

**UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS AND
EMERGENCY RELIEF COORDINATOR, MARK LOWCOCK**

Briefing to the Security Council on the humanitarian situation in Yemen

New York, 15 April 2021

As delivered

Thank you very much, Mr. President. Like Martin [Martin Griffiths, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen], my warmest wishes too for the holy month.

The situation in Yemen – already the world’s largest humanitarian crisis – is still getting even worse.

As Martin said, COVID has come roaring back in recent weeks. A new wave of infections has more than doubled the number of confirmed cases in just six weeks.

More people are getting sick, including doctors, nurses and aid workers, although reporting mechanisms capture only a small share of cases. Hospitals and health facilities are increasingly turning people away because they have no more room or they lack supplies.

Aid agencies are doing what they can to help, including with more surveillance, public outreach, testing and critical supplies like fuel and medicines. We’re also working closely with the Government on vaccines. And the first COVAX shipment of vaccines arrived in Aden two weeks ago – about 360,000 doses, with another 1.6 million expected to follow in the coming months.

But right now, the virus is moving much faster than we can keep up. Vaccines won’t be enough to suppress the second wave. So we urgently need more resources to scale up treatment, monitoring and other activities that will mitigate the impact of the pandemic.

This second wave, of course, is coming at a time when large-scale famine is still bearing down on the country. Tens of thousands of people are already starving to death, with another 5 million just a step behind them.

To stop this unfolding catastrophe, we urgently need action on the five points I brief you on every month: protection of civilians; humanitarian access; funding; support for the economy; and progress towards peace.

On **protection of civilians**, March was the deadliest month for civilians so far in 2021. More than 200 were killed or injured as a result of hostilities. Nearly 350 private homes were damaged or destroyed. Camps hosting displaced people were affected.

About a quarter of the civilian casualties occurred in and around Marib, where Ansar Allah forces have continued to press a military offensive, and many of the displaced people have been displaced again and are ones who have already fled from other parts of the country.

As Martin has said, the offensive in Marib is a severe threat to millions of people, including more than 1 million IDPs, and it has also set off escalations elsewhere, notably in Taizz and Hudaydah – again, with heavy civilian casualties.

If the fighting continues, we expect tens of thousands – at least – more people will be forced to move. And that will be very dangerous as we see the latest COVID spike. It will also put more pressure on aid agencies already being overwhelmed by the incipient and progressive famine, and finding it impossible to meet other needs given the shortage of resources.

Turning to **humanitarian access**, in Marib, we have had approval for regular UN flights, and they will start soon, I hope. And I am grateful to the Government and the Coalition who are working with us to facilitate that.

The Government has also recently released humanitarian assets that had been stuck in customs in Aden for a long time, but there are still lots of bureaucratic impediments which constrain humanitarian action all over Yemen.

On the west coast, for example, local authorities in Government-held areas recently introduced new regulations requiring movement permits and other paperwork for aid agencies. They were issued independently, without Government approval, and they brought aid delivery in the area to a near standstill.

They have now been suspended for Ramadan, which is a good start, but we hope to see them reversed altogether. And again, we are grateful to the Government for their help on this.

In the north, we are continuing to engage with Ansar Allah at all levels to reinforce the improvements we saw last year on issues like biometric registration, assessment missions and project approvals. Those improvements have mostly held, but progress has not been forthcoming, and that is a priority.

Many of you will be keen to hear an update on the Safer tanker. It's possible there could be a deal in sight to resolve the impasse that we face on logistics and practical arrangements to

implement the mission that was agreed a long time ago. It depends on whether the Ansar Allah leadership agrees now to move forward. They have made some recent statements which give us cause for a degree of optimism, but we have, of course, been here before.

Mr. President, my next point is on **funding for the aid operation**.

More money for the UN response plan is the fastest, most efficient way to save millions of lives.

Right now, agencies are able to help only about 9 million people a month. That's down from nearly 14 million a year ago, and that's essentially because of the funding cuts.

As you know, on 1 March, we got promises of \$1.7 billion at the pledging conference. That is, as you know, less than half of what we need.

Of the pledges that were made, about half have been paid. So what that means is that today, the response plan is less than 25 per cent funded. So again, as I have said many times before, without more funding, millions of Yemenis will be staring down a death sentence before the year reaches its close.

So I again ask donors to disburse any outstanding pledges right away, and to make additional pledges.

Sustained assistance is going to be necessary all through the year if we are going to avert the famine, as well as deal with Yemen's other acute needs.

Turning now to the **economy**, again, there are two urgent priorities.

The first is to strengthen the currency. The rial is still trading near record lows, which means that millions of people who still have an income often can't afford to buy food or other essentials.

Again, the solution is one everybody knows, and has been implemented in the past, which is additional provision of foreign exchange through the Central Bank stabilized in Yemen.

The second issue is ensuring adequate quantities of commercial imports keep entering all the ports.

I reiterated my concern about recent developments on commercial fuel imports through Hudaydah last month.

And again, just to be clear, fuel is an absolutely essential commodity. Without fuel, there are no clean water pumps, or aid delivery around the country, or sanitation systems run, or health facilities kept running, or sick people taken to hospital.

A few weeks ago, the Government cleared four commercial fuel ships to berth in Hudaydah. That was equivalent to two weeks' worth of fuel imports. They were the first ships to enter the port since January.

Another three ships were cleared on Tuesday this week. But what we need is consistent, regular and reliable clearance of ships to meet these very basic and essential needs. That would be facilitated by a resolution to the long-running dispute on the use of revenues arising from fuel imports.

Lastly, of course, the most important thing ultimately is **progress towards peace**.

I very much echo everything Martin has said today. There could be really quite significant improvements straight away for everybody across Yemen, against the list Martin has set out, if we get peace.

So I couldn't echo more strongly what he said to you about the need for a nationwide ceasefire – not just in Marib, but across the country – and a resumption of the political process.

Because the only way to end the crisis in Yemen is to end the war.

Thank you.