

# EQUIPPING YEMEN'S INFLUENTIAL WOMEN FOR GREATER IMPACT



Shayma winced as she slowly traced the letters of the Arabic alphabet in her literacy class. Her teacher Layla handed her a tissue and she set her pencil down to dab at the fresh blood oozing from the cracks in her fingers. Meanwhile, Layla turned away so that Shayma wouldn't see the tears in her eyes. "You can't tell the difference between a woman's hand and a man's hand in this village," Layla thought.

Shayma and her five sisters had never gone to school. Her father could only afford to send his only son to school, so he'd sent the girls to work the land and do the housework from the time they were able. One of their most difficult and time-consuming chores was drawing water from the local well for all their household needs. Sometimes it made their hands bleed. It was also risky. Periodically, they heard stories of a woman or a child falling into a well in their region and drowning. However, despite their heavy workload, when Layla started a literacy program in their village, Shayma and her sisters had jumped at the chance to learn. "I felt they had a real love for learning, and I felt that they'd been deprived," Layla explains. "In our society, women just have duties—they don't have rights."

Women and girls face many obstacles to learning in Yemen; however, throughout Yemen's war, local nonprofits have been working to increase their access to educational opportunities. In addition to operating literacy programs for women, this has included operating Alternative Education Centers (AECs) and building classrooms in rural areas. "People in the village are waiting eagerly to see the new school that a local nonprofit constructed begin operating," said the coordinator of one such AEC. "Until now, parents have to send their children to schools located far away, and girls are often the most impacted as they are forced to drop out of school very early."

Meanwhile, partners of International Christian Response (ICR) have been working to increase women's access to discipleship resources - regardless of their literacy levels - through audio programs produced in Yemeni dialects. This has impacted women like 40-year-old Amal, who recently gave her life to Christ. Although she is illiterate and struggles to understand Scripture, she was eager to grow in her faith. Listening to audio programs featuring Bible stories in her heart language has helped her to learn more about the God of the Bible and to begin incorporating Christ's teachings into her life. She was particularly inspired by the story of Ruth and her selfless love and devotion to her family. Amal has begun telling the stories that she hears on the audio programs to women in her village and encouraging them to learn the Bible regardless of their literacy level.

Scripture-based audio programs are also helpful for educated women in Yemen. “Although I have a college degree, I had difficulty understanding the Bible, as it contains words and phrases that aren’t commonly used,” shared a woman who came to faith a year ago. “My husband has been a believer for many years and he’s discipling me and my two daughters. One day, he played an audio program for us in Yemeni dialect, and we kept listening to more of them. In time, I noticed that understanding the Bible became easier for me. Listening to the programs also makes our daughters happy because it assures them that we are not alone as believers in our society and that there are many other families like ours.”

Despite their overall marginalization, a recent story from Marib highlighted the prominent role that women can play in conflict resolution within Yemen’s tribal communities. In this case, the mother of a convicted murderer secured a pardon for her son who was condemned to die.<sup>1</sup> Sadly, despite such influential roles in tribal life, women are largely excluded from Yemen’s peace talks. The renewal of diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran in March has led to speculation that the thawing of affairs between the two regional powers may accelerate peace talks between Saudi Arabia and the Iran-backed Houthis in Yemen. However, it is simultaneously raising concerns that an agreement reached between the two parties may invite further violence due to the exclusion of the Southern Transitional Council (STC) that maintains significant governing authority in the south of Yemen, as well as women and other groups representing the interests of Yemeni citizens around the country. Wedad Al Badwi, a journalist and member of the Yemeni Women’s Pact for Peace and Security asked, “Do we have to carry weapons and participate in war to be taken seriously by the UN and the warring parties and be granted a seat at the table?”<sup>2</sup>

With the 8th anniversary of the Saudi-led military intervention in Yemen passing on March 25th, Yemeni women like Amal invite you to join them in a key opportunity to pray for lasting peace in their nation. Throughout the month of Ramadan, which falls in March and April this year, devout Muslims pray, fast, reflect, and seek God’s forgiveness for their sins. Muhammad reported receiving his initial revelations of the Qur’an during Ramadan, and fasting during the month is one of the five pillars of Islamic practice. Thus, as Yemenis turn their minds to spiritual affairs, the global Church can pray alongside them that God will reveal His Word to them in Christ, including the forgiveness offered through His death and resurrection. Partners of ICR want to cover Yemen in prayer 24 hours a day, seven days a week from March 23rd through April 22nd, 2023. Visit [yemen.pray4movement.org](http://yemen.pray4movement.org) to sign up for 15-minute slots to help fill the 744 hours of prayer for the month. Currently, 93 percent of the timeslots are covered. A prayer guide with prompts for daily intercession will be provided to those who sign up, along with reminder emails for each time slot they register for. The link and details can be shared with anyone who would like to come before God’s throne of grace on behalf of Yemeni disciples living on the frontlines of the conflict, as well as the unreached Yemenis around them!

HELP SUPPORT OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS BY CLICKING ON THE LINK BELOW AND CHOOSING “CAP FUND”.

**CHRISTIANRESPONSE.ORG/GIVE**

1 <https://observers.france24.com/en/middle-east/20230306-a-rare-moment-of-grace-in-a-country-at-war-tribal-chief-in-yemen-forgives-man-involved-in-his-son-s-killing>

2 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/mar/12/detente-between-saudi-arabia-and-iran-is-no-panacea-for-yemen-war>