

Civil Society Groups Demand Urgent UN Action Against Impunity for Yemen Crimes

For nearly seven years the people of Yemen have been victims of innumerable war crimes and human rights abuses.

Until last month the fact that the UN Human Rights Council's Group of Eminent Experts (GEE) was documenting crimes by all parties to the conflict and reporting them to the world attested to a commitment to address widespread impunity for such crimes. It signaled to civilians in Yemen that Member States of the United Nations were not turning a blind eye to their suffering.

But not anymore. Saudi Arabia, backed by the United Arab Emirates, the leaders of a military coalition in the Yemen conflict, lobbied Human Rights Council members to end the GEE's impartial monitoring and reporting. As a result, Council members narrowly rejected a resolution whose adoption would have renewed the GEE's mandate, dealing a serious blow to accountability efforts.

As the Netherlands' ambassador to the UN in Geneva rightly summed it up, by ending the GEE, the Council has "failed the people of Yemen."

The international community cannot stand by and allow that vote to be the last word on accountability efforts for abuses and war crimes in Yemen.

The undersigned organizations call upon the UN General Assembly to move quickly and establish a new international accountability mechanism for Yemen. The suffering already inflicted on civilians in the country demands this step to address impunity in the ongoing conflict and send a clear warning to perpetrators on all sides that they will be held accountable for war crimes and other serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights law.

All parties to the conflict in Yemen have perpetrated widespread and systematic abuses, including the killing and injuring of tens of thousands of civilians. Since 2015, the Saudi and UAE-led coalition has conducted scores of unlawful airstrikes that have killed and injured civilians and destroyed or damaged homes, hospitals, schools, markets, and other civilian infrastructure, and has allegedly armed and supported local armed groups and militias. Houthi forces have fired mortars, rockets, and other missiles indiscriminately into heavily populated areas, including cities, in Yemen, as well as launching ballistic missiles indiscriminately at populated areas in Saudi Arabia. Warring parties have prevented life-saving humanitarian aid from reaching those who need it. The criminal conduct of all parties to the conflict has claimed many thousands of civilian lives and caused the world's worst humanitarian crisis in Yemen.

The undersigned organizations call upon the UN General Assembly to establish an independent and impartial body that would investigate and publicly report on the most

serious violations and abuses of international law committed in Yemen, while also collecting and preserving evidence and preparing files for possible future criminal prosecution. Such a strong mandate is required to ensure not only that the serious crimes under international law committed in Yemen be exposed to the world, but also that potential avenues of criminal accountability may be effectively exploited in the future to address impunity and provide effective redress to victims.

This is an ambitious goal, but the General Assembly has risen to the challenge before, when grave, widespread, and persistent abuses demanded it. For example, in 2016, the General Assembly created the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to collect, preserve, and analyze evidence of the most serious crimes under international law committed in Syria. In 2018, the Human Rights Council created a similar mechanism for Myanmar in the wake of the 2017 crimes against humanity and possible genocide committed against Rohingya Muslims. Recognizing the urgent need for accountability in Yemen, dozens of UN Member States have already urged the international community to “actively explore further alternative mechanisms” for monitoring the human rights situation.

UN General Assembly Member States can and should create such an accountability mechanism for Yemen and ensure it is provided with adequate resources to conduct its task. It is the least they can do for those who have endured immeasurable suffering for nearly seven years.

The people of Yemen need justice. And justice begins with investigations and accountability. The time to act is now.

The full list of signatories follows (64 as of December 2, 2021):

1. Action on Armed Violence (AOAV)
2. ACAT-France
3. Africa Center for Security, Governance & Research
4. Alkarama for Human Rights
5. ALQST for Human Rights
6. Allard K. Lowenstein International Human Rights Clinic, Yale Law School
7. Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain
8. Amnesty International
9. Avaaz
10. Bridges for Yemen
11. Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)
12. Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT)
13. Centre for Social Impact Studies
14. Changemaker Norway
15. CIVICUS
16. Columbia Law School Human Rights Clinic

17. Conflict and Environment Observatory
18. DefendDefenders (East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project)
19. Defense Foundation for Rights and Freedoms
20. Democracy School
21. Development House
22. European Center for Democracy and Human Rights (ECDHR)
23. Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR)
24. Femmes des medias pour la justice au Congo
25. FOMICRES
26. Global Action to Prevent War and Armed Conflict
27. FundiPau (Fundacio per la Pau)
28. Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect
29. Global Legal Action Network
30. Gulf Centre for Human Rights
31. Human Life Foundation for Development and Relief
32. Human Rights Information & Training Centre- HRITC
33. Human Rights Watch (HRW)
34. International Commission of Jurists (ICJ)
35. Human Rights Monitor Organization
36. International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
37. International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)
38. Le Réseau d'action sur les armes légères en Afrique de l'Ouest, section Côte d'Ivoire (Le RASALAO-CI)
39. MENA Rights Group
40. Mwatana for Human Rights
41. Partners Foundation
42. PAX
43. Peace Track Initiative
44. People's Federation for National Peace and Development (PEFENAP)
45. Rete Italiana Pace e Disarmo
46. Project Ploughshares
47. Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED)
48. Salam For Yemen
49. SAM Organization Rights and liberty
50. Sisters' Arab Forum for Human Rights (SAF)
51. Swedish Peace and Arbitration Society
52. The Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD)
53. Truth Justice Memory Center
54. Vision GRAM-International
55. Vredesactie

56. Watch for Human Rights
57. WITNESS
58. Win Without War
59. Women for Peace and Democracy Nepal
60. World Organisation Against Torture
61. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
62. Yemen Relief and Reconstruction Foundation
63. Yemeni Archive
64. Yemen Policy Center- Germany