

The Fourth Conference on National Dialogues, 11—12 June 2019  
The House of the Estates, Helsinki

## Transforming Conflicts in a Complex World

---

### Objective of the session

The objective of the session is to reflect the experiences and lessons learnt of national dialogue as an approach for conflict transformation in Ethiopia and Yemen. The opportunities for peace and transformation as well as challenges and preconditions for a successful national dialogue in complex situations will be discussed against the backdrop of previous national dialogues in Yemen and in the new political situation in Ethiopia. The session will also build grounds for the plenary discussion on *Addressing Complexity in National Dialogue Processes*.

### Background

National dialogues can be multi-layered, multi-sectoral and multi-dimensional political change processes aimed at reaching a new and sustainable social contract in the society. National dialogues are context specific and can vary in structure and coverage. Wide-ranging mandates of national dialogues may include, for example, constitutional, justice, security and socio-economic reforms and dialogue around power sharing and decentralization. The processes often aim at increasing legitimacy by including a broad range of national stakeholders, addressing a broad range of issues and offering a promise of a transition away from elite deal-making towards more inclusive and participatory politics.

Yemen has an experience on several national dialogues processes, the most recent being the National Dialogue Conference (NDC) that took place in 2013 after the Arab Spring. The conference and multiple dialogue sessions resulted in a successful agreement (Outcome Document) that stipulated a roadmap towards the full transition of Yemen into a state that upholds democracy, freedom, rule of law, human rights and good governance. However, the implementation of an agreement was stalled and from 2015 onwards the conflict in Yemen has intensified between the parties and has become even more complex with increased regional involvement and engagement. The key question thus is; why the national dialogue process in Yemen did not result in a sustainable transformation?

In Ethiopia, Prime Minister Dr Abiy Ahmed who took the office last year has delivered a message of unity, prosperity, justice and peace; peace deal was signed with Eritrea, political and economic reforms have been put in place and other positive decisions and actions have been taken. However, Ethiopia is in the middle of a political transition. Peaceful transition of power paved way for the change in Ethiopia. Transitions are, however, often characterized by uncertainty, unpredictability, volatility and power vacuum. The current rise of ethnic violence and internal displacements in Ethiopia are testaments to the challenges of political transitions. Transitions also present 'policy dilemmas' that need well-thought policy interventions to determine a new course of events. Most importantly, if

seized aptly, the current crisis presents an opportunity for preventing Ethiopia from fragmentation and ethnic conflict but also turning the country towards democracy and stability. Accordingly, there have been some calls for national dialogue in Ethiopia such as the formation of the National Reconciliation Commission earlier this year. The session will consider suitability of a national dialogue in the current situation in Ethiopia.

The session will also explore the role of the political leadership in nationally owned and led dialogue processes as well the role of international actors in supporting the national vision. Particular attention will be devoted to opportunities and challenges in safeguarding the inclusivity and broad participation.

**Key questions:**

- What challenges does the complex national, regional and international conflict context create for a nationally led process? Does national dialogue approach seem appropriate approach to address these challenges?
- What are preconditions for a successful national dialogue? Can these criteria be met in Yemen and Ethiopia?
- How does the formal national dialogue process interact with the informal peace-building initiatives by community-based actors such as traditional and religious leaders?
- How do the speakers see the role of international community/actors in national dialogue?
- How do national dialogue processes address and redress past human rights violations? How can a national dialogue build an inclusive, democratic and transformed society which respects, protects and promotes human rights for all?
- How to strike balance between vertical and horizontal inclusion and effective decision making? What measures are needed to ensure that women, minorities (e.g. ethnic, linguistic, religious) and other traditionally marginalized groups such as persons with disabilities are meaningfully incorporated in national dialogue processes and their needs and demands are also reflected in the outcomes?

**Composition of the session:**

H.E. Hailemariam Dessalegn, Former Prime Minister of Ethiopia

H.E. Yasser Abdullah Al-Raeeni, Minister of State for Implementing the National Dialogue Outcomes in the Yemeni Government

*Moderator: Mr Nicklas Wancke, Journalist, Yle Broadcasting Company*