

ICCS hosts a meeting between members of the Yemeni diaspora and UK government officials

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Tuesday the 5th of March saw the University of Birmingham's Institute for Conflict, Cooperation and Security hosting a meeting between members of the Yemeni diaspora in the UK and a team from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, including the British Ambassador to Yemen, Nicholas Hopton.

The meeting provided the opportunity for the Ambassador to brief the representatives of the various diaspora groups on British policy towards Yemen during the ongoing transition period, including British support for the National Dialogue. Yemeni participants, in turn, had the opportunity to offer their perspectives on the current situation in Yemen and how British policy could be improved and become more effective. They acknowledged the UK's historic links with the country and thanked the government for its continued support in terms of humanitarian aid and political engagement.

Among the crucial challenges identified, the status of South Yemen and recent episodes of violent suppression of protests there by the government figured prominently in the discussion. Ambassador Hopton assured the participants that efforts were being made to secure the representation of all groups in the National Dialogue but that those who advocated violence could not be tolerated. He emphasised the need for all communities and interests to participate

actively in the National Dialogue, regardless of their vision for the new Yemen and noted that the current transition plan remained on track for elections in 2014, despite the political fragility in Yemen and the worsening humanitarian situation.

The Ambassador identified six major challenges facing the country over the coming months including the importance of the success of the National Dialogue due to commence this March, the passing of the Transitional Justice Law, the implementation of women's rights, achieving sustainable economic growth in the country to benefit not just the elite but the population at large, the alleviation of the humanitarian crisis including access for all to food, and dealing with the threat of terrorism which continues to complicate the future development of the country.

Yemeni representatives agreed amongst themselves that the relationship between North and South and its management by the current government and its international partners was the most pressing immediate and longer-term political concern, but disagreed about both its underlying causes and how to manage it peacefully and sustainably.

Another concern for the diaspora remains the lack of access to reliable and accurate information regarding the situation in Yemen, particularly against a backdrop of misleading propaganda from a variety of sources inside and outside the country.

The meeting ended with the Ambassador underlining the UK's continuing commitment to Yemen, including through its support of the Friends of Yemen and engagement with British Yemenis to take their concerns on board in formulating British policy vis-à-vis Yemen.