

South Yemen Update

Dream no small dreams for they do not have the power to move the hearts of men

Newsletter of the Friends of South Yemen

Issue 15 — 16th July - 15th August 2021

FOSY CHAIRMAN ADDRESSES HEALING THE NATIONS CONFERENCE

**“Yemeni society needs reconciliation and healing
to build some trust among the political class”**

In his keynote address on Yemen to the *Next Century Foundation Conference *Healing the Nations*, FOSY’s Chairman Dr Abdul Galil Shaif emphasized that unity in 1990 did not benefit either the North or the South and the North imposed its regime on the South, leading to the 1994 war. The consequences of the current war include the deaths of around 100,000 children and 250,000 people in all. How Yemen could be forgotten is an insult to humanity and an international disgrace. The Houthis, the Internationally Recognized Government (IRG) and other parties are benefiting from the war and enriching themselves at the expense of the Yemeni people. War traders need to be targeted with economic sanctions. “The United Nations has been watching Yemen disappear into the abyss politically, socially and economically and yet they have done very little”, Dr Shaif said; without a change of policy changing envoys “is like rearranging chairs on the *Titanic*.” The economic system has collapsed and the economy is run by the black market. Unless there is reconciliation and a political plan for the shape of the new state Yemenis there will be intensification of the fighting, more hunger and more misery for ordinary people.

The seven-day online conference dealt with events in Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine, as well as American foreign policy towards the Middle East. It began with a session on pragmatic inclusivity – the need for a new ideology for peace. The proceedings were under Chatham House rules but Abdul Galil was happy for his keynote address to be published in *South Yemen Update*. The full text of Abdul Galil’s speech follows.

I would like to thank the Next Century Foundation for hosting this important conference and also thanks to the audience who turned up from many different countries. I would also like to thank the Houthi representative. I very



Dr. Abdul Galil Shaif

much appreciate being with all of you. Many thanks to anyone who has made a contribution towards peace in Yemen. I think the name of this conference, a healing conference, is very appropriate when it comes to Yemeni politics and Yemeni society at this current moment. That is absolutely what we need. More reconciliation and more healing and to build some trust among the parties in the political class in Yemen.

You know, a few days ago before I prepared for this talk I asked my daughter to clean my car because it was really dirty and she charged me £10. When I went outside and looked at the car I saw she only cleaned the outside and not the inside. So I went back to her and said you have to give £5 back because you only cleaned the outside. She said you never told me

to clean the inside. So I ended up with a car cleaned on the outside but not on the inside.

In a sense that triggered something in my mind about what is happening in Yemen. Unification in 1990 was a process that was not thought through. It was rushed, it was emotionally charged. Both the revolution in the North and the revolution in the South – the 14th October revolution and the 26th September revolution – had an objective of Yemeni unity and the objective was an emotional objective. There was no well thought out plan between the two Alis: Ali Abdullah Saleh and Ali Salem Al Beidh. They could not make unity happen in a way that was strategic and effective.

So what we ended up with was unification that did not really benefit the people of the whole of Yemen, either in the North or in the South. The people lost out because of unity and we ended up with two wars, one in 1994 which ensured the supremacy of the Northern regime. I must say the regime in the North (not the Northern people) took over the South. The regime of the North took over the South and state of the

FOSY documentary well-received

FOSY’s documentary *The Case for Southern Statehood* has been seen by over 1,000 people on Facebook and had around 330 views on YouTube. [Click here to watch the documentary.](#)

North became the state of the whole of Yemen and the partner who had come voluntarily in 1990 had very little influence in the unification process if any.

In a sense the 2015 war began again with another invasion of the South by the Houthis into Aden which met with a lot of resistance. They were kicked out by the Southerners and the Houthis realized that it was a fundamental mistake they made in 2015 by entering into the South. They have now restricted themselves to the North but the intensification of the war has meant that the Houthis have become much stronger in the North as a result of the intensification of the war. They now have over 70 per cent of the land in the North and very little influence in the South if any.

How Yemen can be forgotten when 85,000 children have died is an insult to humanity. Imagine 85,000 children in Wembley stadium who have disappeared from society.

The war in Yemen is a catastrophe that needs to end immediately. Any human being that wants this war to continue is my opinion not a decent human being. This war has to end. The cessation of hostilities has to come about and we need to find a political solution.

Let me take you into the consequences of this war. People do not realise in 2018 there were 85,000 children dead as a result of the war. That figure has now gone beyond 100,000. Imagine Wembley stadium full of children that have actually disappeared out of Yemeni society. I think that is catastrophic and it is unacceptable. How Yemen can be forgotten when so many children have died is for me an insult to humanity an international disgrace.



Refugees in Marib (Pic: Pablo Tosco/Oxfam)

Further into the consequences, 250,000 people by UN estimates have been killed. That is a quarter of a million people. Seven years of mass destruction. The infrastructure of the country has been hugely damaged in the North and as well as in the South. The only people who have benefited from the war are the profiteers, the war traders whether they are Houthis, the government, or the STC. They are all involved and they want this war to continue to enrich themselves and benefit from this war. The only real losers are the Yemeni people, again both in the North and in the South.

The United Nations has been watching Yemen disappear into the abyss politically, socially and economically and yet they have done very little.

Twelve thousand schools are not operational. We have a whole generation of children who have had no education for the past seven years. What future can they possibly have in a world of science and technology? They have very little indeed. So the consequences are huge and yet Yemen has been forgotten.

This takes me to the next point. What has the international community and the United Nations done to support Yemenis in this war? My view, my opinion and the

opinion of most Yemenis is that they have done very little if anything. The United Nations has been watching Yemen disappear into the abyss politically, socially and economically and yet they have done very little. There has been very little acceleration of the diplomatic process. It seems that they have failed to deal with the war. Changing the envoy from the first envoy to the second envoy to the third envoy is not the answer. Changing the envoy is like re-arranging the chairs on the *Titanic*. The country is drowning. What you need to do is to change the policy. If you change the policy and you accelerate the diplomatic process you may get a solution to the Yemeni conflict. But unfortunately so far the United Nations have not done this.

Biden has identified an envoy. Biden says the Americans will take Yemen seriously. They did so during the election campaign but so far I have not seen anything that suggest the Americans are going wholeheartedly and effectively into this process. Appointing an envoy is one thing but having a solution to the problem is another. You may ask what can the United Nations do. I think the United Nations can do a lot to accelerate the diplomatic process. Yemen is a very important location in the world of trade. Thirty per cent of world trade passes through the Bab Al Mandib. The Arabian Sea is a critical factor to the world economy. And if there is a political vacuum in Yemen it will be very dangerous. Because no matter what any participant who speaks to you from any group and says that they are winning, nobody is winning. Everyone is losing. The only benefactors in this war are the war traders and the people who sell arms.

I don't see anyone winning. The Yemeni people are in a real mess both economically and socially. So the international community has a big role to play in the political situation in Yemen. They must change their policy. The 2216 resolution is not appropriate to the realities on the ground. To talk about bringing the legitimate government from Saudi Arabia back to Sanaa is an impossibility. There is no way they can achieve that because the reality is that Houthis have got control of Sanaa. They have lost too many people, they have lost a lot of resources and they want to keep that land.

The Houthis need to be part of a political solution, there is no doubt about that. But they also need to be willing to accept a solution. Now they believe that the intensification of the war means an intensification of Houthi power, therefore they are less willing to go to the negotiating table. Particularly the situation in Marib. If Marib falls it will put them in a very strong position.

Yemen has not been in a worse economic situation in its 5,000-year history. The economic system has collapsed.

The United Nations in my view need to take economic measures, economic sanctions against the war traders in Yemen, whether it is the Houthis, other parties or the legitimate government. There are people who are making huge amounts of money out of Yemeni blood. Clear sanctions have to be taken against these people and these sanctions

need be UN led and they need to be targeted: they need to target their money, their resources, their travel plans. So these war traders who are causing havoc in our country can come to the negotiating. Yemenis don't like humiliation. This is one way of humiliating the political leaders and I advise very strongly that the UN should look at these political leaders who are not willing to go into a peace process and ensure that they are targeted politically and economically.

Let us look at the economic situation. Yemen is in a dire economic situation. As an economist and someone who has worked in investment all my life and in the economic system in Yemen for seven years I can say that Yemen has not been in a worse situation in its 5,000 year history. The economic system is collapsing. It is almost collapsing into the abyss. The whole GDP of Yemen in 2009 was \$42 billion with a surplus of foreign currency of \$6 billion in the central bank. In 2018 the GDP of Yemen is \$21 billion. Imagine how much it has shrunk from \$42 billion to \$21 billion. Can you imagine how people are surviving when the economy has shrunk to that level. The GNP has shrunk to a level that I have not seen before in Yemeni society.

This takes me to another point. The local currency is absolutely worthless. One thousand riyals is equal to \$1 in the North. The Houthis have got control by bringing it down to almost 160 riyals but they can do this because they have raised the level of taxes and they have one command structure. In the South there are two command structures with the legitimate government and STC. There is a huge amount of corruption because we have three central banks. We have a central bank in Sanaa, and in Aden and we have the black market central bank – the bureaux de change which are the most powerful of the three because a lot of people change their money out of the country through these bureaux. So we are in a situation now where no one runs the economy. The economy basically is run by the black market.

Which takes me to another economic issue. An individual who is working – the average engineer or teacher – is earning 60,000 riyals a month according to the World Bank figures. This is \$50. Where in the world is someone living on \$50 a month? In 2009 people were earning 60,000 riyals as an average salary but the value of it was \$250. Can you imagine the consequences people are facing in buying their basic goods in Yemen? That for me is an absolute catastrophe.

In addition we have got 2 – 3 million people displaced, refugees in their own country and refugees externally. We have 11 million people facing starvation according to the UN. I would say it is not 11 million, it is 16 million facing starvation in probably the worse humanitarian disaster in history if this war continues to be drummed up and if the international community do not take strong measures to bring all sides to the negotiating table.

So you can see that the average individual has no basic amenities or services and no basic salary to live on. People are starving and yet our politicians continue to kill with impunity anybody who opposes them. But we are not in that category. We want peace and reconciliation. Our plan as FOSY is very clear. The United Nations needs to take a much strong stance. The UN needs to have a strategy, it needs to have a

new policy relevant to the realities on the ground. It needs to have a resolution that talks about the different players: the Houthis, the IRG and the STC. I would suggest that the STC and the Houthis are the stronger parties because they are inside whereas the IRG is living outside Yemen. Those negotiations need to be focused not necessarily looking at what the politicians want but at the aspirations of the people in Yemen.

There should be two international peace conferences: one for the North, one for the South.

I think the aspiration of the people in the South which no one can deny is that they want a Southern state. So our suggestion is that first of all we should have a peace conference. There should be two international peace conferences under the auspices of the United Nations. One to bring the parties together whether it's the Houthis, Tariq Afash, Ali Mohsin and the people from the Islah party. They need to have reconciliation and look at ways in which they can revive the economic system in the North.



War damaged building in Aden (Pic: Qais Saeed)

And I think there should be an international conference for the Southern people. The STC have already initiated that idea but they need to bring the legitimate government and they need to get together so they can have a unified view from the South. I suggest a federal state with two autonomous regions where the Houthis can play a strong role in the North and one in the South where the STC can play a strong role. That particular project could be for three years. Or it could be for five years. It is better to have two autonomous regions under one federal state rather than

having a state fighting within itself continuously with war after war.

The third option is that the people of the South should be given the right to their self determination. They aspire to have an independent state. The people in Scotland aspire to have an independent state. The people in South Sudan have a separate state. There is no issue with that. People make an issue because they want a united Yemen. It is usually the people that are making the money.

So finally my projection for the future is that unless we have peace, unless we have reconciliation, unless we have a political plan for the shape of the new state Yemenis will continue to fight and the intensification of this fighting will be more hunger and more misery for ordinary people. And I hope the Next Century Foundation can play your role in helping us advance through your consultative process at the United Nations. Help us advance our peace plan with new ideas, with amendments with some creativeness. We must not allow the situation to continue as it is at the moment. It is catastrophic, it is inhuman and Yemen is a forgotten country.

*The NCF specialises in open and inclusive dialogue for peace. It is unique in its scope and ability to involve all parties in dialogue with the aim of conflict resolution. Its work is based on the principles of freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want and freedom from fear.

CHRONOLOGY

July 16: Yemeni troops and local tribesmen seize control of the headquarters of a key district in the central province of Marib, scoring major gains in the area for the first time in years.

-In a letter sent to the UN Security Council, the Southern Transitional Council (STC) expresses its readiness for the internationalization of the dispute with the Yemeni government.
-Swedish diplomat Hans Grundberg is appointed as the new United Nations special envoy to Yemen.

July 17: While pro-government forces continue to push onwards in battlefield advances against Houthi militias in Yemen's strategic governorate of Marib, a Saudi-UAE military meeting examines Arab Coalition operations backing the Yemeni army.

July 18: Pro-government commentators in Saudi Arabia are publicly criticizing the United Arab Emirates' role in Yemen, a rare move that reflects political and economic tensions between the two Gulf allies that also led to an open standoff over oil policy.

July 19: Omani Foreign Minister Badr bin Hamad Al Busaidi affirms that the Sultanate of Oman supports all efforts and endeavours to bring peace to Yemen.

July 20: Yemeni Prime Minister Maeen Abdulmalik Saeed warns of a "complete collapse" of the country's economy, amid a currency crash and the absence of international support.
-A ship loaded with diesel that sinks off Yemen's southern coast wreaking heavy environmental damage.

July 21: The third shipment of a Saudi oil grant is expected to arrive in Aden, over the coming two days, according to Yemeni government officials.

July 22: Qatar Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani directs the allocation of \$100 million to support food security in Yemen.

July 23: The British government appoints Richard Oppenheim as its new envoy to the Saudi-based, UN-recognized Yemeni government.

-Saudi Arabia sends two planeloads of troops and armoured vehicles to Aden.

July 24: The STC threatens to prevent the Yemen government and parliament from meeting in the south of the country.

-The World Food Programme (WFP) anticipates that more than 11 million people across Yemen will receive monthly food assistance between June and September.

July 25: The Yemeni government and Houthi rebels carry out a new prisoner swap in Al-Bayda province.

July 26: Saudi Arabia calls on the Southern Transitional Council "to respond urgently" to Riyadh's initiative to implement the Riyadh Agreement.

July 27: Fifty-three per cent of those displaced in Yemen are children, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reports.

LATEST REPORT FROM SANAA CENTER FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES

Bringing Forth the Voices of Muhammasheen

The Muhammasheen, meaning "the marginalized," is an ascriptive term designating a group of Yemenis who were traditionally called Al-Akhdam (literally meaning "the servants"). Membership in this ethnic minority is hereditary, associated with certain types of occupations, and in traditional Yemeni social structures its members are considered 'weak' and lacking origins, therefore ostensibly under tribal protection.

There are strong cultural prohibitions against marriage of Muhammasheen to other social groups and its members are traditionally not allowed to bear arms or to own property. Such individuals are perceived as being of African origin and are highly stigmatized within Yemeni society in ways that are caste-like.

The term Muhammasheen, as an alternative to Al-Akhdam, came into common parlance in the early part of the new millennium in development and humanitarian circles and more broadly in Yemeni society. Estimates of the number of Muhammasheen in Yemen vary radically, most commonly stated from 500,000 to 3.5 million, with significant concentrations in slums surrounding Yemen's major cities.

This study estimates there are between 500,000 to 800,000 Muhammasheen, approximately 1.6 to 2.6 percent of Yemen's population. There are a variety of theories about the origins of the Muhammasheen. Ultimately, discussions on origins cloud the truth that Muhammasheen are Yemenis and Yemen is their homeland.

During the conflict, Muhammasheen children have faced similar issues as other children in Yemen, as well as additional challenges that emerge from their membership of an ostracized ethnic minority with high levels of poverty and at risk from sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Muhammasheen children encounter high levels of discrimination in schools from teachers and administrators, as well as bullying and harassment from their peers. Additionally, many Muhammasheen families need the income that children earn, primarily through begging, to survive.

Despite such an environment, Muhammasheen families generally care deeply about education as it is seen as essential to build a better life. The incidence of SGBV against Muhammasheen is perceived to be increasing, including among children, often with impunity for the perpetrators due to a lack of social and state protection of this group. Young men from the Muhammasheen community have been particularly hard hit by the conflict with shrinking income-earning and educational opportunities and diminishing hopes for marriage and a better future.

One of the most significant challenges young Muhammasheen men face is recruitment to fight by parties to the conflict. While families benefit in the short term from the money earned this comes with problems: lack of support for medical treatment if a young man is injured, and little or no compensation if he is not able to work again; no support for mental health issues or trauma suffered as a result of the horror of war; and if a young man is killed while fighting, his family loses his financial contribution with no support to his parents, widow or children. Further, when a man is away fighting his family is more vulnerable to abuse and violence.

Muhammasheen men have expressed that they feel used by parties to the conflict who neglected them before the conflict and who they believe will abandon them when the war is over.

One of the most urgent needs of Muhammasheen identified in this research is shelter and housing. The conflict has dramatically deteriorated the situation for all residents of shantytowns, but due to their caste-like status and structural discrimination Muhammasheen residents have been disproportionately negatively impacted. Challenges include severe overcrowding and land ownership issues.

The absence of basic services in slums was a major issue before the conflict and since 2015 has only increased in significance. Poverty among Muhammasheen is intimately tied to structural discrimination and translates into a range of challenges including: educational challenges which limit income-earning potential; weak healthcare services contributing to indebtedness and poor health, impacting the ability to work; denial of humanitarian assistance despite Muhammasheen being among the



(Picture: The National)

most vulnerable in displacement; and abuse and trauma which have deep emotional and psychological impacts contributing to depression and constraining income earning.

The social isolation and stigmatization of Muhammasheen magnify vulnerabilities and deny them the support of their fellow Yemenis. Prior to the conflict, Muhammasheen had varying levels of integration into Yemeni society in different parts of the country. Generally, in Aden and Hudaydah, Muhammasheen were more accepted and faced less overt discrimination.

However, with the conflict and humanitarian crisis, in some cases isolation has increased, although there are reports of communities of Muhammasheen and non-Muhammasheen coming together in displacement to support one another. In recent decades many Muhammasheen have become distant from tribal systems as a result of urbanization and seeking to escape strangling social stratification in rural areas through migration.



*Muhammasheen community
(Pic: Sanaa Centre for Strategic Studies)*

The emergence of Muhammasheen-led CSOs has contributed to the increased visibility of the community at both the national and international levels. Such organizations have sought to positively impact the situation of Muhammasheen through educational and health activities, documenting abuse and discrimination, assessing needs and advocating with local authorities on specific issues. Yemeni civil society has been deeply impacted by the conflict and ensuing humanitarian crisis, and

Muhammasheen-led CSOs face similar challenges as their peer organizations, although their marginalized status means their staff face amplified risks of harassment, detention and targeted abuse.

Muhammasheen political engagement has varied during different eras and locations. With the unification of Yemen in May 1990, the possibility of democratization, political parties and electoral politics emerged, but only a few Muhammasheen candidates have entered electoral politics. Apathy or cynicism about national politics is not uncommon among Muhammasheen, who have rarely benefited from the system and have been persecuted, made invisible or manipulated by political elites.

Some younger Muhammasheen joined in Yemen's popular uprising starting in January 2011 seeking political change. However, despite this increased public profile, only one individual from the community, president of the National Union of the Marginalized Noaman al-Hudhaifi, participated in the National Dialogue Conference (NDC). Despite this limited representation, a number of the 1,800 NDC recommendations specifically addressed the situation of Muhammasheen.

Following the NDC, the Constitutional Drafting Committee included one article in the new constitution on the situation of Muhammasheen (Article 62), pledging to promote their participation in political, economic and social life.

Women in Yemen face significant social, economic and political challenges. Muhammashat (plural feminine) are the most stigmatized group of Yemeni women, and also the most vulnerable to abuse. Their income-earning activities, commonly begging and street sweeping and vending, bring them into public spaces where there are few other Yemeni women. Additionally, their social isolation and lack of adequate housing expose them to risks and deny them the respect and protection accorded to women from other strata of society. Stereotypes about Muhammashat abound, accusing them of loose morals, lack of honor and lineage and weak religious observance; these stereotypes shape their interactions with other Yemeni men and women. Such prejudiced views have real life consequences for Muhammashat and put them at increased risk of harassment, abuse and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Perpetrators of violence against Muhammashat are rarely prosecuted.

[To read the full report click here](#)



FRIENDS OF SOUTH YEMEN (FOSY)
2 Firshill Road, Sheffield S4 7BB, United Kingdom
Tele: +44 7802 763711
Email: info@friendsof southyemen.org
Website: www.friendsofsouthyemen.org
Facebook: fb.me/fosy2020

July 28: During a meeting with the US special envoy for Yemen, Tim Lenderking, in Riyadh, Prime Minister Maen Abdul Malik Saeed said a peaceful settlement could be reached if the Houthis accepted the current peace efforts and stopped their hostilities across Yemen.

July 29: The King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center (KSrelief) distributes urgent shelter aid for the people affected by floods in Al-Mahrah Governorate.

July 30: The main universities in southern Saudi Arabia dismiss 106 Yemeni academics after a decision was made to terminate their contracts without prior notice.

July 31: Areas in Yemen controlled by the Houthi militias have become the largest hotbeds of human trafficking, Muammar Al-Eryani, Yemen's Information Minister, says.

-Saudi Arabia sends a shipment of weapons to Socotra airport.

-The STC closes the headquarters of the Islah-affiliated Charitable Society for Social Welfare in the Dar Saad district of Aden.

Aug 1: The head of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) meets the US Special Envoy for Yemen. They both condemn in the strongest terms the Houthis' continued targeting of Saudi Arabia with ballistic missiles and explosive drones.

Aug 2: Yemen's Human Rights Ministry accuses the Houthis of torturing hundreds of prisoners to death since they took power in late 2014.

-The US envoy to Yemen, Tim Lenderking, concludes his trip to Riyadh and returns to Washington after having met a "dead end" on the crisis as the Houthis insist on rejecting truce calls and solidify their insurgency on all levels.

Aug 3: The recent armed confrontations between the Yemeni government forces and the Houthis over the control of key areas in Al-Bayda displaced up to 1,535 families.

Aug 4: Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan bin Abdullah says that the Houthis clearly prefer a military solution in Yemen instead of dialogue and peace.

-An investigation published last month by 17 media organizations says the Pegasus spyware, made and licensed by the Israeli company NSO, was used by the UAE to monitor and spy on the ministers of the Internationally Recognized Government of President Hadi in Yemen.

-The Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) expresses concern over the potential environmental disaster posed to the Red Sea by the FSO *Safer*, an ageing oil tanker moored off the western coast of Yemen.

Aug 5: CARE reports that Sanaa airport's closure for the fifth consecutive year has left stranded at least 32,000 critically ill Yemeni patients in need of life-saving treatment abroad since the first and last medical

flights in February last year.

-Prime Minister Maeen Abdulmalik says that both Yemen and Saudi Arabia want to move forward in completing the implementation of the Riyadh Agreement.

Aug 6: The United Nations announces that it could reduce its humanitarian programmes in Yemen owing to a lack of funding, warning that “most of the money will run out in September.”

-Houthi militia fighters reportedly killed a Yemeni university professor hours after he had requested the Houthi government to distribute and increase salaries.

Aug 7: British-Yemeni Galal Yafai secures the Olympic flyweight gold medal for Britain in the Tokyo Olympics.

-Forty-five Houthis are killed in air strikes and clashes in Marib.

Aug 8: “There is no use in having any dialogue before airports and ports are opened as a humanitarian necessity and priority,” Houthi negotiator Mohammed Abdulsalam tweets in response to the appointment of a new UN special envoy to Yemen.

-Saudi Arabia and the GCC express their anticipation of working with the newly appointed UN Special Envoy for Yemen Hans Grundberg to find a comprehensive solution for the Yemeni crisis.

Aug 9: UNICEF says the war has more than doubled the number of children out of school in Yemen to 2 million.

-Thousands take part in an anti-US rally in Sanaa against the continued blockade of Yemeni ports.

Aug 10: There can be no peace in Yemen as long as the Arab coalition continues its raids and strikes on the country, the leader of the Houthis says.

- Activists across Canada mark the third anniversary of the Yemen school bus massacre with protests at weapons manufacturers and government offices, calling on Canada to stop all weapons exports to Saudi Arabia. The Saudi bombing of a school bus in a crowded market in northern Yemen on August 9, 2018 killed 44 children and ten adults and wounded many more

- In a televised speech Abdul-Malik Al-Houthi says that accepting the UN peace plan would mean surrendering to their opponents.

Aug 11: Tehran has been sending increasingly complex weapons to the Houthis even as Iranian officials have engaged in separate talks with the United States and Saudi Arabia about reducing tensions in the region, a top Pentagon official says.

- The Yemeni riyal surges against the US dollar for the first time in months. It recovered by nearly 10 percent a day after the central bank in Aden shut down several currency-exchange firms for violating monetary rules.

Aug 12: The Houthis submit the Marib peace initiative to Omani mediators.

-Fuel shortages force people to turn to firewood to cook food, and logging as a source of work in a ravaged economy.

British Council's Cultural Protection Fund supports Yemen



*Traditional manuscript
(Pic: The British Council)*

Through the Cultural Protection Fund, the British Council has supported five projects focusing on cultural heritage protection in Yemen. One of these projects is Jamakanah led by the Basement Cultural Foundation, which has digitized 570 unique documents (manuscripts, letters, copies of manuscripts, photographs, sketches, notes, notebooks and memoirs) so that they are safeguarded for future generations.

Faryal Magdy, a volunteer in the project, said that the project had provided her with more to learn about the meaning of documentation and that the training opened unusual horizons through which she was able to benefit from the experience of others.

Another project, led by Felix Arabia International in partnership with the Yemen Education and Relief Organisation (YERO), has preserved intangible cultural heritage practices of Yemeni needlework and embroidery. Fifty women have been trained in needlework skills to enable them to learn new techniques and produce more intricate professional work.

Noria Naji, the Director of YERO, said: “We set up a fashion show to showcase the ancient dresses of most regions of Yemen and distributed certificates to all. It was a great day and a wonderful ceremony. Among all challenging circumstance and the war something wonderful can come out.”

In Mukalla, the Prince Claus Fund led a project to restore, reconstruct and renovate important cultural landmarks and sites that have been affected by the conflict in Yemen, along with a local partner, the Daw'an Mud Brick Architecture Foundation. The project safeguarded built cultural heritage throughout Hadhramaut by reinforcing structures and arresting any imminent danger threatening collapse. The project also trained more builders and local craftsmen in the techniques of restoration of mud-brick architecture and initiated community outreach activities.

Yemeni novel wins translation award

Twelve books from 11 countries and 11 languages have won English PEN's flagship translation awards, including the first novel from a Yemeni woman ever to be published in the UK, and the first novel by a Tibetan woman ever to be translated into English.

The novel by Yemeni author Bushra Al-Maqtari (translator Sawad Hussain), *Behind the Sun*, was published by Titled Axis Press. It draws attention to forced disappearances in Yemen. The novel was among a dozen books, say the organizers, selected for their outstanding literary quality, the strength of the publishing project, and “their contribution to UK bibliodiversity”. The translation award follows on from the Johann Philipp Palm Award for Freedom of Speech and the Press that Al-Maqtari received in December 2020. The translated novel will be published in 2022, a decade after it was first written. Bushra Al-Maqtari continued to write when war broke out in Yemen in late 2014. She was determined to stay and bear witness to what was going on, chronicling the death and destruction, and the lives of ordinary people in her non-fiction book, *What you left behind: Voices from a forgotten war-torn country*.



Bushra Al-Maqtari (Pic: Writers Mosaic)

Will Forrester, translation and international manager at English PEN, said: “These 12 books are significant works of literature. They represent some of the most exciting literature in translation arriving into the UK market. Remarkable in variety of language, voice, form, subject and geography, they are united in being outstanding pieces of writing and translating. English PEN is thrilled to be helping these books get to readers, in a moment in which exceptional, internationalist and diverse literature is vital.”

Ros Schwartz, co-chair of the English PEN translation advisory group, added: “It is exciting to see the ever-increasing diversity of languages being translated. Despite the tough economic climate, publishers are boldly seeking out new writing from around the globe, often brought to their attention by translators. English PEN is proud to support their efforts. Ultimately, it is readers who benefit from a richly diverse landscape.”