Executive Summary

This policy paper addresses the presentation and analysis of “the blockade against Yemen and its various effects on women” as part of a group of activities in a project carried out by the Youth Leadership & Development Foundation under the theme of “Women Leaders for Peace”. This theme is a project which aims to ensure a comprehensive peace building process that takes into account the sensitive gender in Yemen through civil society organizations and strong community initiatives capable of communicating and representing the needs and voices of affected women at the local, national and international levels.

The land, sea and air blockade imposed on Yemen since 2015 has led to an alarming deterioration of the economic and humanitarian situation by exacerbating economic imbalances, which have had an enormous impact on the lives of Yemenis in general and on women in particular; signaling a major humanitarian crisis in the country. This paper was therefore divided into three parts:

Part I
This part addresses the blockade on Yemen, noting the significant deterioration in the economic, social and humanitarian situation, by reviewing the most important imbalances and identifying the key indicators that have worsened as a result of the blockade, including low average per capita income and worsening poverty and unemployment rates. In addition, the country faces a decline in expatriate remittances and the collapse of exchange rates; not to mention the decline in the level of health services to their lowest levels. This portion of the paper concluded that the Yemeni economy was not in a good condition before the blockade but had reached the point of collapse due to the war in 2015.

Part II
This part focusses on highlighting the blockade’s different effects on Yemeni women by addressing the complications of the exacerbating imbalances caused by the embargo previously indicated in Part I to show how severely they affect women’s lives, their stability, their standard of living, their work, their health level, their community participation and the resurgence of the child marriage and other effects that have been reflected negatively on their lives.

This portion concluded that the blockade in general and the siege of the Sana’a International Airport in particular had a number of negative effects on the lives of Yemeni women, perhaps the most important of which were the low levels of income in which some families had reached zero and the increasing poverty rates, the high unemployment rate among women which was at a high level prior to the blockade but it was dreadfully aggravated when it was imposed on the country. Also, the educational and health levels have remarkably deteriorated, resulting in a high dropout rate, increased mortality and a deterioration in the health level of women, the resurgence of child marriage, the low level of community and international participation of women, the high levels of harassment and violation of women’s rights particularly when travelling and the difficulties they face as a result of the

(1) The views in the policy paper do not necessarily represent the views of the Youth Leadership Development Foundation and its partners.
Importance of the Paper

Since 2015, Yemenis have been suffering from the blockade. Sanaa International Airport has been closed to air traffic and travel has been badly affected. Also, the travel of women in particular has become extremely difficult. The cost of travel has doubled and the road trip to Aden or Siyoun Airports have become fraught with risks as a result of the ongoing conflict and the increasing checkpoints of all parties to the conflict, not to mention the less movement of vessels and ships in the ports of Hodeidah and Al-Salif. Also, the enormous gender gap in all areas as well as unequal economic, social and political opportunities have worsened the situation. It was indicated in the Gender Gap Index in 2015 that Yemen is ranked the last state over the last seven consecutive years. Yemen is ranked last among 135 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index. It was therefore natural that the suffering of Yemenis in general and women in particular would be doubled in these situations. It was therefore necessary to focus on the embargo imposed on Yemen and its various effects on women in order to achieve the policies and procedures that must be followed to address this problem and reduce its impact on women, and this paper will seek to address so.

Introduction:

Since 2015, Yemenis have been suffering from the blockade. Sanaa International Airport has been closed to air traffic and travel has been badly affected. Also, the travel of women in particular has become extremely difficult. The cost of travel has doubled and the road trip to Aden or Siyoun Airports have become fraught with risks as a result of the ongoing conflict and the increasing checkpoints of all parties to the conflict, not to mention the less movement of vessels and ships in the ports of Hodeidah and Al-Salif. Also, the enormous gender gap in all areas as well as unequal economic, social and political opportunities have worsened the situation. It was indicated in the Gender Gap Index in 2015 that Yemen is ranked the last state over the last seven consecutive years. Yemen is ranked last among 135 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index. It was therefore natural that the suffering of Yemenis in general and women in particular would be doubled in these situations. It was therefore necessary to focus on the embargo imposed on Yemen and its various effects on women in order to achieve the policies and procedures that must be followed to address this problem and reduce its impact on women, and this paper will seek to address so.

Objective of the Paper

Based on what was indicated previously, the paper aims to discuss the blockade against Yemen and its various effects on women and to make a number of recommendations to the concerned authorities on policies and measures to be taken in order to counter the embargo and achieve peace to realize economic recovery and to involve women at all stages of this recovery.

Importance of the Paper

The significance of the paper stems from the importance of its theme, the embargo imposed on Yemen and its various effects on women. This issue and its negative repercussions have affected the vast majority of Yemeni people, their standards of living and income, and even the level of essential services in recent years, and an in even more obviously the way it had a severe effect on the lives of Yemeni women. The embargo has also resulted in a real economic crisis in women's lives which had become more complicated than before the blockade was imposed. If this siege continues, it will threaten the future of development and further deteriorate the economic situation and social welfare of women.

(2) The term fragility is used to describe a diverse set of relationships between State, civil society and citizens. The concept of fragility allows a departure from the often artificial divide between ‘humanitarian’ and ‘development’ settings (Programming in Fragile and Conflict – Affected Counties, Program me Policy Guidelines, Oxfam, 2011)

(3) The World Bank, the Status of Yemeni Women ... From an Ambition to Opportunity Realization, May 2014.

The paper will use a composite methodology based on a number of scientific analysis tools, which, as a whole, represent a coherent approach to this paper. The most prominent of which are:

- Descriptive analysis, comparative methodology; guided by methodologies, analytical methods and tools provided by previous studies, researches, and published reports.
- The method of active participation and interaction with all relevant bodies through visits and interviews with specialists in ministries and official and unofficial bodies in Yemen; use of advice, data and information to prepare the paper.
- A focus group discussion with a variety of society groups taking into account the diversity of the gender and a case study.

1. The Unjust blockade against Yemen

During the pre-embargo period, the economic situation in Yemen has been characterized by poor performance, but it has deteriorated further in a frightening manner after the embargo, affecting all sectors and all segments of society, and the country’s economic activities as well as exacerbating the economy’s imbalances including, for example, the following:

1.1 Reduced Per Capita Income and Worsening Poverty Rates

The per capita gross domestic product (GDP) has shrunk at the current prices from about $1247 in 2014 to $485 in 2017, which means that per capita real GDP decreased by 55.1% and thus the level of the living standard to a far minimum level, resulting in Yemen ranked among the poorest countries in the world.

The poverty rates in Yemen have worsened from 42% in 2014 to 78.8% in 2017. The Economic Indicators Report in Yemen indicates that 85% of the population live below the poverty line. The United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator for Yemen, Mark Lecoq, also warned that the continuation of the siege would bring Yemen into the famine, which would be «the world’s largest famine in several decades, leaving millions of victims».

1.2 Worsening Unemployment Rates

The employment opportunities for both men and women have been reduced as a result of the destruction of infrastructure. The situation has even worsened further upon the blockade as a result of the interruption of a number of projects, the closure of some of them and a number of mass layoffs – 12% of the companies have laid off 22% of their employees. Foreign companies operating in the oil sector have also left the country, and thousands of workers including engineers and technicians have been discharged without severance and entitlements. Overall, unemployment rates jumped from 26.1% in 2014 to 75% in 2017.

Young people constituted the majority of these victimized, as a result.

1.3 The Collapse of the Oil and Gas Sector

The embargo and the war on Yemen caused the stoppage of exports of the oil and gas sector on which the Yemeni economy depends to a large extent. The interruption of oil and gas production has led to a decline in oil and gas revenues in 2015 by about 77.1% compared to 2014. Consequently, the overall state revenues in 2015 have deteriorated by about 53.7%, forcing the state to be unable to pay salaries and wages since September 2015, and to provide for the basic needs and the loss of the country’s most important sources of foreign exchange from oil and gas. In addition, many productive and vital operations related to the life of Yemenis came to a halt causing the power supply to stop too, not to mention the failure of many projects that relied on oil and its derivatives; resulting in so many employees, men and women, to lose their jobs and a significant rise in unemployment and poverty rates.

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(10) Economic Observatory for Studies and Consultations, the Impact of Fragility and Conflict in Yemen on Decent Work, (March, 2017). P. 36.
(11) 2013 – 2014 Workforce Survey; however, it is insignificant compared to the international sources for example, see World Economic Forum, the Forum of young Global Leaders, (2011).” Accelerating Entrepreneurship in Arab World, A World Economic Forum report in collaboration with BOOZ & Company, 7.
(12) According to unofficial sources, according to the Focal Point Session.
(14) Ala Qasem and Brett Scott, Navigating Yemen’s Wartime Food Pipeline, Deep Root Research, Analysis, (November 2017).
1.4 Decline in remittances
Remittances by Yemenis living and working out of the country are particularly important for the country as many Yemeni families depend for their livelihood on the remittances of their family members outside Yemen. Also, the severity of life and living conditions in Yemen is compounded by the decrease in remittances as a result of the following:

1. Interruption of cash transfer programs during the embargo
2. Significant reduction in externally funded livelihood support programs

The blockade has affected the livelihood of the families who are mainly dependent on such remittances. These remittances have constituted more than 50% of the income of the families, which accounts for 70% of the cases. Remittances are not only important to families but are also of great importance to the country’s economy. The value of annual remittances exceeds foreign direct investment flows, grants and official development assistance; underscoring therefore the importance of remittances as a major source of financial flows to Yemen. The remittances of Yemenis working out of the country are characterized by relative stability as they represented the first source of hard currency inflow from abroad to Yemen during the war in 2015 through 2017. The remittances were estimated at $3.4 billion in 2017.

In addition, there is a siege on Yemeni expatriates abroad, forcing many of them to return to Yemen, thus putting pressure on the labor market and on the balance of the fragile Yemeni economy. In particular, most of the Yemeni expatriates live in Saudi Arabia, which has applied severe procedures and substantial amounts of money on the stay and the issuance of resident permits. The expatriates’ situation has worsened to the extent of their deportation with a pledge they have to make not to return to Saudi Arabia even for performing haj (pilgrimage).

1.5 Deterioration of Exchange Rates
The deterioration of the value of the Yemeni riyal versus the U.S. dollar has had a severe impact on the decrease of the purchasing power for the Yemeni people. The real exchange rate for the U.S. dollar jumped from YR 215 in 2014 to YR 476 to the U.S. dollar in mid-January 2018, reaching 490 riyals per U.S. dollar in April 2-18. Also exchange rate fluctuations were immediately reflected in the prices of goods and services, the purchasing power of the national currency and the living standards of the population in view of the high degree of exposure of the Yemeni economy to the world economy – the ratio of exports and imports to GDP – as well as the high cost of domestic production due to the high prices of imported intermediate and capital goods, which affected the general price levels causing the inflation rate to rise from 8.2% in 2014 to 30% in 2015.

1.6 Low Level of Health Services
Yemen has suffered from a weakness in its health system. There is a shortage of hospitals, health centers, medicines, etc. The embargo has also aggravated the health sector problems and has led to its dramatic and unprecedented deterioration. The World Health Organization (WHO) stated that about one million Yemenis are in need for basic health care, in addition to the fact that there are 2129 deaths from cholera. The diphtheria – a disease that is easily preventable – has also spread in 13 governorates, with a total of 189 clinically diagnosed cases and 20 deaths, and the figures continue to increase.

The impact of the embargo on the health sector in Yemen has been further complicated by:

1. The emigration of many health professionals, doctors, pharmacists, professionals and nurses, due to the interruption of salaries caused largely by the economic embargo; having therefore a negative impact on the majority of the population.
2. Shortage of medicines and, if available, they are sold in high prices, the cost of medical tests and medical supplies has generally doubled. Also, many important medical devices and equipment have ceased to function due to the unavailability of oil derivatives – fuels – to operate, all of which coincided with a sharp decline in the income of the Yemeni citizens.

(16) Ala Qasem and Brett Scott, Navigating Yemen’s Wartime Food Pipeline, Deep Root Research, Analysis, (November 2017). p. 9
(18) For more details, see “The Impact of Fragility and Conflict in Yemen on Employment, op. cit., p. 60.
(19) For more details, see world Bank, Data, Research, Prospect Bilateral Estimates Migrant stocks in 2010.
(20) According to a staff member at the Ministry of Expatriates at the Focus Seminar held at the Youth Leadership & Development Foundation.
(22) See: Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, Economic and Social Update, Issue 17, August 2016. For more details, see: Taha Al-Fusail (2016), Yemen from the Siege to the Economic warfare, Economic Observatory of for Studies and Consultations.
2. The Effects of the Economic Blockade on Women

Although the economic and social effects of the embargo have affected all classes of Yemeni society, they have been more severe on women by virtue of their responsibilities and social status; making them the class the suffered and lost the most. This will be explained in our discussion of a number of the embargo consequences including, but not limited to the following:

2.1 Effects of the Closure of Sana'a International Airport

The United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator for Yemen, Jamie McGoldrick, stressed that the lift of the air blockade on Sana'a International Airport was necessary to resume commercial flights in order to ease the suffering of the civilian people. He noted how serious the embargo is on imports and the difficulty of transporting patients suffering from serious illnesses such as cancer.

Yemeni women also face many problems due to the closure of the Sana'a Airport, including:

2.1.1 Obstruction of Women and Community in International Participation

According to several activists of the focus group and in the depth interviews, the blockade that caused the closure of the Sana'a International Airport made travel extremely difficult for women because of the many problems and hardships facing them:

A. The difficulty to obtain the agreement of the parents to the travel of some of the women, the reluctance of others, and other risks of traveling because of the length of the journey, given the distance to Sana'a. Both roads are distant and fraught with security risks, not to mention the violence or sexual harassment women may be subject to and the increasing financial burdens.

B. Prevention of some women from proceeding in their trips and returning others from the road by some extremist groups on the pretext that there is no mahram. Furthermore, the situation has reached the point where women are harassed at some hotels when they check in to wait for their flights or upon their return to the country. They are not even allowed to stay at the hotels on the pretext that there is no mahram.

2.1.2 The Airblockade has contributed to the deterioration of the health level

"The closure of the airport has serious repercussions on patients seeking urgent medical treatment abroad, as the national health system is unable to treat all cases, especially chronic, or life-threatening illnesses such as cancer," McGoldrick said at a press conference.

"Lifting the ban on humanitarian and relief flights from Sana'a International Airport is an important but insufficient step," McGoldrick said at the same press conference. It must include allowing civilian flights to transport patients and injured persons in need of treatment abroad, and if the ban is not completely lifted from Sana'a Airport and allowing civilian flights, the benefit is not more than 10%, pointing out that “80% of Yemen's population has been affected by the denial of civilian flights to Sana'a Airport. Limiting the operation of the airport to humanitarian flights only threatens tens of thousands of people with death.”

Thus, in order to alleviate the suffering of Yemeni women as a result of the blockade imposed on the country, the ban on Sana'a International Airport and so other airports and ports must be completely lifted and their operations have to resume as soon as possible.

2.2 Return to primitive and physically and morally stressful methods, such as:

(a) Manual washing of clothes instead of using a washing machine
(b) Fetching firewood and using it in place of gas to cook food
(c) Transportation of water from remote locations due to water outages and the high price of water transported by trucks
(d) They have to stay close to gas cylinders at the stations for fear of being removed from the gas lines; leaving their homes and children and even being absentee from their work sometimes. In addition, some of the women who were on the gas queues said that they had been harassed. Even when the supply of gas cylinders is organized through the heads of districts, it is subject to the patronage, nepotism and mediation.

(e) Fraudsters promise poor people, including widows, divorced and destitute women that they will help in the supply of gas cylinders but they steal and sell all their gas cylinders and escape out of the country.

Case study: I am a Yemeni woman from the city of Dhamar, I am very poor. Myself and my family don’t have much to eat. I am a widow and have three daughters and a boy. I was deceived by a person who took advantage of the gas crisis and tricked a lot of people in the city into promising them to fill the gas cylinders for free. When trusted by several people, he disappeared, and the police discovered that he had sold all our gas cylinders and escaped the country.

Source: In-depth interview on 8 April 2018 with one of the Yemeni women who suffered from the problem of lack of gas and the high cost of prices.

(26) https://www.alahednews.com.lb
2.3 The low average per capita income and worsening poverty rates have had a strong impact on women’s lives as the level of spending has declined and even some families did not have funds to make the ends meet. All of this resulted in a significant reduction in the level of nutrition, a sharp decline in health services, a deterioration in the education sector, and a high girls’ dropout rate in education. Also, it is reported that the child marriage phenomenon has resurfaced, increasing rates of singularity and divorce, and worsening family problems.

2.4 The rise in unemployment and the scarcity of decent work opportunities have led to:
(a) Working women and those seeking employment have been significantly affected by the lack of employment and job opportunities, as well as the difficulty of mobility and access to their workplaces as a result of the high cost of transportation.
(b) Many women have worked in areas that do not fit their qualifications in search of making ends meet. Some have even been forced to serve in other people’s homes for cheap wages, but they are the least compared to the wages of Ethiopians, Somalis, and others. Even worse than this is that some illiterate women and those who do not have sufficient skills have used to beg for money.

2.5 Due to the rise of exchange rate, inflation and price rises in general, and the prices of food commodities, about 17 million out of 28 million people are food insecure, complicating, as a result, the burdens placed on women as well as the worry about tomorrow’s sustenance and the widening circle of poverty and hunger. Moreover, in the post-embargo period, the girls’ dropout rate has increased significantly as a result of the high cost of living and their preoccupation with work inside and outside the home; reflecting badly on their lives and service to the community.

2.6 The severe decline in health services has resulted in women’s basic health needs are not provided for, such as health care during pregnancy, childbirth and even after childbirth. Lack of attention to maternal health does not only damage their health situation but may also result in maimed or sick children. For example, the United Nations Population Fund estimated by the end of 2017 that up to 1,000 pregnant women could die or face life-threatening complications during a period of up to six months due to poor services and a shortage of qualified medical personnel.

Case study: I’m a Yemeni woman from a family that has a place in the community, and I have three children. I work as a teacher in a state school and my husband is an accountant. As a result of the interruption of salaries and the cost of living due to the blockade, the war and the lack of decent jobs, I was forced to work at home with a private Yemeni family to provide for the necessary sustenance for my children.

Source: An in-depth interview with a Yemeni woman who was forced to serve in secret in homes to provide the necessary sustenance for her children, April 15, 2018.

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(28) According to what was stated in the Focus Discussion Group
(29) Based on the current living situation, the bus fare has raised from YER 50 to YER 100 per passenger.
(30) Based on a statement by a gender researcher in a Discussion Focus
It is clear that the worsening crisis is reflected much in the delay of the actual beginning of its treatment by diagnosing its various effects. Such a step is essential and can only be realized through firm treatment of this crisis officially by the relevant actors, not just a media and psychological call for people to coexist with the crisis and exercise patience with it. Hence, some recommendations and alternatives had to be developed as follows:

### Recommendations

#### International Community
- The ban of Sana’a International Airport has to be completely and immediately lifted as it is of paramount importance to the lives of Yemenis in general and to the life, activity, health, participation, work and livelihood of Yemeni women in particular.
- Make every effort to lift the siege of all airports and sea-ports in Yemen.
- The United Nations and its humanitarian partners should ensure that humanitarian assistance is delivered in Yemen. Care should be taken to monitor the non-delay or obstruction of ships carrying food-stuffs, humanitarian assistance, medicines and medical supplies, in particular medication materials for chronic diseases and children’s vaccines.
- Urgent support and aids have to be provided to the poor and the disadvantaged Yemenis affected by the blockade.
- Affirming that all parties to the armed conflict in the country respect international laws and the relevant provisions on the rights of women.
- Supporting the projects and programs that reduce barriers to women’s empowerment such as programs that address violence against women, girls’ education and training programs, and women’s political participation.
- Redressing and protecting Yemeni expatriates against violations by some countries and the application of international covenants and treaties relating to the protection of migrant workers.
- Resumption of donor support and the payment of deposits into the Central Bank of Yemen by some countries.

#### Local Organizations
- Development of business activities for post-embargo projects in coordination with various financiers such as the International Finance Corporation, World Bank, UNICEF and the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization.
- Contributing effectively to every effort that will spread the culture of dialogue and peace and work to uproot the culture of hostility, and paying attention to gender issues.
- Providing local services to support families and communities affected by the embargo.
- Mobilizing support for the state institutions such as the Central Bank of Yemen, the Social Welfare Fund and the state budget, and supporting revenue and income generation.
- Supporting the active participation of women in ending the embargo and mitigating its effects by training and making them aware of the importance of their role in lifting the embargo and mitigating its effects.
- Contributing to raising the voice of the affected women through research, scientific papers and specialized events on the embargo and its various effects, and to raise awareness among women themselves to defend their rights.
- Supporting the needs of women at local levels and such support has to be doubled during the crises.

#### Legislation and Laws
- Review of the existing legislations to ensure that the rights of women provided for in the Constitution are reflected in the above-mentioned proposals.
- Issue the law of the minimum age for marriage for girls must be set at 18 years and any violation must not go unpunished.
- Ensure that the draft of the Constitution in line with the international conventions and resolutions in support of women’s participation, the most important of which is Security Council Resolution 1325.
- The strict implementation of laws on violence and sexual harassment of women and the prohibition of all forms of violence against women.
- The integration of women’s rights, needs and perspectives into the political, legal and social decisions that aim to achieve a just and lasting peace.
• Brining peace and ending the conflict to reach a genuine reconciliation among all Yemenis.
• Striving to end the embargo by holding ongoing consultations and bringing the suffering of Yemenis to the attention of the international community.
• Setting up a crisis management team to get the country out of this crisis with the least loss, and to ensure the presence of women in this team.
• Restoration of key service delivery institutions and the return of the economy to its core functions.
• In the medium and long term, the government seeks to diversify its sources of revenues with a focus on the areas of primary and manufacturing industries, services and the agricultural sector; thereby contributing to the creation of employment opportunities.
• Following up on the rights of expatriate Yemeni nationals in the diaspora in accordance with the relevant international covenants and treaties.

About YLDF:
Our vision is a Yemen in which skilled, well qualified and active young women and men play leadership roles smartly in all domains of society and enable Yemenis to contribute to a better world.
Our mission is “to increase youth participation in social, political and economic aspects of society through systematic training and education in vocational, communication, leadership and soft skills in order to bring them in the main stream to respond to community and labor mark.

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