



High Level Meeting and Workshop Following the Successful Conclusion of Yemen National Dialogue: The Work Begins

Concept Note

Background

The Yemeni national dialogue has concluded its proceedings, drawing a blueprint designed to address the root causes of tensions and conflict which accompanied the mass social movements that began in January 2011.

What makes the outcome of the National Dialogue particularly remarkable is the fact that prior to the mass social movement in 2011, Yemen was facing an array of hard challenges that included political marginalization, a governance deficit, fighting in the Saada Governorate, separatism in the southern governorates, terrorism by al-Qaida, tribal-military frictions and demonstrations that were often met with violence. These difficulties are compounded by the socio-economic hardship facing Yemenis: more than half of the population is estimated to live in poverty, according to conservative estimates, and it is almost the total population of the poor rural areas; 43 per cent of the youth (15-24 age group) are unemployed¹ and malnutrition levels of the country are among the highest in the world. Every night, one in four of the country's population of 25 million sleeps hungry at night.²

Against this backdrop, the Arab uprisings began in December 2010 and they quickly spread to a number of Arab countries to also encompass Yemen. In addition to their moral dimension, the protests were a rejection of corruption and lack of participatory-unaccountable modes of governance. The protests have focused on questions of political equity and social justice including the political, social and economic rights of citizens. The demand for democratic modes of governance clearly goes beyond the conduct of free and fair elections or the mere discussion of the future nature of the political system and civil rights. The issue was to build a state that is capable of meeting the aspirations of the Youth. The issue at hand was also to see democracy in its broader definition, which incorporates governance and accountability, freedom and dignity and the manner in which socio-economic development is conducted.²

¹ Government of Yemen, Central Statistical Organization, "Statistical Yearbook, 2009," p.72. ² Joint United Nations Framework to Support the Transition in Yemen, 2012-2014, p.4.

² Jack A. George Goldstone, World Development Report 2011, Background Paper "Representational Models And Democratic Transitions In Fragile And Post-Conflict States," September 18, 2010.

The popular uprising, the socio-economic and political tensions in Yemen brought the country to the brink of civil strife, which was defused through a GCC Initiative and a subsequent transition agreement in November 2011 which established a Government of National Unity; a Military Committee for Establishing Safety and Security; election of a new president, constitutional and electoral reform and a National Dialogue.

The National Dialogue succeeded in reducing the risk of civil confrontation and the transformation of protests into open armed clashes, driving the country and political social forces to take a political path; is by itself is a great achievement. The success of the dialogue to reach its findings in light of the dire difficulties the country is facing is also a significant achievement and merits detailed examination for the benefit of Yemenis and others, and should be listed in the column of Yemen and Arab-National forces supporting this track.

Objective of the Meeting

Among the Arab States that witnessed a political and institutional change during the period 2011-2013, Yemen is the only country which followed a path that began in convening a National Dialogue, paving for constitutional, electoral and institutional tracks. Thus, it is considered as a unique experience and could have potential benefit for other countries.

For a period of two days, participants will be provided with an overview of the national dialogue, in terms of process and outcomes. They will discuss the individual social, political and economic “pillars” as framed by the GCC initiative. Participants will also share a number of Arab and other national practices on specific issues that were carefully selected, given their relation to the challenges that might pose in implementing the National Dialogue outcomes in Yemen. They will address ways to promote the resolutions attained. More specifically, the objective of the meeting is to:

1. Present Yemen’s National Dialogue as a regional case study for resolving multifaceted challenges that culminated in the uprising of 2011.
2. Provide a platform for national actors to reflect on the necessary steps for the realization of the national dialogue’s outcomes.
3. Exchange Arab and other National practices related to the successes and difficulties faced during the democratization phase.
4. Enhance the support of the international community’s efforts and the role played by civil society actors in consolidating the national consensus thus far achieved.

Format of the Conference

Each session will have a 20 minute theme specific presentation and two discussants (10 minutes each). The meeting will be facilitated by ESCWA. At the end of each session, 1 - 3 priorities will be identified. A detailed discussion will ensue on how to address the priorities so as to avoid any potential conflict or at least mitigate their negative repercussions. The main objective of this meeting is to leave as much room as possible for discussions among participants.

Participants

The participants of the conference will be restricted to experts and political actors that have taken part in the national dialogue in Yemen, in addition to a number of experts and observers. Representatives from donor countries will also be invited to participate in the deliberations.

Time of the Conference

The Meeting will be held on the 11-12 June 2014.

** Translation from Arabic to English is available during the meeting.