

## **Proposals of the Istanbul Forum for Dialogue**

November 2015

After approximately eight months of continued war in the majority of the provinces in the Republic of Yemen, the members of the Istanbul Forum for Dialogue (IFD) do not see any sign that the ongoing war in Yemen would soon come to an end. Military intervention from countries in the region has further complicated the situation at all levels. On a political level, the Yemeni parties have been unable to meet face-to-face, even once, on a dialogue table during the war. On an economic level, the already fragile Yemeni economy has been destroyed as a result of the imposed siege and the continuing destruction caused by air strikes on the infrastructure, including on the roads and factories, not to mention schools, hospitals and mosques. Moreover, there is a dangerous expansion of armed terrorist groups in a number of the Republic's governorates, and in particular, in the province of Hadramout.

Recently, the Istanbul Forum has held a number of meetings bringing together the members present in Sanaa as it has been unable to invite those outside Yemen, sometimes also those who were in other provinces, due to the security situation. There has been discussion on the idea of issuing specific proposals for Yemeni parties to study and adopt what they see fit, especially that the forum has had similar successful experiences during the last three years. These can be summarized as follows. The first was in 2012, when the forum, supported by the Crisis Management Initiative and after a series of meetings in the Turkish capital of Istanbul, presented proposals ahead of the National Dialogue Conference (NDC). In the proposals, the forum summarized the Yemeni crisis into five issues and gave a number of proposals for each of them. The majority of these proposals were adopted in the Technical Committee's outputs, which was assigned to form and inaugurate the NDC. The second experiment of the Istanbul Forum was during the NDC (May 2103–January 2014) when the forum held a series of meetings related to the difficulties faced by some of the working groups of the NDC. The forum presented detailed proposals for the working groups focusing on state building, army and security as well as the working group for transitional justice.

The third Istanbul Forum experience was in December 2014, when it held a meeting in Beirut. The meeting was convened because the forum sensed a serious disagreement concerning the idea of building a new Yemeni state comprised of six provinces. The idea of federalism was adopted in the first proposals of the Forum (October 2012). However, the number of regions and how to form them was intentionally left open, on the basis that the ideas on state-building will develop gradually and the public (constituents) will have the choice to influence the decision on the number of regions.

A statement issued as a result of the Beirut meeting warned that the decision on the number of regions was not agreed upon or voted for in the NDC, but determined by a sub-committee chosen by the president. The statement said that, against this background, it is not necessary to propose a certain number of provinces in the draft constitution, as stipulated by the committee that met in Abu Dhabi, because of serious political divisions. The forum proposed to leave the determination of the number of regions until parliamentary elections are held, so that the decision is made by an elected parliament.

The Istanbul Forum for Dialogue hopes that the United Nations and the Secretary General's Special Envoy for Yemen, appointed during the first month of the current war, will produce a roadmap that gets Yemen out of the grinding war, launched by countries in the region, based on the merits of the UN Security Council Resolution 2216, which does not explicitly call for the use of armed violence by countries in the region, as well as ends an economic blockade on the people in Yemen. It is unfortunate that the United Nations has yet to find a way or a methodology by which it can deal with the crisis and war in Yemen. Despite the rise in civilian casualties to thousands, as well as the tremendous destruction of infrastructure, government facilities, homes and properties, the United Nations still seems confused about how to politically deal with parties to the conflict in Yemen as well as the actors from regional countries.

The Istanbul Forum for Dialogue does not see that condemning the events in the Republic of Yemen is either sufficient or appropriate for its role as a forum that brings together members from all parties involved in the conflict, or holding any of the parties, regardless of their role, responsible for what is taking place, despite the ugliness and horror of the ongoing fighting, the spread of terrorist groups or the destruction of infrastructure. As evidenced by its past experiences, the forum, serving as a platform for encounter and dialogue for members from across the political spectrum, sees that its real role is promoting the search for useful means for continued dialogue between the conflicting parties and in proposing effective mechanisms to break the impasse, whatever it may be, even a devastating war such as the one going on in Yemen.

Based on the two clear facts mentioned above, there is no decisive victory for any of the Yemeni parties in this war. The United Nations does not have the ability, at least in the short term, to exit its stalling place. It is wise not to rush proposals that are not commensurate with the actual facts of political and military variables, while emphasizing that it is better for all Yemeni parties to apply logic, support justice and immediately return to the negotiation table as it is the only viable mechanism to put an end to the conflict and restore peace in Yemen as well as to establish territorial integrity against all regional interventions; also highlighting that the humanitarian situation has reached a breaking point in terms of the extent of suffering, and that there are serious shortcomings in the performance of relief and rights organizations, which is undoubtedly one of the outcomes of political interference in such activities that should remain immune from any political pressure.

For the reasons mentioned above, the Istanbul Forum for Dialogue presents these recommendations concerning potential talks between the Yemeni parties under the auspices of the United Nations and the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Yemen, and keeps abreast of the developments in the negotiations between the Yemeni political parties in the weeks and/or months ahead. The members of the Istanbul Forum would like to extend their gratitude to Crisis Management Initiative and its office in Yemen for the support for the activities of the forum, hoping for further cooperation in the future. These proposals contain a small number of appeals of the Istanbul Forum to Yemeni political parties, followed by recommendations for the preparations of the talks, for the duration of the talks, as well as recommendations pertaining to successes or failures in these negotiations.

Finally, it should be noted that not all IFD members necessarily fully endorse each word of the recommendations, but as members of the forum, despite their different political affiliations, acknowledge what is stated in the list of recommendations and hope to stay abreast of future events.

### **The Forum's Appeals**

- The Istanbul Forum for Dialogue calls on all parties and political forces to end the fighting and the war in all its forms and manifestations, and to return to dialogue as soon as possible in order to establish a roadmap containing specific mechanisms for the commencement of a clear political process.
- The IFD appeals to all Yemeni parties and political forces to apply reason and logic and to come to dialogue table no matter how long the war persists and states that further regional intervention in Yemen will only exacerbate the situation in Yemen, regardless of the interfering parties or their objectives.
- The forum reminds all parties and political forces that they have made successful efforts in the past to build a successful political process with promising outputs, including the ones of the National Dialogue. The forum reminds the parties that fighting terrorism must be a priority for all.
- The forum appeals to the United Nations to be more serious and do its best in efforts to bring the Yemeni parties to a successful dialogue away from the influence of regional and international interests.
- The members of the forum appeal to the United Nations for immediate action to increase humanitarian and relief assistance to the people of the Republic of Yemen and stop the economic blockade imposed on it as soon as possible. Similarly, the forum calls on the United Nations and international organizations as well as the Friends of Yemen to enhance their cooperation with the local authorities and civil society organizations that are active in the alleviation of the profound human suffering, both now and in the post-war period.

### **Proposals for the Negotiation Process between the Yemeni Parties**

#### **1) In conjunction with the endeavors and efforts being exerted to hold negotiations**

1. Dealing with the participant selection by each party in a way that makes each of them a decision maker.
2. Ensuring that participating parties announce beforehand their acceptance to engage in serious, responsible and direct talks.
3. Allocating an adequate period of time for meeting all involved parties, even if it implies holding several rounds of talks.
4. Making sure that regional and international parties are willing to grant the parties involved in the talks the opportunity to hold them away from any influence or impact,

and demanding that regional and international parties would welcome the results, whatever they may be, because the issues are purely Yemeni.

5. Informing the public about the progress made and thus contributing to a peaceful atmosphere conducive for confidence-building between the negotiating parties. Information sharing also enhances the transparency of the talks, which in turn lessens the reluctance or a lack of seriousness of any party.

## **2) During the course of negotiations**

1. Agreeing on the principles, controls and references that guarantee the success of the talks at least in case the negotiations stall for any reason.
2. Identifying and naming issues of utmost importance that shall be discussed for the related problems to be resolved.
3. In this regard, we would like to note that the list of issues for the talks may include:
  - A. Political power and decision-making
  - B. The transitional phase, its duration and functions
  - C. The humanitarian situation in its aspects of security and livelihood
  - D. The role of regional and international actors
  - E. The necessary and sufficient guarantees for the implementation of what is agreed upon
  - F. National reconciliation and lasting peace

## **3) Post-Negotiation Period**

*In case of success:*

It is very important that these talks, or any other prospective negotiations, succeed and produce clear, specific, and practically acceptable and binding outputs based on the principle of consensus and the supreme national interest. However, the implementation of the agreements is critical. In order to avoid the occurrence of relapses experienced in the implementation of previous agreements between the Yemeni parties, we see the need to focus on the following:

- A. Not only demonstrating good faith, but making concessions and encouraging initiatives. Even though one-sided, they will contribute to the actual transition from the conceptual stage to the practical stage.
- B. Fully committing to addressing all imbalances that may occur in the implementation phase of the agreement away from violence or reactions leading to it, and making dialogue a fundamental principle to address all differences.
- C. The regional and international community accepting the responsibilities entrusted to each of them to pave the way and provide the necessary means and adequate potential for the implementation phase of the agreements and beyond it, including political efforts for the normalization of the political and security situation and economic and developmental efforts to alleviate the suffering of the citizens and the free flow of humanitarian aid. Not to mention the importance of designing a regional and international process entrusted with reconstruction and activation of the economic and developmental process.

*In case of failure:*

In case the talks stall, for whatever reason, we believe that it is important to sense the responsibility by all parties at home and abroad, and make sure to move forward in the political process, as a fundamental principle, even if it is in conjunction with the military path or beyond it. In this case, we refer to the importance of:

- A. Conducting analysis necessary for identifying the reasons for the deadlock and trying to avoid them in any subsequent talks.
- B. Identifying the reasons for success and building on them in the peace-making process
- C. Expressing an official and permanent readiness to positively deal with any efforts that ensure the continuation of the political process.

Finally, members of the Istanbul Forum for Dialogue express their deep regret and sorrow concerning the situation in Yemen, and wish to direct these recommendations to all Yemeni sides, and the political parties and forces that will be involved in the anticipated negotiations under the auspices of the United Nations, as well as to the parties that will not be participating for one reason or another, and to review and benefit from them. In addition, the forum also directs these recommendations to the office and staff of the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy, and encourages them to review these perspectives, which may vary with the views set forth by the official negotiators. Likewise, the Forum directs these recommendations for all members of the regional and international community engaged in Yemen.

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