



PEACE INITIATIVES IN YEMEN

8 November 2021



About the CMA

The goal of the CMA is to help make mediation efforts throughout Africa more effective. We do so by offering academic and practical courses in mediation, researching new and current best practices, and offering support to organisations and governments involved in mediation processes.

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Seminar Summary

The Centre for Mediation in Africa (CMA) in the Department of Political Sciences at the University of Pretoria in association with The International Christian University, Japan hosted a seminar to discuss Peace Initiatives in Yemen. The seminar was held in the auditorium at the University's Future Africa campus and was attended by approximately 70 people. The discussion was hosted by Anas Al-Hamati from the International Christian University.

The seminar included high profile speakers from the MENA region and was attended by senior ambassadors, diplomats, DIRCO affiliates, members of the public and graduate students. The discussion was occasionally intensely emotional and political as when Dr Abdulkader al-Guneid, author of *Prison Time in Sana'a* spoke of his imprisonment. Other speakers offered a more developmental approach to the Yemeni crisis focusing on the different initiatives and interventions to address the humanitarian disaster that is unfolding in that country. Significantly, the emphasis that emerged during the seminar was that of the need for Yemeni solutions to Yemeni problems. This reflects the position of the CMA as well, where we prioritise an African approach to peace interventions.

The director of the CMA, Dr Cori Wielenga, opened the seminar with words from the poem 'From Exile to Exile' by Yemeni poet Abdullah al-Baradouni, to bring attention to the degree to which the violent conflict and resulting humanitarian crises has left the country devastated.

The speakers emphasised the importance of a social contract and rule of law for the Yemeni people. What was striking in the analysis was the reflection on the South African transition process and the call for mediation between the parties. Professor Laurie Nathan, founder of the CMA and current director of the Kroc Institute, was unequivocal in his statement that all parties should be included in the mediation and negotiation process. Nathan's expertise as a mediator was apparent in his evidence-based analysis, linking perception to outcome and solutions. His views were echoed by Ambassador Dangor who is the Middle East and North Africa advisor to the South African Minister of International Relations and Cooperation.

During the Q&A session, the Ambassadors to South Africa from Yemen, Qatar and Saudi Arabia contributed sincere and dynamic criticism and viewpoints on the crisis. Ambassador

Tariq Ali Faraj Al-Ansari from Qatar pointed to Qatar's consistent efforts at mediation, whilst criticizing the Arab block for their failures and complacency in working together to reach a solution. Qatar has played significant mediatory roles in many MENA conflicts and was also involved in mediation with the Taliban of Afghanistan. The Saudi Ambassador, Sultan Al-Angari stated that Saudi Arabia would not allow any foreign powers to threaten its citizens by using Yemeni soil to advance their agendas. Ambassador Ahmed Hassan from the Yemeni embassy passionately called for a solution that would secure peace and stability in his country. He was emphatic about the fact that it needed to be a sustained and lasting peace that would secure Yemen's future prospects, much like the transition process in South Africa. Additional comment from DIRCO diplomats and the Arab League contributed valuable insights of the different role players and how agendas were perceived.

The Way Forward

It was evident that despite the differences between key stakeholders, all parties represented and those who offered comment from the MENA region were committed to the desire to find a solution for Yemen, to end the hostilities and to attend to the humanitarian crisis. Both the Yemeni and Saudi members were also very clear about Iran's role in the crisis and the fact that Iranian militia were operating in Yemen. This exacerbated tensions, led to violent conflict and was a major point of contention for negotiations and mediation. According to the Yemeni participants, Iranian militia through their Yemeni proxies destabilised the national project when all parties sat together to find a way forward. What became glaringly evident was that the Yemen had become a battleground for foreign powers, fighting a proxy war on its soil. The situation in Yemen is beyond dire and all participants agreed that South Africans should lend their expertise and experience to guide the Yemeni people to work towards achieving a sustainable peace and an end to the conflict.