

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

**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, 19 February 2019

As delivered

Thank you, Mr. President.

Last week, my office released the 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview for Yemen (the HNO). Agencies pooled data from more than 100 earlier assessments. We also collected new data from nearly 7,000 locations in 331 of Yemen's 333 districts and we conducted more than 22,000 interviews.

With a stronger evidence base than ever, the 2019 HNO represents an authoritative analysis of the scale, drivers and trajectory of Yemen's crisis. And it paints a bleak picture.

About 80 per cent of the population – 24 million people – need humanitarian assistance and protection. Some 20 million people need help securing food, including nearly 10 million who are just a step away from famine. Nearly 240,000 of those people are right now facing catastrophic levels of hunger. Almost 20 million people lack access to adequate healthcare, and nearly 18 million don't have enough clean water or access to adequate sanitation. More than 3 million people – including 2 million children – are acutely malnourished. Some 3.3 million remain displaced from their homes, including 685,000 who have fled fighting along the west coast since June 2018.

These numbers Mr. President are considerably worse than last year. Conflict and a failure to respect international humanitarian law, together with the economic collapse in mid-2018, are the driving forces behind the deterioration. The most severe needs are in areas of active hostilities or with large numbers of forcibly displaced people.

Violence has declined in Hodeida following the Stockholm Agreement, but it has continued elsewhere and escalated in some front-line areas – particularly in Hajjah.

Amidst the conflict the economy continues to unravel.

The Yemeni rial is again losing value. Exchange rate is around 600 rial to the US dollar – down from about 400, which was the level it recovered to following substantial injections of foreign exchange into the Central Bank by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in late 2018. As the rate falls, so the price of food for ordinary people rises.

In short, Mr. President, things are very bad.

And unfortunately, aid agencies are running out of money. Among the many challenges the aid operation faces, funding is quickly becoming the biggest. We expect current resources to be used up by the end of March – just six weeks from now.

The UN-coordinated humanitarian relief operation in Yemen is the biggest in the world. It has delivered impressive results. In 2018, more than 250 humanitarian agencies – most of them Yemeni organizations – worked together to assist nearly 8 million people across the country every month.

During 2018, we delivered a step-change in the operation. In December, the World Food Programme reached more than 10 million people – a record achievement. Compared to 2017, the number of people who received health assistance increased by 40 per cent last year, to 12 million. And the number of people who were helped with water, hygiene and sanitation needs rose by 20 per cent, to 11.5 million.

Of the many milestones achieved last year, three stand out in terms of impact, scale and efficiency. At the beginning of last year, 107 districts were facing extreme food insecurity. By the end of the year, 45 of these districts were no longer pre-famine because of the massive, synchronized and rapid scale-up of all forms of humanitarian assistance.

Working through public institutions, UNICEF, WHO and NGOs stemmed the largest cholera outbreak in modern history, reducing the number of new cases from 1 million in 2017 to about 370,000 in 2018.

UNICEF, WHO and nutrition partners, also working through public institutions, helped to identify and cure a higher percentage of children suffering from severe acute malnutrition than in any comparable operation globally. Nutrition programmes last year treated 310,000 children for severe malnutrition – about 20,000 more children than originally planned.

None of this would have been possible without the generous funding provided by all our donors in 2018: nearly \$2.6 billion, or 83 per cent of the Humanitarian Response Plan requirements. The single most important contribution was the \$930 million we received from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. It was not just a large commitment. It was also transferred to us in a single payment early in the year. Without it the scale up I have described would not have been possible.

As the largest humanitarian operation in the world, agencies in Yemen face obstacles beyond funding. The operating environment is far from what it should be. Every day, humanitarian agencies struggle with issues like delays in visas, restrictions on movements, delays in imports, bureaucratic impediments, restrictions on monitoring or interference with principled humanitarian action.

We are particularly concerned that the operating environment is becoming ever more restrictive in northern Yemen. At the same time, we are concerned that Decree 75, imposed by the

Government of Yemen last year, continues to hinder commercial fuel imports, which are needed to pump water and to keep hospital generators running, among other critical functions. As of yesterday, four vessels carrying the equivalent of half an average month's commercial fuel imports were being denied entry by the Government of Yemen under Decree 75.

Many operational challenges faced by humanitarian agencies are eventually overcome through dialogue, and it is by resolving these challenges that we've been able to reach so many people in all 333 districts. As Martin said, in the next few days, I am also hopeful that an assessment mission will finally be able to reach the Red Sea Mills in Hodeida.

The operation in Yemen also faces risks of aid diversion that exist in all conflict settings. These risks too can be mitigated. My office continues to coordinate an independent, impartial third-party monitoring programme covering the entire Humanitarian Response Plan. Early results have been positive, indicating that the vast majority of assistance is going where it's supposed to.

So it is clear that operational challenges in Yemen, while daunting, can be managed.

I cannot say the same of funding-related challenges.

So let me explain the position clearly to you.

Without adequate resources, the aid operation will grind to a halt at a time when more people need more help than ever before.

Humanitarian agencies aim to assist up to 19 million people across the country in 2019. That's half of the population – more than half of the population, including 12 million people who will receive emergency food assistance every month.

It will cost more than \$4 billion to deliver all the life-saving and protection programmes set out in the 2019 UN-coordinated response plan, and that plan is being released today. The response plan lays out a clear, evidence-based and prioritized strategy to address hunger, to roll back

cholera and other diseases, to improve conditions for displaced people and to support critical institutions. It is a life-line for millions of Yemenis.

As Martin just reminded you, a week from today, the Secretary-General will convene a high-level pledging conference in Geneva, co-hosted by Sweden and Switzerland. This event is an important opportunity for the international community to make clear its continuing commitment to save the lives of the starving and vulnerable people of Yemen, as we continue to work in the way Martin has described towards political solutions.

I urge Member States to attend the Geneva meeting at a senior level and I implore you to pledge generously.

Together, we can save millions more lives in Yemen, but only if we have the resources we need. Let me make one last point. Again similar to the point by Martin has made. 2019 needs to be a year not just of saving lives but also of recovery. I would like at the end of the year to be able to say that Yemen is no longer the world's worst humanitarian crisis. I would like to see a reduction in the number of people who need humanitarian assistance. The people of Yemen need a realistic chance of a better future.

Thank you.