

**UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS AND
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As delivered

Thank you very much, Mr. President. And thank you, Khaled.

So, I am very pleased to join you today on what is, of course, quite a familiar topic, although from a rather different point of view. And this is my first outing, in fact, in the Council in my new function, so I'm very glad it is concerned with Yemen.

Yemen really is a magnificent country – we were talking just before the session started. It's home to a rich culture, amazing history, beautiful places, wonderful people. So much more than the war that we discuss here every month.

But after six years of that war, that war overshadows everything.

In my previous role, as Khaled mentioned, I had the immense privilege of trying to help Yemenis to get across that line to make peace to end the war. And during that time, I was repeatedly struck by the shocking brutality of the humanitarian crisis and listened carefully to the briefings of the distinguished Mark Lowcock.

So, I am grateful to have an opportunity now to address those issues to this Council.

There is a lot to address. And in all cases, it is civilians – and as you will hear from Henrietta, particularly children – who are bearing the brunt.

The war grinds on, as Khaled has described, including the devastating Ansar Allah offensive in Marib and clashes along nearly 50 other front lines. Hostilities this year have so far reportedly killed or injured more than 1,200 civilians.

Institutions and public services have imploded, depriving people of clean water, of sanitation, education, health care, and helping to spread diseases like cholera and COVID-19, as we were discussing before the start.

The war has also decimated the economy. This collapse – as I will describe if I may, Mr. President, shortly – is perhaps the biggest driver of people’s humanitarian needs, including the risk of famine.

And, as if all this were not enough, climate change is taking a toll – a direct, immediate toll. Rains this year have been among the heaviest ever, with over 100,000 people affected by flooding in the last few weeks alone.

So, the list goes on and on. More than 20 million people in Yemen need humanitarian assistance and protection. That’s about two thirds of the population. And it continues to be quite an astonishing figure.

But out of all those needs, there is perhaps one overarching humanitarian priority: and that is to stop the famine. Today, about 5 million people are just one step away from succumbing to famine and the diseases that go with it. Ten million more are right behind them.

Famine isn’t just a “food problem.” It’s a symptom of a much deeper collapse, as you know. In many ways, it is all of Yemen’s problems rolled into one. It demands a comprehensive response.

That means, of course, providing immediate relief to the millions of people who are on the verge of famine. It also means attacking the problems that are pushing Yemen towards famine in the first place. And it is particularly on this point where I think the world can do more to help.

Let's start with what the aid agencies are already doing. And on this point, we have a good story to tell for a change.

Humanitarian funding has surged since the March pledging event – and I want to thank all the donors, many in this room who have made that happen – including major new funds announced over the last six weeks by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, by Qatar and the United States.

Today, the Yemen response plan, the annual humanitarian programme, is 50 per cent funded and has received more money than any other appeal in the world. So, it's a testament, I think, to those who have advocated for the needs of the people of Yemen. Thank you to all our donors. And these funds are enabling humanitarian partners and agencies to help 10 million people across the whole country every single month.

Without that help, Yemen would of course succumb to famine.

Our partners, those humanitarian partners and agencies – the majority of them, I should add, are Yemeni NGOs – are working in every single one of Yemen's 333 districts during a live war. That is no small feat.

We are also working to deepen the aid presence across the country. And I should like to pay tribute here to David Gressly and his team, who have travelled to many, many parts of the country in recent weeks. That means more staff in field locations, more aid flights to places like Marib, where we needed to build up the staff, and more road missions to front-line areas. So that is quite a change.

Delivering aid, as we have often discussed here, is often harder than it should be, mostly due to bureaucratic impediments. We are working with everyone to resolve these access challenges, and support from donors and Member States will continue to be crucial on this point.

Naturally, we are also asking donors to increase their contributions to ensure funds are adequately distributed across the different sectors. So, although the appeal is indeed, as I have said, relatively well funded, relative to other appeals around the world, agencies will soon start running out of money again in certain sectors in the months to come.

By October, for example, food aid will probably face cuts. And programmes in other sectors – especially health, water, sanitation and shelter – I’m sure Henrietta will speak to this – are already struggling. And if aid levels fall sharply, there you get the risk of famine roaring back.

Next month, the European Union, Sweden and Switzerland will host a humanitarian event on Yemen during the General Assembly week. That meeting is an opportunity for the world to show its commitment again, renew its commitment to addressing this crisis with new funds.

But, Mr. President, I must be clear that even a well-funded humanitarian operation does relatively little to empower people to look after themselves, which is what most Yemenis want.

The biggest challenge is the economy, and Khaled indeed discussed it already. People in Yemen, as Mark has often said, are not starving because there is no food in the country. They are starving because they can’t afford it.

One reason is because incomes have dried up. GDP has plummeted 40 per cent since 2015, taking many jobs with it. One quarter of the population – including doctors, teachers, health professionals, social workers, water and sanitation workers – these rely on civil servant salaries, which, as you know, are only sporadically, erratically, unreliably paid.

Paying civil servant salaries – not a new issue, much discussed – would put money in the pockets of millions of people. It’s also essential to keeping basic services running – many of which are key institutions for the humanitarian response. So, we are of course eager to work with the parties to continue to try to find a solution to this. And I think there is a lot of work that has been done on this, by certainly the mission, but also by UNDP and others about how to meet these immediate needs.

But we must also take steps also to boost people’s incomes, other people’s incomes. Protecting remittances, for example, which is a lifeline for millions of families and constitute Yemen’s largest source of foreign exchange. And there was recently a story about the possibility of remittances from Saudi Arabia being at risk, and that is of course a very important source of income for many people in Yemen.

It means promoting economic opportunities for farmers, fishing communities and local businesses. And I want to stress that it is not unusual for a humanitarian official, as I am now, to talk a lot about the needs for livelihoods and development funding and institutions to survive through that type of support and assistance.

Another reason many people in Yemen can't afford to eat is because, as I have said, commodity prices are skyrocketing, not just food. Food is more than three times now as expensive as before the war. Fuel is four times more expensive, which has, of course, knock-on effects on other products.

Prices are rising in part because the Yemeni currency (the rial) has collapsed – a disaster, of course, in a country which relies on imports. Foreign-exchange injections through the Central Bank, and Khaled referred to this, would help stabilize the rial. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has been very generous in the past this regard. It's very good news to hear today's announcement by the IMF that Yemen will receive, I think, it's \$665 million in special drawing rights, which will also help the liquidity and hopefully stem the fall of the rial.

Prices are also rising because the parties interfere with the market. With the exception of food, Government restrictions now re-route nearly all commercial imports away from Ansar Allah-held ports, Hudaydah, of course, to Aden and elsewhere. And many of these imports are then shipped by road up to the north of the country, adding to the cost and indeed affecting the black market.

That approach is much more expensive. It opens the door for market manipulation, and the end result is much higher costs and prices for people who anyway can't afford the prices that went before.

Restrictions on commercial imports beyond the international arms embargo – I want to be very clear about this, Mr. President – should be lifted right away. That means Hudaydah and Saleef ports should be opened without additional impediment. Other market manipulation – like profiteering downstream through the informal market – must also stop.

Doing this will, as Khaled has already said, boost civilians' access to the goods they need to survive. And he has talked about the need for fuel ships to come into those ports. That is

consistent with the obligation of all parties to treat civilians under their control humanely – as is required by international humanitarian law. It is an obligation, it is a responsibility, it is not an option.

It's consistent with the obligation under international human rights law to uphold an adequate standard of living. Refraining from interference with access to essential goods and services is an important step towards fulfilling that obligation. And I want to make this appeal here to the Council.

On a related point, I believe Sana'a airport should also be re-opened – at least for the thousands of civilians to travel abroad for medical care. International humanitarian law requires all parties to care for the wounded and the sick, and that should include travel abroad when treatment is not available.

To conclude, Mr. President, I have gone on perhaps excessively about the way in which the economy is driving needs and risking famine in Yemen, and that it is also the economy that we need to pay attention to, to give people safety from that threat.

But we must not forget what has caused the economy to collapse in the first place, and that is the war. The world must push, as we have done so often in this chamber, for that nationwide ceasefire that Khaled and the mission is mentioning today.

A ceasefire will give desperate civilians a break. It will create space to address the drivers of the crisis, which I have described in some length, as well as to provide the basis, as Khaled said, of the resumption of the all-inclusive political process necessary to end the war.

I know from my own experience that resuming that political process is no easy task. It is essential. And I want to congratulate Hans Grundberg, who I know well, on his appointment as Special Envoy. He has, of course, all our support for his difficult, essential, central task.

And I hope that the war that has gone on for too long can now come to an end.

Thank you very much, Mr. President.