

**Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs**

ON BEHALF OF THE UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS AND EMERGENCY RELIEF COORDINATOR, MR. MARTIN GRIFFITHS, UN OCHA DEPUTY DIRECTOR, MS. GHADA ELTAHIR MUDAWI

Statement to the Security Council on Yemen

New York, 10 September 2021

As delivered

Thank you, Madam President, and thank you for this opportunity to brief the Council.

As Hans has just described, conflict is raging across many parts of the country, especially in Ma'rib where fighting has again become particularly fierce. As always, it is civilians who are paying the highest price.

During Under-Secretary-General Griffiths's last briefing to the Council two and half weeks ago, he outlined the many ways in which the war in Yemen is compounding people's suffering.

We see it in the country's crumbling economy. We see it in the disintegration of essential services. And we see it in the faces of the millions of men, women and children who – despite their extraordinary resilience – are being forced deeper into desperation.

Today, I wish to speak about what the humanitarian community is doing to mitigate some of these terrible consequences and what more needs to be done.

Madam President,

As this Council well knows, Yemen is home to the world's largest humanitarian aid operation. This is, of course, a title no country or people would wish upon themselves – but it does speak to the commitment of the international community to stand by the people of Yemen in their hour of need.

Over the past few months, we have seen a surge in donor funding. The Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan is now one of the best funded appeals in the world, having received more than \$1.9 billion so far this year – 50 per cent of its total requirement.

This support has enabled the UN and its partners to scale up lifesaving assistance across the country. Together, we managed to prevent famine during the first eight months of this year. Humanitarian organizations are active in all of Yemen's 333 districts. In June, we provided lifesaving assistance to 12.8 million people – that is a full 3.3 million more people than we were able to reach the month before.

These achievements are significant, Madam President, but they are also fragile and uneven. The threat of famine is not over in Yemen. It will require our continued efforts unless we are ready to sacrifice the important gains we have made and invite famine back into the country after we have fought so hard to keep it at bay.

A lot of this comes down to donor support. A number of sectors remain gravely underfunded, including some that are critical to addressing food insecurity.

Health, for example, as well as water, sanitation and hygiene have received only a tenth of the funding required for this year, threatening to shut down these vital services at a time when Yemen is grappling with multiple disease outbreaks, including cholera, dengue and diphtheria. A deadly third wave of COVID-19 is putting the country's population – and its fragile healthcare system – at further risk.

Even food security and agriculture – one of the better funded sectors in the appeal – currently faces a \$750 million funding gap. Without additional support, we could see cuts in this assistance as soon as in the coming weeks.

Madam President,

Another sector facing critical shortages in the humanitarian response is protection. In the first six months of the year, protection partners have only been able to reach a fraction of people in need due to lack of funds.

This is extremely serious in a country where protection needs are so high.

Yemen is an incredibly difficult place to live for women and girls. Across the country, gender-based violence is rampant. Early marriage and pregnancy, including child mothers are commonplace. Women and girls are often the last to eat, see a doctor or go to school.

I want to take a moment to salute the courage of women-led and women's rights organizations in Yemen – and we are very fortunate to have one of these voices with us, Ms. Al-Qadhi, in the Council today. The tenacity and extraordinary efforts of these organizations are helping to

amplify the voices of women and girls across Yemen, and to create better conditions for current and future generations.

Yemen is the world's fourth largest internal displacement crisis, with numbers rising by the day as people flee violence as well as significant flooding and other climate-related disasters in various parts of the country, including Ma'rib, Ta'iz, Al Dali', Lahj and Hudaydah.

Many IDPs find refuge in schools, religious sites or abandoned buildings. Others are forced to take shelter in overcrowded settlements, where clean water, food, electricity and other essential services are in extremely short supply.

Yemen's protection crisis affects many other population groups. Children face horrific threats to their physical, emotional, and mental well-being as a result of the conflict – including being killed or maimed, recruited into armed groups, or exposed to sexual violence. People with disabilities, refugees, migrants and other marginalized groups are also highly vulnerable to many of these risks.

Madam President,

These are just a few of the perils many civilians face on a daily basis. The list is, of course, much longer.

There is one additional protection risk I wish to touch on: landmines and explosive remnants of war.

Since 2018, landmines, IEDs and unexploded ordnance have killed or injured more than 1,400 civilians in Yemen, many of them children.

In addition to causing direct and deadly harm, these explosive weapons and remnants – which are littered across large swathes of the country – instill terror in communities and have a deeply negative impact on people's livelihoods and the wider economy.

Many farms and fishing communities in Yemen are standing idle due to the presence or fear of land- and sea mines. This presents a further hit to domestic food production and to people's incomes, when Yemen is already facing dire levels of food insecurity and poverty.

I urge all parties to uphold their obligations under international humanitarian law, including by refraining from using weapons which are by nature indiscriminate, and by taking constant care to spare civilians and civilian objects throughout their military operations.

I also call for practical steps to be taken. Scaling up humanitarian mine clearance and support for it – including by letting in and expediting the passage of demining equipment into the country – would go a long way to protecting civilians.

Madam President,

On 22 September, a high-level side event on Yemen will take place in the margins of the General Assembly. Co-hosted by the European Union, Sweden and Switzerland, it will be a key opportunity to discuss protection challenges and galvanize support for the country's most vulnerable.

During the event, donors will also be able to announce new contributions since the high-level pledging conference in early March.

As I mentioned earlier, donors have demonstrated tremendous generosity this year. I strongly encourage them to continue to do so by increasing their contributions to the Humanitarian Response Plan.

Ensuring adequate funding across all sectors is essential to protecting the delicate gains we have made this year. This is not the moment to slow down, unless we are ready to see record humanitarian suffering come roaring back in Yemen.

Thank you, Madam President.