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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, 15 October 2020

As delivered

Thank you very much, Mr. President. While as Martin has just said, there is a glimmer of hope on the political side, experts are increasingly worried that the window to prevent famine in Yemen is closing.

I will brief you again today on five priority issues that, when they were acted on two years ago, successfully prevented famine: protection of civilians, humanitarian access, funding the relief operation, supporting the economy, and progress towards peace.

First, protection of civilians.

Since we last briefed you, we have seen a further escalation of conflict. There are now 47 active front lines across Yemen – the most ever recorded. Over several recent weeks, the heaviest clashes have occurred in Hudaydah, Marib and Al Jawf. And in September, civilian casualties reached the highest levels recorded this year. As Martin alluded to, in recent days, hostilities have subsided a little bit, but it is not enough.

Around 1 million people who are displaced are sheltering in and around Marib city. A major confrontation there, as we have said before, would be disastrous. Escalating violence in Hudaydah is also very worrying. Hudaydah port, of course, remains the lifeline for northern Yemen. Anything jeopardizing its smooth and continuous functioning would put the lives of millions of people at risk.

Violence also continues to force people from their homes. Nearly 150,000 people have fled this year, most of them in Marib. The International Organization for Migration estimates that 80 per cent of people displaced in the last two months have had to move into already overcrowded shelters.

And civilian infrastructure, which is critical, is still coming under attack. Just yesterday, a civilian was killed and seven injured when a local market in Marib was hit by missiles. On 11 October, in Taizz, artillery shells struck a school, killing a child and injuring others. And despite Yemen's hunger crisis, farms are attacked with alarming regularity. The Norwegian Refugee Council estimates that air strikes and shelling have hit farms more than 900 times since 2018 – that's about once every day.

So I repeat: Yemen needs a nationwide ceasefire – one that covers Marib, Hudaydah and everywhere else. And that's been our message for many months.

All parties must take constant care to spare civilians and civilian objects throughout military operations. There should be accountability for violations. We welcome the recent mandate renewal of the Group of Eminent Experts, which was established by the Human Rights Council to document violations and promote greater accountability.

Mr. President, the second point is unimpeded humanitarian access.

In the south, front-line humanitarian staff continue to face challenges due to insecurity, including harassment by armed groups. Discussions with the Government of Yemen to streamline bureaucratic processes to approve aid projects are still continuing, as they have done for the last six months. We hope a resolution can be expedited.

In the north, agencies are grappling with more severe access challenges, mainly the result of restrictions imposed by the Ansar Allah authorities.

Since my last briefing, they have taken concrete steps to reopen Sana'a airport to humanitarian flights, which is welcome. That means aid personnel and cargo should again be able to come in and out of northern Yemen. Reopening the airport has also enabled the return home on 4 October of 29 Yemeni patients and their carers who had travelled to Jordan for medical treatment, using the air bridge established and facilitated by the World Health Organization.

More broadly, donors and agencies continue to engage with the Ansar Allah authorities with the aim of improving the operating environment for humanitarian agencies. More progress is needed there. The European Union and the Government of Sweden will convene senior officials in November to take stock of developments on this, and to look to the future.

On a separate note, as Martin touched on, we continue to speak to the Ansar Allah authorities about the SAFER oil tanker. The discussions have accelerated in recent weeks, and as he indicated, we hope to receive formal, written approval in the coming days for the UN mission to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the vessel and to undertake initial repairs.

Mr. President, the third point is funding for the humanitarian operation.

Since my last briefing, funding for the Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan has increased from 30 per cent to 42 per cent.

That is obviously to be welcomed.

But this time last year, the response plan was 65 per cent funded. Funding shortages still mean that more key programmes are at risk of shutting down.

Just last week, the Food and Agriculture Organization was forced to close a livestock vaccination programme that was serving 3 million rural families.

Aid agencies are now reaching only about 9 million people a month in Yemen – that's down from more than 13 million at the start of the year. What is to be the fate of the 4 million we no longer have the money to help?

I said earlier that the window to prevent famine in Yemen is closing. Increasing support for the response plan, starting with fulfilling unpaid pledges but also increasing support back to last year's levels, is the fastest way to help.

Mr. President, the fourth point is Yemen's economy, which remains a key determinant in the risk of famine.

Commercial food imports have remained largely stable in recent months, with more than 380,000 metric tons entering Hudaydah and Saleef in September. But the cost of food and other basic goods means they are out of reach for millions of families.

Fuel shortages also persist in the north. They are driving up the price of fuel, which in turn is exacerbating humanitarian needs.

Only 20,000 metric tons of commercial fuel entered Hudaydah in September – that's the third-lowest figure ever recorded, and 76 per cent less than in August. Currently, 20 commercial fuel ships are waiting to enter the port and discharge the equivalent of three months of imports.

The Government is blocking their entry due to an ongoing dispute with the Ansar Allah authorities over the management of import revenues. The Government has periodically cleared vessels to enter Hudaydah on an exceptional basis, including a number this month, as Martin said. But this modest and temporary exception to the fuel blockade does little to solve the problem.

So I reiterate Martin's request just now for the parties to work urgently with his team to find a solution. Fuel is essential to provide life-saving assistance to millions of people in need.

I turn now to the exchange rate. In September, the Yemeni rial reached an all-time low, trading in the south at 850 to the dollar. That means fewer people can afford food and other essential goods, nearly all of which must be imported.

Yemen needs regular foreign exchange injections to help stabilize the rial, to subsidize commercial imports and to pay salaries.

That worked in the past, and it can work again. The economic support we saw in 2018 was critical to the famine-prevention effort. Given current conditions in Yemen, I am not convinced

that humanitarian agencies – even were they to have more funding – can prevent famine now if there is no accompanying support for the economy.

Mr. President, my final point is progress towards peace.

The crisis urgently needs a political solution. That's what would help move the country back from the edge of famine. Indeed, food security data show clearly that the worst hunger is concentrated in areas affected by the conflict.

You've just heard Martin summarize developments on the political track.

And your support – on this and on the other issues I've raised – has, I think, never been more important.

Thank you very much.