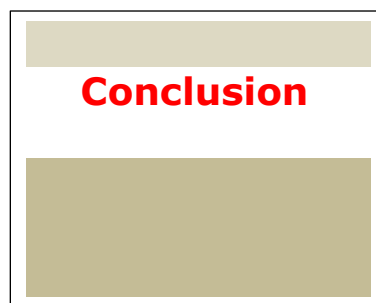
The violations were distributed among cases of threats, harassment, and burglary, looting and freezing of assets. 33% of the organizations were subjected to various harassment, which was an obstacle to their role. The looting was followed by 20% followed by closures and 17% Incidents of infiltration by 5%, while 5% of the total violations of civil society organizations were distributed between burning and freezing of assets.

In order to build peace in Yemen, youth who are often seen as the source of violence, hold enormous potential to bring about peace in the communities. Equipping youth with peace-building skills and fostering a mediator mindset enables positive peer influence. Providing youth with a platform to constructively engage with their communities empowers them as leaders for the future. Their participation in peace-

building processes also promotes a positive perception of youth, which further serves to empower them as peace actors.

Women also play an important peace-building role and provide a key entry point into family units. Even in areas where women are not perceived to be engaged in peace-building, such as in AQAP-dominant areas, women hold influential positions within family structures, are key in educating children, and often inhabit spaces spanning across sectarian divides. Despite the challenges of incorporating women in peace-building roles in Yemen's male-dominated society, the role of women in society is also changing due to the conflict as they are increasingly engaged in the management of family affairs and contributing to household incomes

Their participation in peace-building efforts can lead to the emergence of increased female leadership at the local level, which could help affect the secondary effect of enhanced representation in governance structures.



Civil society in Yemen has gone through various stages of development and regression, as windows of opportunity alternately

open and close. In the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen [i.e. South Yemen], activities became government organized, and NGOs lost their independence. In the Yemen Arab Republic [i.e. North Yemen], the village self-help initiatives grew into the cooperative movement. This movement lost its effectiveness when it became part of the government bureaucracy in the 1980s. With unification, Yemen enjoyed greater democratic liberties than ever before in its history, and civil society expanded. Within this environment, political parties, free press, and NGOs began to flourish. Yemen is still in this phase, but since the 1994 civil war, the activities of political parties and the press have been restricted and many believe that the same might happen to NGOs.

Despite the evident support by the international donor community and in spite of the development of many organizations and their transformation through the merger of "modern"

and “traditional” means of mobilization, is forced to evolve in an uncertain and ambivalent environment. While not suffering from a standstill, civil society actors do not seem to have been able to durably and profoundly affect the equilibrium of power and to influence the government by imposing democratic reforms or allowing the participation of citizens. For example, (after months of political crisis and the threat of the opposition to boycott the ballot, the decision to postpone for two years the parliamentary elections in February 2009 was taken without consultation of civil society actors). On the issue, leaders of both the government and the opposition reached an agreement, while many civil society actors acknowledged that it was a set-back for democracy. Nevertheless, Yemen appears as a rich case-study in the sense that it encourages analysts to adopt a broad understanding of civil society and to take in account a wide number of actors, but which all take their share in limiting autocratic rule and in being an intermediary between the state and the citizens.

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