

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

Briefing to the Security Council on Yemen

New York, 15 June 2021

As delivered

Thank you, Mr. President.

I wanted to start by saying that several weeks after starting this job, in October 2017, I went to Yemen. I wanted to see for myself what was going on there and what the world might do to help.

And when I came back, I described, including here in the Security Council, what I saw: bombed out buildings, children starving to death, families crowded into tents, surging disease and a collapsing economy.

And the only way to stop all this suffering, I said, was to end the war.

In the meantime, I noted, the world could also do other things that would help right away: better protection for civilians, more access for aid workers, more money for aid agencies and more support for the Yemeni economy.

Those five points will sound familiar. Nearly four years later, they are still the things we ask for every month.

But I believed then, as I do now, that by acting on all five of those issues, the world can make a difference. Over the years, we have seen some important achievements.

In 2018-19, for example, we stopped a major famine. There are some early signs that – perhaps – we’ll manage to stop a big famine again this year as well, although I should emphasize that it’s still too early to be sure, and a lot depends on what happens in the next three months.

But two brushes with mass famine in three years is not a success – even if the worst was avoided. It’s a failure. Millions of Yemenis can attest to that. Their lives have just kept getting worse.

There is broad agreement on what to do, including in the Security Council, and we need to translate that agreement into action.

That means everyone – especially the parties to the conflict – must act on all five of those points that we've been discussing here for years.

Let's start with protection of civilians.

On average, at least five civilians are now being killed or injured by hostilities in Yemen every single day. May was the deadliest month so far this year, with more than 60 civilians killed across the country.

On 10 June, a missile and drone attack – apparently launched by Ansar Allah forces – struck Marib City, causing dozens of civilian casualties. The explosions also damaged a nearby residence for aid workers.

The Ansar Allah offensive in Marib continues to pose a direct threat to millions of people, including more than a million Yemenis who have fled their homes and are sheltering in and around the city.

Air strikes, shelling, clashes and other incidents have continued in other parts of Yemen over the last month as well, causing civilian casualties in Sa'ada, Taizz, Hudaydah and elsewhere.

At all times, the parties must take constant care to spare civilians and civilian objects throughout military operations. There must be, as well, accountability for serious violations.

And, as I have been saying since 2017, Yemen needs a nationwide ceasefire, as Martin referred to in his statement.

I would also like to draw attention once again to the plight of migrants and refugees, because yesterday, a boat carrying more than 150 migrants sank off Yemen's southern coast. Local reports indicate 25 bodies have already washed up onshore; dozens of people are still missing. Migrants and refugees in Yemen face some of the most dangerous conditions in the world, and they need more support.

Mr. President, the next point is access for aid workers.

Aid agencies are now helping more than 10 million people every month in Yemen, but they still face too many obstacles. Most, but not all, of the problems are in areas controlled by Ansar Allah.

Senior donor and agency officials discussed all this in an important meeting on 1 June. They welcomed progress over the last year on issues like assessments, project approvals and biometrics.

But they were also clear that much more is needed, particularly to facilitate future assessments, allow aid workers to travel without undue restrictions, and agree standard operating procedures to fast track project approvals, visas and other routine processes.

Where humanitarian agencies can't do what they're supposed to do, we can expect funding to decline and aid to reduce. The parties – especially Ansar Allah – need to do more to facilitate their work. That will help convince donors to sustain funding through the year.

And my next point, Mr. President, is funding for the humanitarian operation.

Since the pledging event on 1 March, the response plan has moved from about 15 per cent funded to 43 per cent funded today.

That's substantial progress. Thank you to the United States, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Germany, the European Union and those others who have stepped up.

The wider aid operation is as of today on a better financial footing. Starting this month, the World Food Programme is resuming full rations for 6 million hungry people whose aid had previously been cut.

But, Mr. President, the money will soon start running out again. In August, UNICEF will cut fuel support for water and sanitation systems serving 3.4 million people. In September, the World Health Organization will stop providing the minimum-service package that enables healthcare for 6 million people.

And the cuts will intensify from there. The dangers of famine, disease, including COVID, and displacement have not gone away. And if more money doesn't come in, more people will die.

So I once more call on all donors to pay outstanding pledges right away. More than \$200 million in promises from the March event have still not been paid, including from some of Yemen's biggest donors. I'm also calling on donors to increase their support and ensure funds are distributed in a balanced way across all the sectors where we need activities to be financed.

In September, Sweden and Switzerland will co-host a humanitarian event on Yemen in the margins of the UN General Assembly. And that's a meeting intended to follow up on the pledging conference of 1 March, and it's really important that donors use the opportunity to increase their support.

Mr. President, my next point is Yemen's economy, which has collapsed as a result of the conflict. That collapse is driving many of the most severe needs, including the risk of famine.

As I have often said before, the two fastest ways to help the economy are to free up commercial imports and bolster the exchange rate.

For years, the Security Council has agreed that commercial imports must be able to enter all ports in adequate quantities. But that's still not happening.

Fuel imports into Hudaydah from January to May were one fifth the level – 20 per cent – of the equivalent period last year.

And as a result, fuel prices are going up, which is in turn making food, water and everything else more expensive and forcing cuts in essential services.

Increased fuel imports through Aden have not offset these price increases.

Now, the Government recently authorized four fuel vessels to enter Hudaydah. All of them had been previously cleared by the UN Verification and Inspection Mechanism. One had been waiting more than six months for Government permission to proceed.

This cycle of shortages and partial relief – the stranglehold being enforced and then partially released – has been going on for a year due to a dispute over revenue. The parties must find a solution. Martin has offered the parties countless ideas, and the parties really need to take them up. Lifting restrictions on commercial imports – as well as refraining from interference in the domestic market – would help millions of people.

And then the second thing is strengthening the exchange rate, which is a key determinant of what people can afford.

The rial is now trading around 940 to the US dollar in Government-held areas – that is a record low. And in May, food basket prices exceeded 55,000 rial – a record high. And those two things are linked: the more the exchange rate collapses, the more expensive food becomes.

As they did in the past, foreign exchange injections would help stabilize the rial and bring down prices. And I really hope Yemen's partners will work closely with the Government to achieve that.

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

I strongly support everything Martin has just said. There has been no shortage of opportunities to stop the war.

But it's up to the parties to turn those opportunities into reality. So far they have not.

As I said at the beginning, I have been calling for a nationwide ceasefire since late 2017. It would give Yemenis a break from the violence and create space for more political engagement. There shouldn't be any preconditions.

War has solved nothing. Try something different. Give peace a chance.

Thank you.