

Remarks by Ms Olla Al-Sakkaf
Security Council Briefing on Youth, Peace and Security
Monday, 27 April 2020 at 10:00am

(As prepared for delivery)

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, and fellow young people, I hope you are doing well during these difficult times. Thank you, Mr President, for your kind invitation to present before you and the UN Security Council members.

My name is Olla Alsakkaf. I am a 25 year old peacebuilder. I was born and I grew up in difficult circumstances in my country, Yemen.

I am here today as a representative of the United Network of Young Peacebuilders, a global network working to end the violence of youth exclusion, transforming power structures to enable meaningful youth participation, and offering a platform for youth to act together on decisions that affect them.

The world is scared because of the outbreak of Corona Virus. All day, you are following the news about the increasing number of victims. You are afraid of losing people you love or even losing your own life. Your children cannot go to school. You do not trust the health system any more.

In Yemen, there are few recorded cases of the Corona Virus. However, my fellow citizens and I understand what the world is going through. We feel you and we pray for you. What you are experiencing has been our reality since the beginning of the war in 2015. People are asked to stay at home, but have you thought about millions of displaced people around the world, who don't have houses to take shelter in?

I live in Taiz, which is a city under the siege since 2016. People are forced to travel for 5 to 6 hours from one part of a city to another, when it used to take us 10 minutes. I have attended the funerals of my friends more than attending their weddings. I wake up every morning staring at the sun, not knowing if I am going to see it again or if this is going to be my last day. When I meet my friends I cannot enjoy my time with them, because I am afraid it will be the last time I will see them. I walk in the streets feeling scared to be killed by a landmine, airstrike or stray bullets. We face death everywhere and at every moment.

The situation in Yemen is at its worst. Five years of ongoing armed conflict have exhausted not only the infrastructure and systems of health, education, economy, etc. but also the people. For the second time, Yemen is the home of the worst humanitarian crisis around the world with 3.65 million IDPs, a massive cholera outbreak, recent floodings, and widespread hunger.

In all this darkness, there is a glimmer of hope. Although we lack support, opportunities and recognition, young people in Yemen are doing our best to survive and build a better future for our children. Across Yemen, we are cleaning public places, informing people how they can protect themselves against Covid19, and risking our lives to save victims from the floods in Aden and Sanaa. Youth organizations are working with their communities and authorities

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to enhance the capacities of the health care system by restoring health facilities, provide them with sanitizers, and train medical staff.

Our efforts are not only in response to the Corona Virus, but also to build peace and re-normalize the public life. Youth-led organizations are playing an important role in bridging humanitarian work and the peacebuilding process, as reported by the Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace, and Security.

Youth Without Borders Organization for Development is an example of such a youth organization, which I am a part of. It believes in the energy and power of young men and women to build and sustain peace. Youth Without Borders is working to rebuild the social fabric, peaceful coexistence, and security in our communities through capacity building, awareness raising, advocacy and research. We do not only target young men and women, but also other community members, state institutions, local authorities, community initiatives, private sector.

We, young people, can't bring peace and prosperity to Yemen alone. We need the international community to support, invest in, and strengthen our work:

1. Promote and enable youth participation and inclusion in all phases and tracks of the peace talks on Yemen, and all other UN-supported peace processes;
2. Believe in young people. Trust us. Invest in our peacebuilding work, through increased resources for the implementation of the Youth, Peace and Security agenda, including accessible funding for youth organisations;
3. Ensure that Youth, Peace, and Security remains on the agenda of the UN Security Council, beyond today's debate through regular reporting and inviting youth briefers to country-specific and thematic discussions;
4. UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths briefed your council on 16 April and concluded that "Yemen cannot face two fronts at the same time: a war and a pandemic." We call upon this council to support the call for a truly upheld ceasefire in Yemen and beyond.

Mr President, as young people, we stand ready to support all actors in pursuing and upholding the Secretary General's call for a global ceasefire, in order to focus on the response to the current pandemic. When under a global threat, the time to act on peace is now.