



## ICRD Monthly Update

August 6, 2018

Dear friends,

As bombs and bullets continue to rip at Yemen from all sides, and the famine and cholera outbreak reach epic proportions, Yemeni civil society struggles to fill the gap left by absent or collapsed national and regional institutions. With international news focused on the war in Syria, nuclear concerns with Iran and North Korea, and Russian interference in the 2016 election, **the war in Yemen has remained a forgotten crisis**, largely underreported and overlooked since 2014. To date, the UN estimates that nearly 22 million men, women and children have been impacted by the violence, with over 2 million displaced, more than 17 million suffering from acute food shortages, nearly 8 million at risk of starvation, and a second outbreak of cholera underway. This is all in the context of the persistent activity of Al Qaeda and IS-Yemen militants.

Of those focused on peace in Yemen, many remain intent on macro-level strategies. Although important, these **discussions overlook the stability and humanitarian efforts being led by Yemeni people at the community level**, and often miss the nuanced distinctions between local actors that will factor into any effort to resolve the violence. Policymakers and media have focused primarily on the larger geopolitical conflict – specifically the role of Iran and Saudi Arabia – which reinforces a resounding silence shrouding the experiences of the Yemeni people – many of whom have been doing herculean work in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds.

This week, ICRD brought together experts on Yemen’s humanitarian relief, conflict transformation, and socio-political situations for a discussion about the important role of local communities in **filling the gap in services left by a failure of national and regional institutions**, delivering life-saving aid, and dealing with the complex histories of identity at the heart of the conflict. The panel, titled “Yemen’s Silent Crisis: Elevating Local Perspectives,” featured well-known figures from the field including (from right to left):

- Anwar Khan: President of Islamic Relief – USA;
- Salwa Sarhi: Independent Consultant on Yemen;
- Fatima Abo Alasrar: Senior Analyst at the Arabia Foundation; and
- James Patton: President & CEO of ICRD.



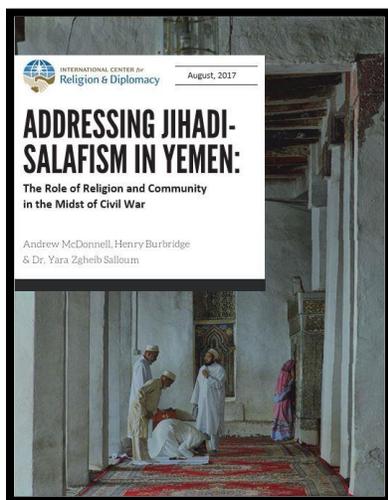
Shifting the focus away from geopolitical struggles, the panelists humanized those impacted by the ongoing horrors resulting from the violence, raised the profile of local stability efforts, and provided a nuanced look at the local dimensions of the conflict.

Salwa Sarhi discussed the importance of Local Councils in creating a framework of stability. An overlooked aspect of local governance that are rarely included in assistance efforts, these elected Councils need to be taken seriously by the international community if any progress is to be made advancing collaboration between international actors and Yemeni civil society, she argued.

*"The only effective and key players that have been instrumental, and continue to be instrumental in the stabilization process, are the Local Councils and civil society."*  
– Salwa Sarhi

However, any attempt at local reconciliation is going to require a nuanced and informed understanding of the local identity groups where the seeds of conflict were first germinated. Fatima Abo Alasarar described the history of Zaydism in Yemen and the important distinctions between the Houthi movement and broader Zaydi Islamic thought. Community action can only go so far, she suggested, and needs to be the basis for reconstructing broken institutions:

*"Even if we stop the war, we are still not going to see peace. Because peace needs a stronger rule of law, a strong government... We have to think more creatively about this."*  
– Fatima Abo Alasarar



In ICRD's recent report on [Addressing Jihadi Salafism in Yemen](#), the findings point to widespread suspicion of outside groups. That being the case, I asked the panelists who it is that might be best positioned to bridge the gap between local stability and humanitarian efforts and the international community.

Ms. Sarhi explained that women are perceived as relatively neutral in a highly-partisan environment and that they, alongside the underfunded and poorly acknowledged Local Councils, remain under-engaged in peacebuilding. Mr. Khan highlighted the critical role that religious actors play as an important voice speaking out against extremism, despite the killing of many moderate religious leaders in recent months, and how they need recognition and help:

*"Every time people say, 'How come somebody doesn't speak up against extremism?' Because they tend to get shot... They (religious leaders) died quietly and we did nothing to support them."* – Anwar Khan

ICRD and its counterparts, PartnersGlobal and PartnersYemen, remain among the few conflict-transformation organizations supporting ongoing stability efforts in Yemeni communities. In the coming months, we will be conducting another series of conflict resolution and dialogue trainings in eight governorates throughout the country. To stay updated on our work in Yemen, I would encourage you to read our recent publication [Empowering Yemeni Peacemakers: The Intersection of Conflict Resolution & CVE](#) and to watch the full video of this event on our [website](#)!

Thank you for your support. Warm regards,



James Patton

ICRD is currently designing a program to understand and reverse an increasing trend toward religious prejudice in the United States. Through a series of meetings with American religious leaders across the spectrum of faith practice, ICRD is working to design a replicable toolkit to be used in seminaries and to help local communities better address issues of religious diversity and collaboration. Please consider supporting this effort by making a one time or recurring donation of \$100/month. Together, we can empower religious leaders in the U.S. to mitigate cycles of prejudice and engage one another peacefully across religious differences.

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