



## **Yemeni youth ... peace leaders not war fuel**

YYFP position paper regarding the increasing recruitment and mobilization of Yemeni youth by the conflict parties.

The Yemen Youth Forum for Peace is an effective coordination forum that has youth representatives in all Yemeni governorates and the 18 countries sponsoring the peace process. The forum seeks to communicate the voices and opinions of youth to various levels of decision-making at the national and international levels.

## **Introduction:**

For Yemenis, the new year 2020 does not differ from the previous six years, while people around the world aspire to achieving their goals and dreams in the new year, most Yemenis do not aspire except for how a new year will pass with the suffering of war, hunger and diseases and their only wish is to stop this war. Their goal is how to survive during 2020. A six years long war in Yemen has made more than 80% of the population in need of humanitarian aid<sup>1</sup>, which means there are only 20% of those who enjoy a good or simple level of necessary humanitarian needs such as drinking water, food, medicine, clothing and housing. Wars and conflicts have hindered Yemen from stepping towards development.

Not only that, but these wars deplete the energies of young people and deviate them from their natural role in society. Instead of leading the wheel of development, they became a fuel for the wheel of destruction, and instead of being the construction basis, they became demolition mallets. The issue of youth recruitment is one of the serious issues for Yemen. Young people are Yemen's mainstay and the reason for its rise, growth and stability, but when their thoughts are directed towards violence and the use of their capabilities to instill concepts that are incompatible with peace and coexistence, this will affect their identities and behavior in society and this will contribute to creating a fragile society that pursues conflict as the only way to resolve conflicts in the future.

Unfortunately, the parties to the conflict are dedicating enormous efforts and resources to mobilize Yemeni youth to engage in hostilities. We are shocked by the shameful attitude of international community on how the parties are spreading a culture of violence and conflict among the youth, we find that these parties are adopting means of intimidation and enticement through the media and religious and educational platforms to mobilize and attract youth. The Yemeni community is a young community where 38% of the population is between the age of 15-34 years<sup>2</sup>, and they represent wide capabilities infused with strength and enthusiasm and filled with the ambition to succeed and prove themselves. The deterioration of economic conditions has made young people an easy prey under the temptations to engage in hostilities, but we, as young people, condemn the exploitation of public authority and assets as means to entice young people towards fighting. That also denotes widespread corruption gnawing the already dilapidated country. Luring young people by offering them jobs in the public sector or the international humanitarian organizations is a violation of the constitution and the law and it turns them from a peace element into a war tool. Also, the continuous threat to youth of imprisonment or dismissal from their jobs or denial of allowances, bonuses, incentives and public services is considered as a trigger for youth to look for other income sources thus become easy to be manipulated to join the conflict, on the contrary, those parties must provide protection and suitable means for the youth to contribute to peacebuilding as stated in UNSCR 2250.

The involvement of young people in armed conflicts has severe negative effects on Yemen now and in the future. The consequences do not stop with the cessation of hostilities, but they cast a negative shadow on the country's future in various political, economic, social aspects. This lies great responsibility on the shoulders of the Yemeni youth in order to assume leadership and establish a path that guarantees the investment of these powers and capabilities.

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<sup>1</sup> Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan 2019.

<sup>2</sup> UN World Population Prospects 2020.

## **Issues and Solutions:**

The Yemeni youth is vulnerable to polarization by the conflict parties for complex reasons which can't be tracked but by researches and studies to investigate the underlying causes behind it, but what remains visible on the surface is sufficient to know that economic, political and social causes have formed a mixture of motivations for young people to be an easy victim, hence we believe in the necessity to develop remedies to overcome the wave of violence and its consequences, and these remedies must be in two directions, the first direction towards reducing the youth's vulnerability in front of polarization campaigns, and the second direction towards reducing polarization campaigns by the conflict parties.

What young people strive for now is to save their dignity by securing their basic needs, thus we see an urgent need to create job opportunities for them to be able to demonstrate the capabilities and skills they already have instead of wasting aid funds on developing new skills. It could be beneficial to start working on developing their skills in parallel with creating job opportunities, but the priority remains to create job opportunities so they can be independent and create income sources that grant them a decent life to survive severe economic conditions due to the absence of capabilities and means to earn basic life needs such as food, drink, clothing and housing. Such circumstances have formed strong motivation for youth to engage in hostilities as an alternative. We also recommend reforming and activating the social security networks in Yemen represented by the Social Welfare Fund and the General Corporation for Social Security to ensure that beneficiaries receive their dues continuously to support in alleviating the burden on young people and overcoming many of the effects of the war on humanitarian needs.

We emphasize on the necessity to revitalizing the educational process, especially vocational and technical education, in order to rehabilitate and train young people, return them to the right path and normalize their lives again with development and awareness raising. The disruption and deterioration of the educational process has created a great spare time for the youth, and since Yemen lacks the development means and facilities to accommodate the youth, they have become a palatable prey for the polarization campaigns. Young people are involved in marches and demonstrations in support of war, in hostilities in the field, or in other acts under the umbrella of a conflict party. Therefore, we see that the revitalization of the educational process begins with the human resources such as teachers and administrative staff not by rehabilitating buildings and facilities; many educational facilities are still in place, but schools are turned into military barracks or ideological hubs; due to the absence of the teachers. Hence it's out of necessity to prioritize facilitating the functions of professors and administrative staff to create an appropriate environment, even at the minimum requirements, so the young people can access educational and cultural attainments and to build their cognitive abilities. We also think that it is better to pay special attention to revitalizing vocational and technical education as it is the most potential gateway for young people to enter the labor market and to be able to generate a regular income.

We demand that the media, religious and educational discourse be rationalized by the parties to the conflict and refrain from spreading a culture of violence and hatred. It's a must to halt all provoking visual and auditory media which is influencing the youth to pursuit revenge from the opponent party, and they might be motivated by patriotic motives driven by a systematic psychological media coverage in addition to the religious and educational machineries. The influence of religious speeches in mosques and mass media is severe psychological stimuli that push young people to think about violence and accept that violence becomes a culture of practice among them. The parties to the conflict must refrain from spreading violence and hatred among the community, and they must assure community-friendly media content, and to obstruct

what disturbs peace and coexistence. We also see the necessity of providing psychological support services for the youth to survive the psychological consequences of war.

It is important to point out the pressing need for civil society organizations to lead on developing a national plan to implement UNSC Resolution 2250 for young people to ensure effective and meaningful participation in decision-making and public policies to ensure the alignment of any political consensus with their visions and aspirations for the future.

The political deadlock has shed its heavy shadow on the youth and they have lost their hope in reaching a nationwide adorable peace agreement that guarantees them stability and safety in the future. Such circumstances have pushed young people to despair from finding ways for them to contribute to building the future, and as a result, they became more vulnerable to polarization campaigns in an attempt to secure themselves. Young people are the legitimate inheritors of this current conflict legacy, and they should be allowed to contribute to a future that makes them feel safe and reconciled with the past through a nationwide political solution that establishes lasting peace and protects the community from the renewal of the conflict cycles and not to transfer today's obstacles and conflicts to the future for young people to face later as natural consequences of the current shabby regime.

We also encourage peace-sponsoring countries to listen to the voices of youth and involve them in peacebuilding and development plans. Excluding young people from active participation in peacebuilding is not a violation of their rights or inhibiting their role, but rather paving potential future conflict because exclusion and marginalization of youth by conflict parties and international peace sponsors is one of the main reasons for making young people more vulnerable to engage in armed conflicts. What future are we expecting to be built by youth suffering from marginalization, unemployment, poverty and war? It is better for these countries to open channels to communicate with young people and to seek their advice.

We commend the role of civil society organizations in documenting crimes and human rights violations, which will contribute to ensuring that criminals will not go unpunished. A noticeable negative legacy has formed for impunity for criminals in previous periods of violence and conflicts in Yemen and this delivered a false belief among the youth that being dragged behind the delusion of power and influence at the expense of innocent blood is nothing but a culturally proven gain that everyone pursued in the past, and this led them to believe that whatever crimes they commit now, they will not be held accountable and they will assure themselves some high status or positions in this future and that will become a legitimate gain after the war. Also, impunity was a motivation for young people to take revenge against those who committed violations against them as they know that those who killed their families and friends will not be held accountable, so the youth seek to join the fight out of revenge to make sure the violators won't go unpunished just as it happened in previous wars and conflicts.

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