February 17, 2022

Dear Members of Congress,

We, the undersigned civil society organizations, urge you to publicly oppose a Foreign Terrorist Designation (FTO) of the Houthis in Yemen and communicate your opposition to the Biden administration.

While we agree that the Houthis share much blame, alongside the Saudi-led coalition, for horrific human rights violations in Yemen, an FTO designation does nothing to address these concerns. It would, however, prevent the delivery of commercial goods, remittances, and critical humanitarian assistance to millions of innocent people, greatly hurt the prospects for a negotiated settlement to the conflict, and further undermine U.S. national security interests in the region. Our coalition joins a chorus of growing opposition to the designation, including members of Congress and multiple humanitarian organizations operating on the ground in Yemen.

Rather than being a catalyst for peace, an FTO designation is a recipe for more conflict and famine, while unnecessarily further undermining U.S. diplomatic credibility. It is more likely that these designations will convince the Houthis that their goals cannot be achieved at the negotiating table. During his time as UN Special Envoy for Yemen, Martin Griffiths warned the UN Security Council that U.S. designation would have a chilling effect on both humanitarian relief and diplomatic efforts. By designating only one party to the conflict as a terrorist group, while actively providing military assistance to the Saudi-led coalition, the designation would also further entangle the United States as a partisan and party to the war.

Even prior to discussions of a new FTO designation, the UN warned at the end of last year that the Yemeni people are more vulnerable than ever, as food prices doubled over the course of the year and the economy has been driven nearly to collapse by currency devaluation and hyperinflation. Designating the Houthis will further exacerbate and speed this suffering by disrupting the flow of much-needed commercial and humanitarian goods, including food, medicine, and aid delivery to the majority of Yemen’s people. Some of the world’s top humanitarian aid organizations working in Yemen warned in a joint statement this month that an FTO designation on the Houthis could “diminish the flow of humanitarian assistance at a time when organizations like ours are already struggling to keep pace with immense and growing needs.”

Even without an FTO label, commercial shippers have been reluctant to import to Yemen given the high risk of delays, costs, and risks of violence. An FTO designation only increases this level of risk for commercial entities and further places the vital work of humanitarian and peacebuilders at risk. As a result, even if humanitarian exemptions are permitted, financial institutions, shipping firms, and insurance companies, along with aid organizations, are likely to find the risk of potential violations to be too high, resulting in these entities dramatically
scaling down or even ending their involvement in Yemen – a decision that would have indescribably severe human consequences.

According to Oxfam, when the Trump administration briefly designated the Houthis as an FTO, they “saw exporters of vital commodities like food, medicine, and fuel all rush for the exits. It was clear to all that Yemen was heading toward economic freefall.”

We applaud past statements by Members of Congress to resist former-President Trump’s FTO label on the Houthis, as well as legislative efforts to end unauthorized U.S. support for the Saudi-led war in Yemen. Our organizations now urge you to publicly oppose a Foreign Terrorist Designation of the Houthis in Yemen. We also look forward to working with you on taking a new approach to U.S. policy in Yemen, as well as the broader Gulf region, — one that prioritizes human dignity and peace. Thank you for your consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,

Action Corps
American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)
Antiwar.com
Avaaz
Center for International Policy
Charity & Security Network
Church of the Brethren, Office of Peacebuilding and Policy
Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP)
CODEPINK
Democracy for the Arab World Now (DAWN)
Demand Progress
Environmentalist Against War
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Freedom Forward
Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL)
Health Alliance International
Just Foreign Policy
Justice for Muslims collective
Justice Is Global
MADRE
National Council of Churches
Neighbors for Peace
National Iranian American Council (NIAC)
Peace Action
Physicians for social responsibility
Presbyterian Church (USA)
Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft
RootsAction.org
Saferworld
SolidarityINFOService
The Episcopal Church
The Libertarian Institute
US Campaign for Palestinian Rights (USCPR)
Water4LifeMinistry.org
Win Without War
Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, US Section
World BEYOND War
Yemen Freedom Council
Yemen Relief and Reconstruction Foundation
Yemeni Alliance Committee