

Yemen UPR Delegation – Internal Report

With support from Karama, Norad, and the Fund for Gender Equality, a Yemeni delegation consisting of two males and one female traveled to Geneva to observe the Human Rights Council’s Universal Periodic Review. While the delegation was only in Geneva from January 27 to 30, 2014, it was the result of half a year of preparation and advocacy within Yemen.

Prior to travel

In the lead up to the UPR, Karama assisted the Yemen Organization for Defending Rights and Democratic Freedom (YODRDF) in producing an NGO stakeholder report with a series of recommendations focused on women’s human rights. The report was submitted to the UN in June 2014, and Karama translated it into Arabic in November. Yemeni partners were advised to hold meetings with foreign embassy officials within the country to ask them to share the recommendations with their diplomatic counterparts in Geneva prior to the review. YODRDF was able to present the report to the American Embassy, the EU Embassy, Human Rights Watch, and delegation from Amnesty International prior to their travel to Geneva, as well as holding a press conference attended by two officers of the Ministry for Human Rights and three members of the National Dialogue Conference.

Summary documents of the stakeholder reports in English and Arabic were also drafted and distributed in the weeks prior to the UPR along with an issue brief on women’s political representation in Yemen. In preparation for a side event in Geneva planned for the day before Yemen’s official UPR review, letters of invitation were sent to each country delegation on the Human Rights Committee that had issued recommendations concerning women’s rights in Yemen’s 2008 review, providing them with information on the event itself and requesting their attendance.

During the delegation

The delegation consisted of Ali Al Dailami and Emad al-Garash, NGO representatives from YODRDF, and Amal Basha, a female member of the recently-concluded National Dialogue Conference, accompanied by Samia El Shafie and Amneh Helweh of Karama.

On the first night the delegation met to discuss talking points for the next



day's side event with each delegate agreeing to hit certain points. The delegation arrived early where they met and spoke to colleagues from the Danish Institute for Human Rights who were also there for the Yemen UPR. They discussed points of mutual interest and concern and agreed to work together in the future.

In the entryway leading to the event itself, Karama placed 30 copies of the YODRDF/Karama issue brief, the YODRDF/Karama summary of recommendations, the YODRDF/Karama UPR Stakeholders report, and the YODRDF/Frontline-Human Rights Defenders summary of recommendations. Each of these documents was available in both Arabic and English.

During the event entitled "Yemen: Concerns and Challenges Faced by Women and Human Rights Defenders in the Transition Period" the delegation presented their findings and recommendations based on their extensive experience working on issues of women's rights on the ground and using their stakeholder reports as a guide for their comments.

Ms. Basha spoke first regarding the violence faced by women in particular during the transitional period and the difficulty in documenting such abuse due to a number of reasons including social stigma. Ms. Basha also discussed her experience as a member of the 9-month National Dialogue Conference (NDC) and the challenges she faced therein in her attempts to have women's rights on the table. As time would tell, her hard work and efforts did lead to a shift in the NDC which announced there would be a minimum set at 30% for women's participation in all areas of government.

Next, Mr. Dailami spoke about YODRDF's work with Frontline-Human Rights Defenders, identifying some of their priority concerns as torture, disappearance, arbitrary detention, and other human rights violations. He stressed while the NDC made a few references to "justice," nothing has been added to legislation yet. Mr. Dailami then presented the key recommendations reached by the stakeholder report they completed as: the immediate investigation of all violence against human rights defenders in Yemen; the creation of a new Civil Society law that reflects international laws and standards; and the end to the harassment and torture that human rights defenders face following their return from meetings abroad and as retribution for their dissent.



Mr. Garash presented the final report of the meeting, focusing on the opportunities for women's rights activists at this time in Yemen. He argued that following the commitments made by the NDC

regarding women's representation, it is now time to ensure the 30% quota for women moves beyond rhetoric and into legislation. Mr. Garash stressed the need to increase the capacity of women to run for and hold public office to match the percentage of female voters and called for assistance in conducting trainings to facilitate this process. The side event concluded with participants thanking the delegation for the information and requesting to stay in contact in the future to serve as resources on the ground.

The day of the UPR itself, the delegation met with a representative of the German mission to the UN who was extremely interested in the situation of women on the ground. She asked a number of pointed questions on human rights issues within the country as well asking what the German government could do to be of service.

Immediately prior to the UPR session, Mr. Dailami and Mr. Garash met with the official Yemeni government delegation to the UPR, including H.E. Ms. Hooria Mashhoyr Ahmed, the Minister of Human Rights. Mr. Dailami and Mr. Jerash used this opportunity to present their



stakeholder reports to the Minister and explain their recommendations. Following the completion of the Yemen UPR, YODRDF drafted and published a press release in Arabic informing their constituency of the concerns raised at the UPR, which centered on the rights of women and girls. Many of the recommendations could have been drawn directly from their stakeholder report. Karama also issued a press release in English and posted it on its website with links to YODRDF's stakeholder reports with Karama and with Frontline.

Next steps

Following their return to Yemen, the delegation is working on the creation of a follow-up strategy to use the momentum and attention generated by the UPR to further their advocacy agenda. Karama recommended they hold a press conference upon their return to let the general public know how the government was portraying the human rights situation within the country. Karama also recommended they monitor government implementation of recommendations made during the UPR as well as closely following the government's progress in addressing commitments made during the UPR session.

Additional Notes:

- We should work to create the summary documents as far in advance as possible and include them with side event invitations in the future.
- A member of the Yemeni government delegation asked Emad why they were there if they were not going to give a statement during the review itself. In the future, can use a response such as: to learn how the process works, to hold a side event, to make contacts at the UN and with other countries, and to monitor the government and hopefully have the opportunity to meet with them.
- A member of one of the country delegations suggested we send out recommendation/hold our side event earlier in the future as each of the countries in the HRC submitted their statements a few days in advance of the UPR. One opportunity to do this is by attending UPR-Info's Pre-Session meeting in Geneva about 2-3 months in advance.
- The delegation also met with Hanny Megally, Chief of Asia Pacific, Middle East, and North Africa Branch of OHCHR following the UPR sessions.