

**Security Council**

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Letter dated 11 December 2017 from the Permanent Representatives of Sweden, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Uruguay to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Sweden and Uruguay, as Co-Chairs of the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security, and in close cooperation with the United Kingdom, hereby transmit a summary note of the meeting held on 22 November 2017 on Yemen (see annex).

We would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Olof **Skoog**
Ambassador

(Signed) Matthew **Rycroft**
Ambassador

(Signed) Elbio **Rosselli**
Ambassador



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Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security: summary of the meeting on Yemen, held on 22 November 2017

On 22 November, the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security convened a meeting on the situation in Yemen. Members of the Security Council were briefed by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, the United Nations Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator in Yemen, Jamie McGoldrick, and the UN-Women Country Programme Manager, Marta Colburn. The meeting took place shortly after the United Nations was notified of the reopening of the airport in Sana'a and the port in Hudaydah to allow for humanitarian shipments after more than two weeks of a total blockade by sea, air and land. Council members, several of whom had lobbied for the lifting of the blockade, were interested in the specifics of the announcement. In addition, their questions focused on the impact of the blockade on women and girls; the capacity of the Office of the Special Envoy and the country team to implement the women and peace and security agenda and assess women's needs in order to target humanitarian aid adequately; women's participation in track two and track three negotiations, in the light of the suspension of the formal peace talks since mid-2016, and plans for the role of the Yemeni Women's Pact for Peace and Security.

The Special Envoy noted that the situation in Yemen had deteriorated significantly since the previous Informal Expert Group meeting, eight months earlier, and particularly in recent weeks due to the total closure of Yemeni air, land and sea space, the parties' disregard for the protection of civilians and the destruction of civilian infrastructure. The peace talks continued to be suspended, and the Office of the Special Envoy was working with the parties to return to the negotiation table, agree to a cessation of hostilities, and implement confidence-building measures like the ones suggested by the Yemeni Women's Pact for Peace and Security. The parties had never complied with the 30 per cent quota for women suggested in the National Dialogue, and so the Office had looked for alternative ways of engaging women. The Special Envoy continued to be regularly advised by the Pact, and would welcome an expansion of their role and their access to more opportunities for advocacy. In addition, the Office was looking to strengthen engagement with other women's networks and support the participation of women in negotiations at other levels, such as in de-escalation committees or securing humanitarian access in specific locations. Thanks to the support of the Government of Japan, the Office now had a small unit on gender and women, peace and security, but it was acknowledged that that capacity should be funded by the regular budget.

The Resident Coordinator briefed participants on the impact of the conflict on the humanitarian situation and underlined how important it was that lifting the blockade should include commercial goods and fuel, which was needed to pump water for 2.5 million people without access to adequate water. That had had a major impact on the cholera epidemic, with more than 900,000 Yemenis affected. With 7 million Yemenis at risk of famine, there were only 8 to 10 weeks of food supplies left. Entrenched gender inequalities severely limited women's access to aid, services and livelihoods, and led to the rise of negative coping strategies and vulnerability to sexual and domestic violence and survival sex, especially in the context of forced displacement. It was estimated that gender-based violence had increased 36 per cent in the current year, and 70 per cent over the course of the conflict. A recent survey

conducted by the United Nations Children's Fund among internally displaced persons had found that nearly half of all marriages involved girls under the age of 15. The percentage of female-headed households had also increased significantly during the conflict, especially among the displaced population. Some assessments had measured the percentage of households led by girls under the age of 18 at more than 20 per cent. A large majority of civilians directly killed in the conflict, rather than by the consequences of the conflict, were men, but 4.5 million women and girls were at risk of violence. Moreover, 65 per cent of reproductive health facilities and 55 per cent of primary health facilities were out of service. The United Nations and its partners in the humanitarian country team were keenly aware of the crisis facing women and girls and had established mechanisms to gather differentiated information and provide tailored responses, with the support of a gender adviser seconded by UN-Women to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

The UN-Women Country Programme Manager read excerpts of a letter written by the Yemeni Women's Pact for Peace and Security for the Informal Expert Group. In the letter, which was subsequently circulated to Council members, the members of the Pact demand an immediate truce, the reopening of all ports to humanitarian aid and commercial goods, a resumption of the formal peace talks in compliance with the 30 per cent quota established in the National Dialogue and called for by the Security Council, and the establishment of a gender commission as part of the formal structure of the peace negotiations. Other important issues were highlighted in the letter, from arms smuggling to prisoner release and the payment of civil servants' salaries, and it also contained a request for support for the education and health sectors, including reproductive health, and for women's organizations, including them in leadership in efforts with regard to counter-terrorism, deradicalization and anti-corruption. As the secretariat of the Pact, UN-Women expressed its support for expanded opportunities for the Pact and noted that a study of its work since October 2015, and the vision of the Pact's members, was under way. A meeting of the Pact scheduled for November had been postponed owing to the blockade, but it had been rescheduled for 8–12 December 2017.

UN-Women, as the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group, and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, shared some of the recommendations presented to Council experts. The recommendations from the previous meeting of the Informal Expert Group on Yemen were still relevant and should be implemented, especially in the Council's subsidiary bodies on counter-terrorism and sanctions, and in future meetings and decisions of the Security Council on Yemen. For those, the secretariat referred to the documentation submitted at previous meetings, and added two new recommendations: that the Security Council and its members support the group of international eminent experts and ensure that its mandate, staffing, expertise and reporting would adequately cover gender-based crimes, and that the Security Council hold an Arria-formula meeting in 2018 devoted to hearing from a diverse representation of women's civil society organizations from Yemen. The Office of the Special Representative reiterated that the sanctions Committee should include sexual violence in its mandate and in the expertise of the panel of experts, and emphasized the need for monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements by the United Nations on conflict-related sexual violence, including to examine the link between violent extremism, trafficking and sexual violence, as indicated in resolutions [2331 \(2016\)](#) and [2388 \(2017\)](#) on trafficking in persons in conflict situations. The Office also called for increased attention to critical services for survivors of sexual violence. In Yemen, very little was known about that linkage, or about conflict-related sexual violence in general, because of the lack of services, cultural factors, insecurity and the requirement that service providers report to the police.

The Co-Chairs committed themselves to follow up on those recommendations.