

First official European Parliament visit to Yemen since 2009, 17-19 December 2023

Members from the European Parliament Delegation for relations with the Arab Peninsula (DARP) visited Yemen on 17-19 December 2023. Led by DARP Chair Dr Hannah Neumann and composed of two other Members (DARP Vice-Chair Niels Fuglsang- S&D, Denmark, and György Hölvényi – EPP, Hungary), this was the first official visit to Yemen by the European Parliament since 2009. This was an important visit at a time when ongoing efforts for peace are progressing against the backdrop of a complex regional situation. With this visit, the Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) wanted to show that the European Union stands by the people in Yemen and will continue to closely follow the situation.

The visit started in Amman, Jordan, on 17 December, where the EU Delegation to Yemen is temporarily based. MEPs met with UN Special Envoy for Yemen, Hans Grundberg. They discussed progress on peace efforts and the Members expressed their support for his work. The Members also met with the EU Ambassador to Yemen, Gabriel Munuera Viñals, and the EU Heads of Mission accredited to Yemen, as well as with EU Development Counsellors and ECHO (European Commission Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations department).

In Aden, Yemen, the EP delegation met with H.E. Mohammad Ali Alshadadi, the Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives, as well as several members of the House. During this interparliamentary meeting, members of the two parliaments exchanged on the on-going peace efforts. The EP delegation underlined the need for a just and inclusive peace process that involves women and youth representatives in all tracks, and addresses accountability and transitional justice, in order to achieve a lasting peace. The delegation emphasised the importance of the parties' constructive engagement with the UN Special Envoy. Both sides agreed on the importance of achieving peace and security, including in the wider region. In that context, the Members stated that the EU condemns the recent Houthi missile attacks on ships in the Red Sea and expects the Houthis to cease such actions threatening international navigation and maritime security. Last but not least, the Members stressed the importance of fostering a positive operating environment for humanitarian and development actors in all parts of Yemen to ensure that aid reaches the most vulnerable and is implemented in an efficient manner.

The EP delegation met with Dr Shafiqah Saed Abdo, Chairperson of the Women National Committee, and several members of the Committee, as well as women activists and Human Rights Defenders, to discuss the main challenges faced by Yemeni women and how the EU could counter the discrimination of women in all sectors that has increased since the start of the war. The Yemeni women expressed grave concern about the continued absence of women from government, parliament and large parts of public life, and called on the EU to take a firmer stance in support of women's inclusion in decision-making, governance and peace efforts in Yemen.

The EP delegation had the opportunity to make several field visits to EU-funded projects in Aden, implemented in partnership with UN agencies and local partners. The Members visited the water tanks in Tawilah, part of a rehabilitation project of Aden old city. This was followed by a meeting with

youth and civil society organisations working in the cultural space and the preservation of Aden's cultural heritage. The Delegation also visited the Al Sadaka hospital, part of an EU-funded project focused on severe and moderate malnutrition among women and children. Finally, the Members visited the Balqees high school for girls, which was reconstructed as part of the SIERY project (Strengthening Institutional and Economic Resilience in Yemen), the EU's largest development project in Yemen. SIERY trains and empowers local authorities to identify and implement priority development projects in close cooperation with local communities and with the involvement of women and marginalised groups.

The EP delegation met with representatives of the UN agencies present in Aden to discuss their work in the country and the challenges they face in implementing humanitarian and development cooperation. The Members expressed their appreciation for the tireless work of the UN agencies and NGOs in support of people in Yemen, and recognised the pivotal role of EU funding to maintain and scale-up this essential work. Cognisant of the disastrous humanitarian situation, the Members reiterated the need for continued support for Yemen's Humanitarian Response Plan, as well as the need to complement this with increased funding for development actions that will create the foundations for a sustainable future for Yemen and are possible even under the current circumstances. These development actions must include a focus on climate, given that Yemen is one of the countries that is worst affected by climate change.

Throughout these meetings, the Members expressed support for UN-led efforts towards a comprehensive resolution of the Yemen conflict, and for the work of the Internationally Recognised Government of Yemen, under very challenging conditions. They reaffirmed the European Parliament's strong commitment to the unity, sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of Yemen, as well as to helping people in the country. The Members insisted that the active participation and involvement of women, youth, and marginalised groups, is vital for the success and legitimacy of any peace process.

The EP delegation called for an enhanced role for local women-led and women's rights organisations, who play a crucial role in supporting and empowering women to play an active role in politics, peace and governance.

The Members expressed their hopes that this visit will mark the start of a more regular exchange between the European Parliament and the Yemeni Government and House of Representatives, as well as renewed relations with civil society in Yemen.

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