

6. Peace negotiations in the Middle East

- The Middle East was the scene of four negotiating processes in 2022 that accounted for 10% of all peace processes worldwide.
- Negotiations over the Iranian nuclear programme oscillated between progress and impasse, but full compliance with the agreement reached in 2015 had not been restored by the end of the year.
- A truce agreement in force in Yemen for six months helped to reduce violence in the country, but at the end of the year, uncertainty persisted because the truce was not renewed and there were fears of a new escalation.
- Hamas and Fatah signed a new reconciliation agreement, but there was scepticism about its implementation given the failed experiences in recent years.
- Different formal negotiating schemes continued in Syria, but in line with previous years, no significant progress was observed in the search for a political solution after over a decade of armed conflict.

This chapter analyses the main peace processes and negotiations in the Middle East throughout 2022. First, it presents the main characteristics and general trends of the negotiating processes in the region. Second, it studies the evolution of contexts during the year, including references to the gender perspective and implementation of the international agenda on women, peace and security. At the beginning of this chapter, a map is also presented identifying the countries of the Middle East that were the scene of negotiations in 2022.

Table 6.1. Summary of peace processes and negotiations in the Middle East in 2022

Peace processes and negotiations	Negotiating actors	Third parties
Iran (nuclear programme)	Iran, EEUU, P4+1 (France, United Kingdom, Russia and China plus Germany)	EU, UN
Palestine	Hamas, Fatah	Algeria
Syria	Government, political and armed opposition groups	UN, EU, Russia, Turkey, Iran, in addition to Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and ICRC (observers in the Astana process)
Yemen	Government, Houthis / Ansar Allah, Saudi Arabia	UN, Oman, Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)

6.1. Peace negotiations in 2022: Regional trends

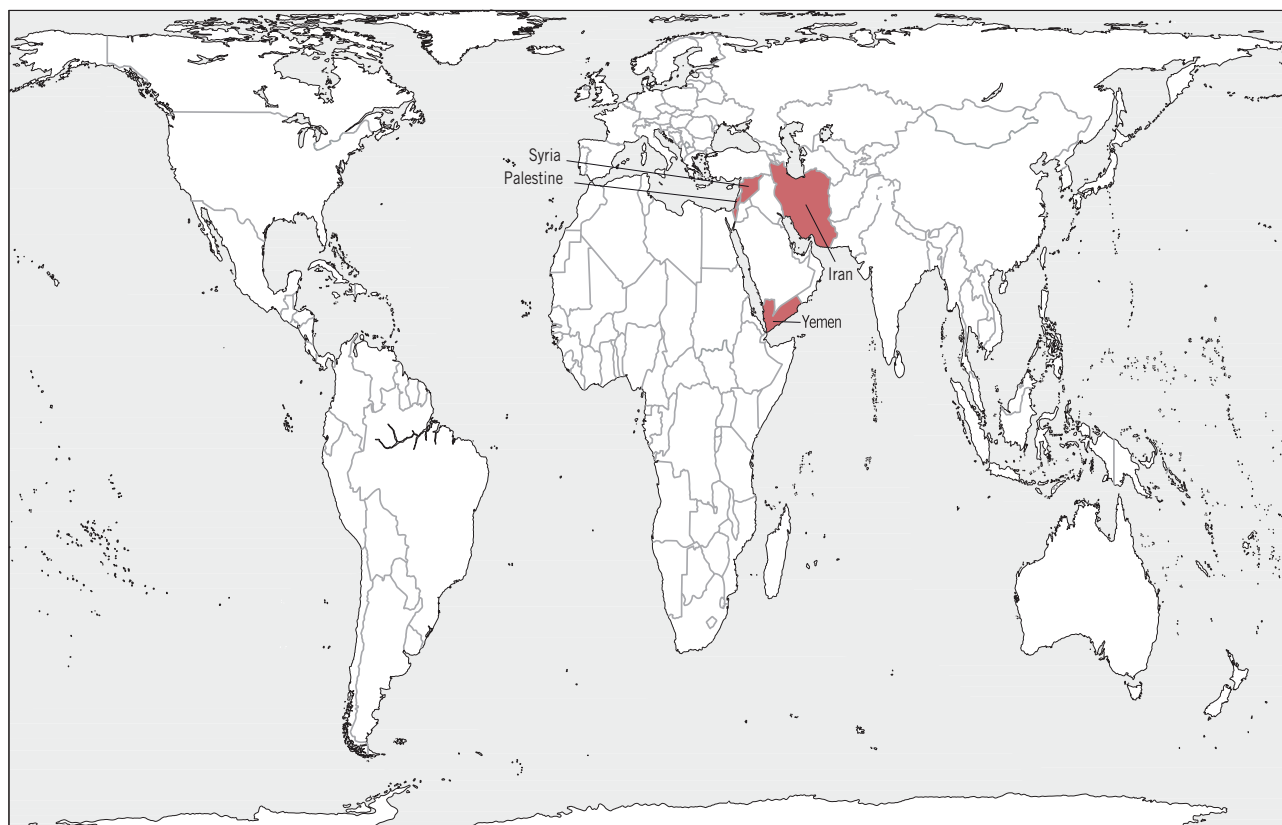
This chapter analyses four negotiating processes that took place in 2022 in the Middle East and account for 10% of the peace processes worldwide that year. Two of these processes are linked to armed conflicts (in Yemen and Syria) and the other two are connected to socio-political crises (one between the Palestinian groups Hamas and Fatah and the other associated with the Iranian nuclear programme). With the exception of Palestine, which is internal in nature, the rest of the contexts were internationalised (Yemen and Syria) or international (tension over the Iranian nuclear programme). In geographical terms, two of the cases were located in the Gulf (Yemen and Iran) and the other two were in the Mashreq area (Palestine and Syria). The number of negotiations in the Middle East fell compared

to previous years, in which the case of Palestine-Israel was also included. This case is not analysed as a peace process due to the chronic impasse in the negotiations, suspended since 2014, and the gradual exhaustion of the two-state formula and Israel's persistent occupation, annexation and apartheid policies.¹

As for the **actors participating in the negotiations**, the respective governments were involved in all cases in the Middle East, both in direct and indirect meetings with other actors. **Government actors participated in negotiations with various kinds of actors, mainly other states and armed and unarmed opposition organisations in mostly formal negotiating schemes.** Thus, for example, in 2022, diplomatic contact continued

1. For further information, see the previous edition of this yearbook and "Violence, apartheid, dispossession: the price of ignoring the occupation of Palestine" in *Alert 2022! Report on conflicts, human rights and peacebuilding*. Icaria: Barcelona: 2022.

Map 6.1. Peace negotiations in the Middle East in 2022



■ Countries with peace processes and negotiations in the Middle East in 2022.

between Iran and other countries that signed the 2015 nuclear agreement (France, the United Kingdom, Russia and China, plus Germany, known as the P4+1 group), in addition to the United States, which formally pulled out of the agreement in 2018 during the Trump administration. Iran continues to adhere to the agreement formally, but it has distanced itself from complying with its provisions in practice. US President Joe Biden promised to return to the nuclear agreement during the electoral campaign, but by the end of 2022, Washington had still not rejoined the agreement due to disagreements with Tehran over the conditions to restore it. In Yemen, the internationally recognised government supported by Saudi Arabia also remained involved in negotiations with the armed group known as the Houthis (formally Ansar Allah). Abdo Rabbo Mansour Hadi, who had headed the government since before the escalation of violence in the country in 2015, resigned from his office in 2022 and gave way to a presidential council that declared the objective of negotiating with the Houthis to reach a permanent ceasefire and a political solution for Yemen. In Syria, the government of Bashar Assad also remained formally involved both in the negotiating format sponsored by the United Nations, the Geneva process, and in the Astana process, which is promoted by its main supporter, Russia, along with Iran and Turkey. However, the Damascus regime was singled out for its lack of genuine political will to engage in the Geneva process, which involves Syrian political and social actors. The negotiations in the intra-Palestinian

dispute mainly involved Hamas, which has controlled the Gaza Strip since the political split, and Fatah and the Palestinian Authority (PA), which has maintained dominance over the West Bank. The possibility of setting up a national unity government was discussed during the negotiations in 2022, but in the end no consensus was reached in this regard.

The significant influence of regional and international actors on the dynamics of the dispute and on the prospects for negotiation became evident in some processes in the Middle East. This influence is based on their direct or indirect participation in some of the armed conflicts that are subject to negotiation, on their ability to influence the positions of some of the local actors involved in the respective conflicts and/or on their power and leverage on the international scene at a more general level and in some of the dialogue and negotiating mechanisms put in place. One context where this became more evident in 2022 was Yemen, where Saudi Arabia's growing interest in distancing itself from the war may have influenced the Yemeni government (supported by Riyadh) to agree to the nationwide truce agreement in April. After the failure to renew the cessation of hostilities agreement in October, Saudi Arabia held direct talks with the Houthis and this bilateral channel had emerged as the main space for negotiations by the end of the year. In Syria, signs of rapprochement in 2022 between the Assad regime and the government of Turkey (still one of the main sources

of support for the Syrian opposition) prompted various interpretations about its possible influence both on the dynamics of the conflict and on the talks. According to reports, the normalisation of relations between Syria and Turkey is a priority for Russia, which is one of the main backers of the Assad regime and wields great influence over Damascus. **Rising tension between Moscow and Western countries after the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 also had repercussions on the negotiating processes in the Middle East.** Thus, for example, the EU decided not to invite Russia (as it traditionally did before) to the annual meeting on Syria held in Brussels in May. Weeks later, the Geneva process to address the conflict in Syria was blocked after Russia and Damascus demanded a change in the venue for the talks, considering that Switzerland was no longer an impartial actor due to its position on the war in Ukraine. Progress made on the talks on the Iranian nuclear programme in the first quarter as a result of intense diplomatic exchanges was also affected by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which ended up undermining the dynamics of the dialogue and did not allow for the establishment of a consensus text. Towards the end of the year, Western countries involved in the negotiations with Iran over the nuclear programme also indicated Tehran's responsibility for the transfer of weapons (drones) to Russia, in violation of United Nations Resolution 2331, which endorsed the nuclear deal in 2015.

Rising tension between Moscow and Western countries after the invasion of Ukraine had repercussions on the negotiating processes in the Middle East

Third parties were involved in all the negotiating processes in the Middle East. This role was played by international organisations, regional bodies and/or states that did mediation and facilitation work. **As in many other cases around the world, the United Nations played a prominent role in the processes in the region and was an active mediator in three of the four cases.** In Syria and Yemen, the United Nations led negotiating processes through "special envoys" (Geir Pedersen for Syria and Hans Grundberg for Yemen). In the negotiations over the Iranian nuclear programme, the UN's role was mainly channelled through the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and its supervision and facilitation of compliance with the provisions of the 2015 nuclear agreement. Regarding the role of regional organisations, the EU coordinated the negotiations over the Iranian nuclear programme in terms of contact between the parties that adhered to the agreement and by facilitating exchanges between Tehran and Washington. In Yemen, the Saudi-led Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which played a role in the past in attempts to facilitate a political transition in the country after the overthrow of Ali Abdullah Saleh (2011), facilitated the formation of the new presidential leadership in 2022, conceived as a structure representing different forces in the country to resolve disagreements within the anti-Houthi faction. Regarding states involved in mediation and facilitation tasks, Algeria played a decisive role in the

rapprochement between Hamas and Fatah that led to the signing of an agreement between the parties and 12 other Palestinian organisations in October. Oman also played an important role in facilitating bilateral contacts between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis regarding the conflict in Yemen.

The **negotiating agendas** included various topics due to the unique and specific nature of each context. However, one significant issue was the attempt to establish ceasefire agreements. This subject has become prominent in recent years in Syria and Yemen and was especially important in Yemen in 2022. The nationwide truce reached in April, coinciding with the start of Ramadan, was the first since 2016 and had a significant impact on reducing violence in the country while it was in force (until October). Other aspects of the truce agreement in Yemen included humanitarian issues (access to fuel through the country's ports, the resumption of commercial flights from the capital, Sana'a, and the reopening of roads in various governorates). The UN special envoy sought a more far-reaching truce, but the negotiations failed mainly due to the Houthis' additional demands. Regarding the Iranian nuclear programme, the main issues of disagreement that prevented a return to effective compliance with the 2015 agreement were related to three issues. Firstly, the sanctions imposed on Iran (particularly the listing of the Revolutionary Guard as a terrorist organisation by the US); secondly, the guarantees on how long the agreement would last and, thirdly, the deadline to end the inspection of Iranian nuclear facilities. In Syria, the sanctions against Damascus were also a topic of interest in the Astana process, while in the Geneva process the debates continued to focus on the contents of a future Constitution for Syria. Given the deadlock of the process and the little progress observed in recent years, the UN special envoy tried to explore whether different actors involved in the Syrian conflict were willing to make concessions in exchange for reciprocal measures on issues such as kidnapped, detained and disappeared persons, humanitarian assistance and conditions for the dignified and safe return of refugees. The release of prisoners was also present in the Astana process and was one of the topics that the UN special envoy in Yemen wanted to include as part of the failed renewed truce agreement in October. As has happened on other occasions in the past, the agreement between the parties in Palestine focused on political and electoral issues. The agreement once again included a commitment to hold presidential and legislative elections within a year and recognised the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.

In terms of **implementing the international agenda on women, peace and security in the region**, many different challenges for women's equal and substantive

participation continued to be observed, despite the demands made by women in this area.. Thus, for example, the Algerian-backed agreement between the Palestinian organisations was signed with no Palestinian women present. There were none among the people signing the agreement at the ceremony held in Algiers. Palestinian feminist organisations have denounced the exclusion of women in discussions to address Palestinian reconciliation in recent years, warning of their marginal involvement in delegations. Throughout 2022, Yemeni activists repeated that female participation in power and decision-making were well below the 30% threshold agreed at the National Dialogue Conference in 2014. At the end of the year, the UN special envoy for Yemen also said that a decline had been observed in the already limited number of women involved in the various formal negotiating processes active in the country since 2015. In the new Presidential Leadership Council established in April, not one of the eight representatives of the different forces of the anti-Houthi faction were women. Consultative structures allowing regular communication between the respective special envoys and women's advisory groups continued to operate in both Syria and Yemen. As part of their dialogue and advocacy activities with other actors, feminist organisations and activists from the region expressed concern over various issues, including humanitarian needs in armed conflicts (Syria, Yemen), frustration over the impasse in the political process (Syria) and concern over the harassment and persecution of human rights activists and defenders, limitations on freedom of expression and restrictions on mobility due to the requirement of male guardians (Yemen).

Agreements were signed in both Palestine and Yemen in 2022, but the prospects at the end of the year were still uncertain

Finally, the **evolution of the negotiations in the Middle East in 2022** was uneven, but in general terms it illustrates the problems and obstacles besetting the processes in the region. **Agreements were signed in both Palestine and Yemen in 2022, but the prospects at the end of the year were still uncertain.** In Palestine, this was because of the scepticism with which the announcement of a new agreement was received, considering that similar pacts in the past have not materialised or led to effective intra-Palestinian reconciliation. Thus, sectors of the Palestinian population perceive that neither Hamas nor Fatah are genuinely committed to change because they benefit from the status quo. In Yemen, the nationwide truce clearly had positive effects on reducing hostilities, the number of victims of the armed conflict, the number of displaced people and levels of food insecurity. Although large-scale fighting had not resumed between the warring parties by the end of the year, the fact that the truce could not be extended after October raised concerns about the possibility of fresh violence in 2023. Progress and setbacks were observed in the Iranian nuclear programme in 2022, but the intense diplomatic activity did not lead to a consensus and by the end of the year the prospects for negotiations

remained murky. The US issued a series of demands to Tehran to return to the 2015 agreement, while Iran persisted in policies that progressively distanced it from complying with the provisions of the agreement, including on the production of enriched uranium. The different negotiating schemes in Syria to address the armed conflict remained under way, but no significant progress was observed in the search for a political solution and relief from the serious economic and humanitarian conditions faced by civilians.

In addition to the negotiating processes analysed in this chapter, there were other political dialogue initiatives in the region. In Iraq, after the October 2021 elections, escalating tension between different actors due to the inability to form a government and the occupation of Parliament by followers of Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, acting Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi promoted political talks in the middle of the year to try to overcome the persistent political impasse. The talks

were attended by the president, the speaker of Parliament and leaders of different political parties, but it was boycotted by al-Sadr, whose group had won the largest number of seats in the elections. In line with her mandate to offer good offices and given the situation of political crisis, the UN special representative in Iraq and head of the mission in the country (UNAMI), Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, participated in the talks promoted by al-

Kadhimi and maintained contact with various actors in the country, including al-Sadr. The diplomat did not offer details about her efforts, but she assured that she had held various meetings in which potential road maps were discussed and that she had conducted shuttle diplomacy to foster communication between the parties. The persistent deadlock and al-Sadr's decision to withdraw from politics and shut down political bodies associated with his movement led to an escalation of violence in August. Finally, a year after the elections, a new government was set up in Iraq. The head of UNAMI, a mission whose priorities include supporting inclusive dialogue and national reconciliation in Iraq, was openly critical of Iraqi leaders from across the political spectrum for their lack of political will to put national interest first and for engaging in power struggles that prolonged the impasse. The UN representative insisted on the need to establish a stable, institutionalised and predictable mechanism to comprehensively and lastingly address the problems facing Iraq and stressed the importance of ensuring substantive female participation in the political process. The UN underlined its willingness to support efforts in this regard.

At the same time, other actors are trying to promote spaces for dialogue to address the main challenges in Iraq. The Iraq Dialogue Initiative, promoted since September 2021 by The Shaikh Group, has sought to bring together various actors from the Iraqi political spectrum to address the root causes of the conflicts in

the country, facilitating conversations between elites on the one hand and between elites and citizens on the other. Informal talks have been held in Basra, Baghdad, Mosul and the Kurdish region for this purpose. In 2022, regional and international actors also held talks on the challenges facing Iraq as part of the second round of the Baghdad conference. Held in Jordan in December in coordination with France and Iraq, the event was attended by representatives of Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Egypt, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman and the UAE, as well as the EU, the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council. The first of these meetings had been held in Baghdad a year and a half earlier, in August 2021. **During the meeting in Jordan, it emerged that Saudi Arabia and Iran had reached an agreement to resume dialogue with a view to re-establishing bilateral relations.** Direct contact between Riyadh and Tehran began in April 2021 under the mediation of Iraq. The two countries have great influence over the conflicts in the region and their usually tense relations deteriorated since 2016.. From April 2021 until the end of 2022, five rounds of dialogue were held in Baghdad under the auspices of the Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi, who left office in October 2021. Finally, in October 2022, Israel and Lebanon reached an agreement on the demarcation of their maritime border after several years of intermittent mediation by the United States.

6.2 Case study analysis

Mashreq

Palestine	
Negotiating actors	Hamas, Fatah
Third parties	Algeria
Relevant agreements	Mecca Agreement (2007), Cairo agreement (2011), Doha agreement (2012), Beach Refugee Camp agreement (2014)

Summary:

Since the start of the confrontation between Hamas and Fatah, which materialized as of 2007 with a de facto separation between Gaza and the West Bank, several mediation initiatives have been launched in an attempt to reduce tensions and promote an approximation between these two Palestinian formations. It was not until May 2011 that the confluence of several factors –including the deadlock in negotiations between the PA and Israel, changes in the region as a result of the Arab revolts and the pressure exerted by the Palestinian public opinion– facilitated the signing of a reconciliation agreement between the parties. The diverging opinions between Hamas and Fatah on key issues have hampered the implementation of this agreement, which aims at establishing a unity government, the celebration of legislative and presidential elections, and reforming the security forces. Successive agreements have been announced between both parties since, but they have not been implemented.

As part of the negotiating process mediated by Algeria, **Hamas and Fatah signed a new reconciliation agreement in 2022.** The deal was presented as a new possibility for the main Palestinian factions to overcome a split that had only widened since 2006, after Hamas' electoral victory, which was not recognised internationally. This led to armed clashes between Hamas and Fatah in 2007 and worsened the territorial fragmentation of Palestine beyond that the Israeli occupation imposes. The reconciliation agreement reached in October 2022, similar to others signed in the last decade at the request of other mediating actors (primarily Qatar and Egypt), was received with scepticism by the Palestinian population and local analysts.

Algeria expressed its willingness to mediate in the conflict between the Palestinian factions in late 2021, when tensions had risen again due to the decision of the president of the Palestinian Authority and leader of Fatah, Mahmoud Abbas, to suspend (in April) what would have been the first Palestinian presidential and legislative elections in 15 years. The Algerian proposal was for the parties to address their differences and the organisation of conference on intra-Palestinian reconciliation before the Arab League summit, scheduled for November 2022. In January 2022, Hamas confirmed that a delegation headed by its leader, Ismail Haniyeh, would travel to Algeria for “talks on Palestinian unity” after receiving an invitation from the Algerian ambassador in Qatar, the country where the Islamist leader resides. Months later, in early July, a meeting took place in Algiers between Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune, **Abbas and Haniyeh. It was the first direct meeting between the two Palestinian representatives since October 2016.**

Despite the photographs of the two leaders shaking hands and the fact that some described the meeting between Abbas and Haniyeh with the president of Algeria as “historic”, other observers considered it a matter of protocol and political courtesy towards the host for the 60th anniversary of Algerian independence (6 July), rather than as a sign of progress in the rapprochement of positions between the Palestinian factions. According to reports, there was no bilateral meeting between the leaders of Fatah and Hamas during the trip to Algiers. Media outlets and analysts highlighted the interest of both Palestinian factions in maintaining good relations with Algeria, one of the countries that has offered the strongest political and economic support to the Palestinian cause² and a staunch opponent of the normalisation of relations between the Arab countries and Israel as part of the Abraham Accords, which has viewed the rapprochement between Israel and Morocco, its main regional adversary, with suspicion and concern. In a context of declining support from other Arab countries, Algeria has maintained significant support for the Palestinian Authority (100 million dollars per year). The Islamist group Hamas is interested in the support of a country like Algeria, given the deterioration of its ties with other Arab

2. Daoud Kuttab, *Palestinian reconciliation must be championed post-Arab League summit*, *Arab News*, 19 October 2022.

countries amidst the revolts that have shaken the region. Throughout the year, Hamas and Fatah leaders continued to trade accusations for blocking reconciliation efforts. Nevertheless, Algerian efforts persisted and meetings were held with teams from the rival Palestinian factions. Thus, on 11 October, representatives of Hamas, Fatah and a dozen other Palestinian groups arrived in Algeria to participate in two days of talks aimed at discussing a proposal for reconciliation and national unity. The draft had been prepared by Algiers after its diplomats held separate talks with representatives of Hamas and Fatah. **The signing of the Algerian Declaration by Hamas, Fatah and the other 12 Palestinian organisations attending was announced on 13 October.** The text, officially titled “Algerian document for Palestinian reconciliation”, **recognises the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) headed by Abbas as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and supports the adoption of a national dialogue to ensure the involvement of all groups in this space. The declaration also includes a commitment to hold presidential and legislative elections within one year in Gaza, the West Bank, including Jerusalem.** The elections include a vote for the Palestinian Legislative Council, which operates as a parliament in the occupied Palestinian territory, and one for the Palestinian National Council, the PLO’s legislative body in which Palestinians and diaspora Palestinians also participate. Algeria offered to host the sessions of the Palestinian National Council after its election. The agreement also specifies that an Arab-Algerian team would be responsible for supervising the implementation of the agreement. **According to reports, there were talks regarding the formation of a unity government, but in the end no mention was made of this issue in the final document.** The declaration was signed by Haniyeh on behalf of Hamas and by the head of the Fatah delegation, Azzam al-Hamed. Others who signed the document were the secretary-general of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), Tala Naji; senior PLO official Ahmed Majdalani; the secretary-general of the Palestinian National Initiative, Mustafa Barghouti; and the secretary-general of the Palestinian People’s Party, Bassam al-Salhi. President Abbas was not present at the ceremony in which the agreement was made official. The signing of the declaration took place in the Palace of Nations in Algiers, a symbolic setting, as Algerian President Tebboune recalled, since it was the same place where Yasser Arafat declared the independence of the Palestinian state in 1988.

The Algerian declaration was welcomed by the UN Secretary-General, who urged the parties to fulfil the commitments made, especially with regard to holding elections. However, the announcement was met with

The Palestinian population was reticent and pessimistic about the prospects of the agreement between Hamas and Fatah, since similar announcements in the past have not materialised in effective reconciliation

scepticism in Palestine. After dozens of meetings, rounds of contacts and over six previous agreements between the parties, including for the formation of a unity government, **the Palestinian population was pessimistic about the prospects of the agreement, partly due to similar announcements in the past that have failed to materialise.** A perception exists that the main Palestinian factions are not truly committed to the change because they benefit from the status quo. According to opinion polls released in the last quarter of 2022, two thirds of the Palestinian population does not believe that reconciliation efforts will lead to substantive changes on the ground. At the end of the year, a new round of talks between Palestinian factions in Algeria was announced, but no further details were revealed about the meetings or about the implementation of the Palestinian reconciliation agreement reached in Algiers.

At the Arab League summit in November, in which Algeria aimed to reaffirm a position of regional power, the Palestinian issue was once again present and was pointed out as one of the priorities for discussion. However, the first face-to-face meeting of the Arab League after the COVID-19 pandemic was held with several heads of state absent, including those of Morocco, Bahrain and the UAE, all of which signed the Abraham Accords, as well as the head of Saudi Arabia, which is expected to sign the agreements to normalise relations with Israel. The Arab League summit closed with a communiqué reiterating support for the Palestinian cause and commitment to some positions adopted in the past by Arab countries, in line with what is known as the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative. Nevertheless, **analysts and observers noted that the summit repeated known commitments and avoided controversial issues, including addressing and positioning itself on the Abraham Accords.** Critics said that regarding the Palestinian issue, the final declaration of the Arab League summit in Algeria is nothing more than rhetoric, since the normalisation agreements with Israel are not criticised even though they contravene principles established in the charter of the organisation.³

Gender, peace and security

The signing of the Algerian document for Palestinian reconciliation once again demonstrated the marginalisation of Palestinian women from the highest decision-making spaces, including in the field of peace and reconciliation. **No women signed the 13 October agreement in Algiers.** This exclusion persists despite the formal commitments made by the Palestinian Authority to international frameworks such as the Women, Peace and Security Agenda or the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW),

3. Mustafá Fetouri, *Arab leaders claim to promote Palestine, but actually do the opposite*, *Middle East Monitor*, 10 November 2022.

which was signed by the PA in 2014, but has not yet been published in the official Palestinian gazette. Palestinian women's organisations and analysts have stressed that there have been virtually no women in the delegations to address Palestinian reconciliation except for the meeting that led to the 2017 agreement, in which four women from three political parties participated. Nor has there been a significant female presence in the technical committees established to implement the reconciliation agreements signed in the past.

Syria	
Negotiating actors	Government, political and armed opposition groups
Third parties	UN, EU, Russia, Turkey, Iran, in addition to Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and ICRC (observers in the Astana process)
Relevant agreements	Geneva Communiqué from the Action Group for Syria (2012); UNSC Resolution 2254 in support of the International Syria Support Group Roadmap for a Peace Process (Vienna Statements (2015))

Summary:

Given the serious consequences of the armed conflict in Syria and amidst concern about the regional repercussions of the crisis, various regional and international actors have tried to facilitate a negotiated solution and commit the parties to a cessation of hostilities. However, regional actors' and international powers' different approaches to the conflict, together with an inability to reach consensus in the UN Security Council, have hindered the possibilities of opening the way to a political solution. After a brief and failed attempt by the Arab League, the UN took the lead in the mediation efforts, led by special envoys Kofi Annan (2012), Lakhdar Brahimi (2012-2014), Staffan de Mistura (2014-2018) and Geir Pedersen (since 2018). Other initiatives have come from the EU, United States, Russia and leaders of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG). In 2015, the ISSG peace talks in Vienna -led by Washington and Moscow and in which twenty countries and international organizations participated- resulted in a peace plan for Syria that was endorsed by Security Council resolution 2254 the ONU. As of 2017, in parallel to the UN-led Geneva process - which has included intra-Syrian talks promoted by De Mistura- a new channel began: the Russian-backed Astana process, which also involve Turkey and Iran. The various rounds of negotiations held since the beginning of the armed conflict have shown the deep differences between the parties and have not been able to halt the high levels of violence in the country.

In line with the situation observed in recent years, **formal negotiating schemes to address the armed conflict in Syria remained active in 2022, though no significant progress was made in the search for a political solution** after more than a decade of hostilities. Although the levels of lethality of the conflict have been decreasing in recent years, the country continues to be the scene of continuous acts of violence involving local, regional and international actors and the humanitarian crisis is at its

worst level since the start of the war.⁴ Given the significant role played by Russia in the Syrian armed conflict and in the ongoing negotiating schemes, they were indirectly affected by the war in Ukraine and its consequences, particularly by the significant deterioration in Moscow's relations with other international actors.

The UN-backed negotiating process for Syria continued to be promoted by the organisation's special envoy, Geir Pedersen. In this context, **two rounds of meetings were held with the Constitutional Committee throughout 2022, the seventh and eighth of this process initiated in September 2019**. The first meeting of the year (seventh round) took place in Geneva between 21 and 25 March. In four days of sessions, issues related to governance, state identity, symbols of the state and structure and functions of the public administrations were addressed. At the end of the four days, however, the Syrian opposition said that no significant changes had taken place and repeated its criticism of the government for its lack of effective involvement in the process. In this context, a new EU-backed meeting on Syria was held in Brussels in May, with the participation of around 50 countries, international organisations and UN agencies. The conference "Supporting the future of Syria and the region", the sixth annual meeting of its kind, aimed to support the United Nations' efforts to promote a political solution and raise funds for the Syrian refugee population and the countries hosting them. The EU decided not to invite Russia to this meeting and its high representative for foreign affairs and security justified the move by saying that, given its aggression against Ukraine, Moscow had shown that it had no interest in contributing to peace in the world.

The next (eighth) round of the Constitutional Committee was held between 30 May and 3 June. Four topics were discussed, one per day: using unilateral coercive measures from a constitutional perspective, preserving and strengthening state institutions, upholding the supremacy of the Constitution and the hierarchy of international agreements and pursuing transitional justice. On the fifth day, the parties presented and discussed their observations on the different issues. Although the UN special envoy said that some areas for potential rapprochement had been identified, significant disagreements persisted in others. Pedersen lamented the slow pace of the process and the inability to specify issues that could form part of an interim agreement. A ninth round of the Constitutional Committee was then scheduled for 25 to 29 July, but it did not take place. The Syrian government refused to participate and demanded a change in the venue for the negotiations, in line with the demands of its ally, Russia. Moscow proposed changing the meetings from Geneva, where they have been held since 2019, to a city like Muscat, Abu Dhabi, Algiers or Astana, since it no longer considered Switzerland an impartial actor.

4. See the summary on Syria in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts) in *Alert 2023! Report on armed conflicts, human rights and peacebuilding*, Icaria: Barcelona, 2023.

Faced with this situation, Pedersen asked all the actors involved to protect the political process in Syria from the disagreements they may have in other parts of the world. The UN special envoy tried to reactivate the negotiations in the following months and in meetings with members of the UN Security Council, he expressed concern about Damascus' lack of political will to become involved in the Constitutional Committee's work. **At the end of the year, Pedersen openly acknowledged that no serious efforts were being made to resolve the conflict politically. Nevertheless, the diplomat announced that he would persist in his political efforts, concentrating on his "step-by-step, step-for-step" approach,** which he pursued throughout the year. With this goal in mind, Pedersen held meetings in 2022 with multiple actors (the Syrian government and opposition, the EU, France, Germany, Italy, the Arab League, Egypt, Qatar, Russia, Turkey, the US and the UK) to explore actions that could impact the dynamics of the conflict and build trust. Through these meetings, he sought to identify the concessions that different actors could make in exchange for reciprocal actions from others on various issues, including the situation of kidnapped, detained, and disappeared persons; humanitarian assistance; conditions for the dignified, safe and voluntary return of refugees; socio-economic conditions and diplomatic affairs. Under this rationale, in December Pedersen met with representatives of the Syrian government and with the president of the Syrian Negotiation Commission (SNC) that represents the Syrian opposition.

At the end of the year, UN Special Envoy for Syria acknowledged that no serious efforts were being made to resolve the armed conflict politically

Meanwhile, **two new rounds of meetings were held in 2022 as part of the "Astana" process,** which has been active since January 2017 and promoted by Russia, Iran and Turkey, three of the international actors most involved militarily in the armed conflict in Syria. The 18th round of this format took place in the capital of Kazakhstan, Nur-Sultan (formerly Astana), between 15 and 16 June, and the 19th round was held there between 22 and 23 November. According to official notes released after these meetings, the commitment to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria and to UNSC Resolution 2254, which calls for a political solution to the conflict, were reaffirmed during the talks. Demonstrating the sensitivities and interests of the international actors that dominate the process, the participants also stressed their willingness to continue collaborating in the fight against terrorist actors and those with separatist agendas, while the use of unilateral sanctions was condemned. The working group on kidnapped, detained and disappeared persons created as part of the Astana process may have achieved the release of some prisoners. Representatives from Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, the UN and the International Committee of the Red Cross (CICR) continued to

participate as observers in the meetings of the Astana process. A new round of meetings was expected for the first quarter of 2023. Russia, Turkey and Iran also discussed the situation in Syria elsewhere, such as in a meeting in Tehran in July.

One of the most significant events observed during the year due to its potential impact on the dynamics of the conflict and the negotiations were the signs of rapprochement between Turkey and Syria. The government of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, a key supporter of Syrian opposition groups, showed signals of being willing to normalise relations with Bashar Assad's regime. In late December, the defence ministers and intelligence chiefs of Turkey and Syria met in Moscow in the first public meeting of its kind since the armed conflict started over a decade ago. The parties reportedly discussed immigration and the Kurdish issue. A week later, Erdogan assured that he was willing to meet with Assad "to promote peace and stability in Syria" and announced that the trilateral talks between Russia, Turkey and Syria that began in Moscow would continue. This would have been unthinkable just a few years ago, when both leaders traded harsh accusations. The possible thaw in Turkish-Syrian relations was received with particular concern by Syrian opposition groups and by the Syrian Kurdish group YPG. These meetings took place while Turkey was threatening a new incursion into northeastern Syria after blaming Kurdish groups for an attack in Istanbul in November.⁵

The change in Ankara's stance is attributed to various factors. Analysts point out that Turkey wants to take advantage of its stronger position on the international stage to press for its interests in Syria. A member of NATO, Turkey has tried to position itself as a mediator between Russia and the West and offers a safe space for Russian businesses and citizens in a context of increasing international sanctions against Moscow. Erdogan would like to force the withdrawal of Kurdish forces and prevent the establishment of autonomy in Syria. Ankara would also like for Damascus to consider the YPG a terrorist group and insists on creating a 30-kilometre buffer zone along the Turkish-Syrian border. Meanwhile, the Assad regime's preconditions for normalising relations with Ankara included the withdrawal of Turkish troops from Syria and the end of its support for rebel groups. However, Damascus may be forced to talk with Turkey because, as analysts suggest, the normalisation of Turkish-Syrian relations may have become one of Russia's key objectives. As observers have noted, Erdogan's electoral calculations are also a factor, as he is facing general elections in June 2023. Polls indicate that 60% of the Turkish population approves of negotiations with the Assad regime with the expectation that a re-establishment of relations could lead to the return of the Syrian refugee population (3.7

5. See the summary on Turkey (southeast) in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts) in *Alert 2023! Report on armed conflicts, human rights and peacebuilding*, Icaria: Barcelona, 2023.

million people in Turkey).⁶ Turkey is also interested in being involved in reconstruction projects in Syria. Finally, during 2022 the normalisation of relations intensified between the Syrian regime and the UAE, a country that also supported parts of the Syrian opposition in the past. After calling for Syria's reinstatement in the Arab League in 2021, the UAE became the first country to host Syrian President Assad in his first visit to an Arab country since the outbreak of the war.

Gender, peace and security

Syrian women have been demanding greater and more substantive participation in political discussions on the future of Syria since the negotiations began. As a result of these efforts, in 2019 they achieved 30% representation in the Constitutional Committee established as part of the UN-sponsored intra-Syrian talks. Throughout the year, the Women's Advisory Board (WAB) also remained active. Established in 2016 and made up of 15 Syrian women of different sensibilities, the WAB is the first consultative structure of its kind created by a UN special envoy. The WAB held regular discussions with Pedersen and his team to address issues related to the conflict and its resolution and the political process, offering its insight into the daily situation of Syrian women, men and boys. WAB meetings were mostly held in Geneva, Switzerland, although there was also a meeting in Oslo, Norway earlier in the year. The members of the WAB also continued to participate in other forums, such as the annual conference on Syria in Brussels promoted by the EU. During meetings with Pedersen and other senior UN officials, the WAB and other civil society actors expressed their concern and frustration at the deadlock in the political process and the enormous humanitarian needs facing the Syrian population.

The Gulf

Iran (nuclear programme)	
Negotiating actors	Iran, EEUU, P4+1 (France, United Kingdom, Russia and China plus Germany)
Third parties	EU, UN
Relevant agreements	Joint Plan of Action (provisional agreement, 2013), Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (2015)
Summary: Under scrutiny by the international community since 2002, the Iranian nuclear programme has become one of the main sources of tension between Iran and the West, particularly affecting Iran's relationship with the United States and Israel. After more than a decade of negotiations, and despite the fact that various proposals were made to resolve the conflict, the parties failed to reach an agreement and remained almost unchanged in their positions. The US,	

Israel and several European countries remained distrustful of Tehran and convinced of the military objectives of its atomic programme, whilst Iran continued to insist that its nuclear activities were strictly for civilian purposes and in conformance with international regulations. In this context, the Iranian atomic programme continued to develop whilst the UN Security Council, US and EU imposed sanctions on Iran and threats of military action were made, mainly by Israel. Iran's change of government in 2013 favoured substantive talks on nuclear issues, facilitated new rounds of negotiations and led to the signing of agreements aimed at halting the Iranian atomic programme in exchange for lifting the sanctions. Negotiations on the Iranian nuclear programme have been met with resistance by Israel, certain countries such as Saudi Arabia and groups in the United States in a context marked by historical distrust, questions of sovereignty and national pride, disparate geopolitical and strategic interests, regional struggles and more.

The negotiations over the Iranian nuclear programme experienced many ups and downs during the year, but at the end of 2022 the general trend was one of blocked efforts to restore the agreement reached in 2015 (Joiny Comprehensive Plan of Action, JCPOA). Beyond the issues under discussion in these talks, the overall process was affected by various factors. These included the Russian invasion of Ukraine and its consequent repercussions in rising tensions between various actors on the global scene; the international condemnation of Tehran for the intensification of its crackdown on the massive internal protests following the death in police custody of a young woman for not properly wearing the veil; and the US midterm elections in November, which also shaped Washington's calculations and position on the Iranian nuclear programme. The last negotiating process to restore the nuclear agreement was reactivated three years after the Trump administration decided to pull out of the nuclear agreement in 2018 and intensify sanctions against Iran. US presidential candidate Joe Biden promised that the US would return to the agreement during the election campaign in exchange for Iran's strict compliance with the commitments made. Tehran has formally maintained its adherence to the JCPOA, but in practice it has taken actions that contravene its provisions, especially regarding the limits for uranium enrichment.

Between April and June 2021, six rounds of negotiations were held in Vienna, which were suspended after the presidential election won by Ebrahim Raisi. The process resumed in October 2021 and the eighth round that began in December 2021 continued in the first few months of 2022. **In March 2022, after weeks of intense diplomatic activity, it seemed that an agreement had been very close and that the parties were close to a final text that addressed almost all the substantive issues they had raised.** However, the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the rise in international tension ended up affecting the dynamics of collaboration and the disagreements between Tehran and Washington on key

6. Fehim Tastekin, "Fledgling Turkish-Syrian dialogue faces bumpy road ahead", *Al-Monitor*, 14 January 2023.

issues once again blocked the process. The EU, which coordinated the talks, tried to reactivate the process in the following months. European External Action Service Deputy Secretary-General Enrique Mora travelled to Tehran in March to meet senior Iranian officials and address some of the most divisive issues. There were exchanges of proposals between the US and Iran and a round of indirect meetings in Qatar at the end of June, but no progress was made. In July, the head of European diplomacy, Josep Borrell, assured that “the best possible deal” had been submitted for the parties’ consideration. In August, the negotiations between the parties were resumed in Vienna and headway was made on some issues. Iran and the US exchanged a series of counterproposals, but they did not lead to an agreement. The last meetings between the negotiators took place in September, shortly before tension in Iran escalated due to anti-government protests.

The disagreements between the parties focus on three issues. The first has to do with Washington’s listing of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard (IRGC) as a terrorist organisation in 2019. This was an unprecedented decision, since it affects a state body from a third country, in this case a military body operating under the direct control of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, independently of the rest of the Iranian Armed Forces, which projects its influence in various countries in the region. Tehran wants Washington to remove the IRGC from its list of terrorist organisations during negotiations over the nuclear programme. The US government has insisted that it will only remove the IRGC from the list if certain conditions are met. In March, it was suggested that both Iran and the US refrain from attacking retired or active officers of the other country, in a context in which Tehran is still seeking reprisals for the assassination of senior General Qassem Soleimani by the Trump administration in January 2020. Later, Washington reportedly proposed removing the IRGC from the list in exchange for a broader and stricter nuclear agreement that goes beyond 2030 (the expiration date of the JCPOA) and includes new issues, such as Iran’s support for militias in the region.

A second point of contention has to do with the sanctions against Iran: Tehran insists that it will not reduce its enriched uranium reserves until Washington overturns the sanctions, while Washington assures that it will not lift the sanctions until these reserves decrease. Neither country can agree on which sanctions should be withdrawn or on the duration of a new agreement. **Tehran wants guarantees that the agreement will last and will not be struck down by a new US government.** According to analysts, some in Tehran even doubt whether Biden will be willing to keep it during his

term of office. Meanwhile, the US government says that it cannot satisfy Iran’s requirement because it cannot bind future administrations in the way that Tehran wishes. Another divisive issue revolves around the International Atomic Energy Agency’s (IAEA) investigation into Iran’s past activities related to nuclear material and three undeclared sites. Tehran stressed in September that the end of this investigation is a precondition for its full compliance with the nuclear deal. However, as analysts point out, the US and other European countries involved in the negotiations do not wish to nor can they limit the mandate of a United Nations agency whose mission is to monitor nuclear activity.

Regarding this last issue, France, Germany and the United Kingdom issued a joint statement denouncing that Tehran was reopening issues related to its international obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and stated that its demands cast serious doubts on its intentions and commitment to the JCPOA. Meetings in Vienna on this issue between the director of the IAEA, Rafael Grossi, and the head of the Iranian nuclear agency, Mohammad Eslami, produced no positive results. Thus, the **IAEA Governing Council passed a no-confidence resolution in late November (with China and Russia voting against it)**

condemning Iran and urging it to comply with the IAEA investigation. In response, the Iranian government announced days later that it had begun to enrich uranium to 60%, at the Fordow facility, a level just below what is needed to produce nuclear weapons. This percentage is also well above the 3.67% limit established in the nuclear agreement. Previously, the IAEA had warned that Iran had already accumulated 62.3 kilos of 60% uranium produced at Natanz, its main nuclear facility. The agency also warned that its verification and monitoring work had been severely affected by Tehran’s decision to dismantle the devices installed for the surveillance and supervision of the JCPOA. In December, an IAEA delegation returned to Tehran to try to move towards an agreement. In this context, **the UN Secretary-General called on Iran to reverse the steps it had taken to distance itself from implementing the agreement since July 2019.** Previously, the head of the United Nations had warned that the delays and lack of diplomatic progress to re-establish the JCPOA undermined confidence that the agreement would help Iran to maintain a peaceful nuclear programme. During the last quarter of the year, Western countries said that Iran was responsible for transferring weapons, specifically drones, in violation of UN Security Council Resolution 2331, which was approved to support the JCPOA in 2015. Russia may have used these weapons in Ukraine.

In March, a deal on the nuclear agreement seemed close, but the dynamics of the negotiations were affected by the consequences of the Russian invasion of Ukraine

Yemen	
Negotiating actors	Government, Houthis / Ansar Allah, Saudi Arabia
Third parties	UN, Oman, Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)
Relevant agreements	Stockholm Agreement (2018), Riyadh Agreement (2019)

Summary:

forced Ali Abdullah Saleh to step down as president after more than 30 years in office. The eventful aftermath led to a rebellion by Houthi forces and former President Saleh against the transitional government presided over by Abdo Rabbo Mansour Hadi, who was forced to flee in early 2015. In March 2015, an international coalition led by Saudi Arabia decided to intervene militarily in the country in support of the deposed government. Since then, levels of violence in the conflict have escalated. Given this turn of events, the United Nations, which has been involved in the country since the beginning of the transition, has tried to promote a political solution to the conflict, joined by some regional and international actors. Despite these initiatives, the meetings were unsuccessful, and the talks have been at an impasse since mid-2016. It was not until late 2018 that meetings between the parties resumed and led to the signature of the Stockholm Agreement at the end of that year, arousing cautious expectations about the possibilities of a political solution to the conflict. The hostilities have significantly worsened the security and humanitarian situation in the country. In 2019, under the mediation of Saudi Arabia, various actors signed the Riyadh Agreement to try to resolve the struggles and differences within the anti-Houthis faction.

The year 2022 was one of change and oscillation in Yemen, including an escalation of the armed conflict at the start of the year, a ceasefire agreement between April and October and a climate of uncertainty and the prospect of a possible intensification of the fighting in the last quarter because the truce was not renewed.

As in previous years, the negotiations were promoted primarily by the United Nations, although Oman also played an important role in the bilateral meetings between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis throughout the year. Disagreements between the anti-Houthi actors continued, despite the accord mediated by Riyadh in the past and some important institutional developments.

The year began with a rise in violence that had previously been observed in 2021 as part of the Houthis' campaign to take control of the central city of Maarib that was repelled by armed groups supported by the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The Houthis' attacks against the UAE and Saudi Arabia and the reprisals from both countries set off alarms of the possible regional expansion of the conflict and made January 2022 the month with the highest number of civilian casualties in Yemen in the last three years.⁷ In February, the UN Security Council approved the resolution renewing the sanctions against Yemeni actors, including the Houthis as an actor subject to a weapons embargo (UNSC Resolution 2624). In this

context, UN Special Envoy Hans Grundberg continued with his activities. In early March, the diplomat held consultations with different Yemeni actors (political party and civil society representatives and experts) in Amman, Jordan to identify principles and priorities for a future political process in Yemen. In mid-March, Grundberg met in Muscat (Oman) with the Houthis' chief negotiator, Mohamed Abdulsalam, who welcomed the proposal for a truce during Ramadan, a holy month for the Muslim population. In late March, the Houthis announced a three-day truce and said they were willing to release prisoners.

The 1 April the UN formally announced that, for the first time since 2016, the parties to the conflict had agreed to a nationwide truce for an initial period of two months with the possibility of an extension. The truce began on 2 April, coinciding with the beginning of Ramadan. The UN insisted that the purpose of the truce was to create a favourable environment for a peaceful resolution of the conflict and that the parties should not take advantage of it to regroup to resume armed operations later. The truce consisted of five points, including military and humanitarian aspects. First, it established a halt to all types of military offensives (land, air and sea) inside and outside Yemen and the maintenance of existing military positions on the ground to date. Second, the agreement provided for the entry of ships with fuel (18 in two months, as specified) to the port of Al Hudaydah. Third, it allowed the resumption of commercial flights (two per week) to and from Sana'a, the Houthi-controlled Yemeni capital, with two specific destinations: Jordan and Egypt. Fourth, the truce stipulated that talks would begin to agree on opening motorways in various governorates of the country to facilitate the movement of civilians, including Ta'iz, which has been besieged by the Houthis for years. Finally, the agreement committed the parties to continue working with the UN special envoy to take steps to end the war.⁸ Analyses of the different actors' motivations to sign the truce included the wear and tear of two years of intense campaigning in Maarib, the Houthis' limited access to fuel, the serious military problems and internal struggles faced by the government of Abdo Rabbo Mansour Hadi and Riyadh's growing interest in distancing itself from the war.⁹

A few days after the truce was announced, major changes took place in the internationally recognised government of Yemen. **On 7 April, Hadi resigned from his position and transferred all his powers to the Presidential Leadership Council, made up of eight members, all of them men.** This decision was preceded by intra-Yemeni talks that brought together different anti-Houthi actors in Riyadh in late March at the request of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

7. For further information, see the summary on Yemen in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, (Armed conflicts) in *Alert 2023! Report on armed conflicts, human rights and peacebuilding*, Icaria: Barcelona, 2023.
8. Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary General for Yemen, *United Nations Initiative For A Two-Month Truce*, OSESGY, 1 April 2022.
9. International Crisis Group, *How Houthi-Saudi Negotiations Will Make or Break Yemen*, Crisis Group Middle East Briefing no. 89, 29 December 2022.

According to reports, Riyadh pressured Hadi to resign and both Saudi Arabia and the UAE played a decisive role in selecting the members of the Presidential Leadership Council, which then came to be led by Rashad al-Alimi.¹⁰ The presidential declaration that announced the creation of this council recognised that its tasks include negotiating with the Houthis to reach a permanent ceasefire and a political solution that can take Yemen from a state of war to one of peace.¹¹ The Consultation and Reconciliation Commission was also created, made up of 50 members and a legal and economic team to advise the Presidential Leadership Council.¹² However, the establishment of the Presidential Leadership Council did not resolve the differences and struggles between the anti-Houthi forces, which continued to lead to disagreements throughout the year.

In the months that followed, the UN continued with its diplomatic efforts, which took shape in direct negotiations between the parties in Amman and “shuttle diplomacy” conducted by the special envoy. Grundberg visited Sana’a for the first time since he took office, met with the head of the Presidential Leadership Council and travelled to Riyadh, Muscat and Tehran (with the Houthis’ support) to explore a possible extension of the truce. The UN also promoted the creation of a military coordination committee made up of representatives of the government, the Saudi-led coalition and the Houthis. Despite some violations, the suspension of hostilities established by the truce was generally fulfilled. At the same time, commercial flights were restored from Sana’a in May (the first in almost six years) and the arrival of oil through the port of Al Hudaydah partially alleviated the fuel crisis in the country, which was also affected by the repercussions of the war in Ukraine. The United Nations mission (UNMHA) also continued its work in Al Hudaydah, where it supports the implementation of the agreement on this port and on those of Salif and Ras Issa as part of the 2018 Stockholm Agreement. Furthermore, the mandate of the mission was approved for one more year in July 2022. There was no progress on reopening the roads in Ta’iz and other governorates, despite the meetings held between the parties. The Houthis’ refusal to accede to the government’s demands supported the feeling within the Presidential Leadership Council that the implementation of the truce agreement was benefiting their adversaries.

Despite these obstacles, **the ceasefire agreement was renewed twice, in June and in August, but not in October.**

The truce agreement in Yemen had positive effects on decreasing the number of victims of the armed conflict, the number of displaced people and levels of food insecurity

The UN special envoy had proposed an extension of the truce from two to six months along with another set of measures: the payment of salaries and pensions to civil servants, the opening of specific routes in Ta’iz and other governorates, additional destinations for flights from Sana’a, unrestricted entry of fuel through the port of Al Hudaydah, a commitment to release detainees and a strengthening of de-escalation mechanisms through the military coordination committee. According to him, the Yemeni government was willing to renew the truce despite its reluctance due to the persistent blockade of Ta’iz. The Houthis were held responsible for the failure to uphold the agreement by including additional demands, particularly their intention that the military forces under their control be included in the payment of salaries to public officials. According to reports, the group demanded that the funds be transferred to an account controlled by the Houthis and that the money come from government oil and gas exports. Amidst growing uncertainty due to the possibility of a resumption of violence, **the UN special envoy persisted in his diplomatic activities in the last quarter in order to re-establish the truce and highlighted its positive effects. According to estimates, the victims of the conflict fell by 60%, forced displacements dropped by half and the number of people affected by food insecurity was also partially reduced.** Until late 2022, large-scale hostilities had not resumed and some aspects of the UN-sponsored agreement remained in place, such as the reopening of the Sana’a airport to civilian flights and oil imports through Al Hudaydah. Nevertheless, some called attention to indications that the parties were taking advantage of the de facto pause in hostilities to prepare for a new phase of violence and that they had stepped up their economic warfare.

In this context, **the bilateral dialogue between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis remained active, with Oman facilitating.** These talks, which already had precedents (2019), were resumed virtually in June 2022 and became the main negotiating track during the last quarter. Although the parties struck a more conciliatory tone, by the end of the year there were no related agreements and the parties offered different versions of the terms of the talks. Sources close to the talks reported that the Houthis wanted a written commitment from Riyadh that would satisfy their demands to end the armed conflict, including lifting all kinds of restrictions on the Sana’a airport and the port of Al Hudaydah, the payment of salaries, including for their security forces, the withdrawal of Saudi Arabia

10. The Presidential Leadership Council is made up of representatives of various anti-Houthi groups. In addition to Rashad al-Alimi, who was the interior minister in the early 2000s, the Council consists of Maarib Governor Sultan al-Arada, National Resistance Forces leader Tareq Saleh, Giants Brigades Commander Abdulrahman Abu Zara’a, Chief of Staff of the Presidential Office Abdullah al-Alimi Bawaseer, Member of Parliament Othman al-Majali, Southern Transitional Council President Aiderous al-Zubaidi and Hadramawt Governor Faraj al-Bahsani.

11. Security Council Report, *May 2022 Monthly Forecast: Yemen*, 29 April 2022.

12. Saba, *Presidential declaration on the transfer of power and the formation of a Presidential Leadership Council*, Saba (Yemeni News Agency), 7 April 2022.

from the war, the end of Riyadh's support for the Presidential Leadership Council and payment to the Houthis for reconstruction. Some analysts pointed to the risks stemming from the exclusion of other Yemeni actors from the negotiations between Riyadh and the Houthis and underlined the importance of restoring the multilateral format that the UN was trying to promote. Finally, various international actors were involved in the Yemeni negotiating process throughout the year. For example, the US continued to be involved through its special envoy for Yemen, Timothy Lenderking, who continued to work in coordination with the UN special envoy. The armed conflict in Yemen was also high on US President Biden's agenda in his meetings with the Saudi leadership during his visit to the region in July. The self-styled "Quintet", made up of Oman, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, the US and the UK, also held meetings on Yemen during 2022.

Gender, peace and security

Despite their prominent role in peace and security activities, Yemeni women remained excluded from power and decision-making relevant to a political resolution of the conflict. During the Feminist Summit that brought together Yemeni political and civil society actors with the UN special envoy in December, Grundberg noted that there had been a persistent decline in the already limited number of women involved in formal peace negotiations since 2015. During 2022, Yemeni activists repeated that participation levels were well below the 30% representation threshold in decision-making agreed in 2014 during the conclusions of the National Dialogue Conference. There were no women in the committees

established after the adoption of the Stockholm agreement in 2018 (on prisoner exchange, military security and Ta'iz). In the intra-Yemeni talks sponsored by the Gulf Cooperation Council, which bring together anti-Houthi actors, female participation in different spheres has improved, but women remained excluded from discussions on security and anti-terrorism. The new Presidential Leadership Council created after Hadi's resignation in April that tried to represent the different anti-Houthi forces was formed without any women present. In the Consultation and Reconciliation Commission, the executive team included a woman among its five members.

Throughout the year, the UN special envoy held various meetings with Yemeni actors who are not among the parties to the dispute represented in the negotiations, including women activists, experts and civil society representatives. As part of his attempts to promote a multilevel peace process, Grundberg held such a meeting in Amman in May to discuss the implementation of the truce and priorities for a future political process. The office of the special envoy organised another meeting in November to address the challenges of including a gender perspective in Track II activities. Yemeni groups also organised their own discussions and took advantage of platforms such as UN Security Council briefings to articulate their demands, including defence of the 30% threshold for decision-making, the urgent need to address the economic recovery of the country and a halt to arms transfers that perpetuate the cycle of violence. Various Yemenis also denounced the harassment of human rights activists defenders and demanded an end to the growing restrictions on women's freedom of expression and mobility, especially criticising the Houthis' mandatory impositions of male guardians (*mahram*).

