

**Acting Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy  
Emergency Relief Coordinator Ramesh Rajasingham Briefing to the Security  
Council on Yemen**

New York, 12 January 2022

*As delivered*

Thank you, Madam President.

I had hoped to deliver some good news at the start of the new year. Unfortunately, recent developments do not give us – or the people of Yemen – much cause for optimism.

Today, I want to focus on three main points: first, the civilian toll of the crisis, especially on women and girls; second, the constraints limiting the humanitarian operation; and third, how we can deliver a more effective and inclusive response – including by strengthening the economy to reduce people’s needs.

Let’s start with the impact of the crisis on civilians.

Since our last briefing, fierce fighting has continued along dozens of frontlines. Clashes in Al Jawf, Marib and Shabwah have displaced more than 15,000 people over the past month. Hostilities have also resurged in Al Bayda, while airstrikes have escalated in Sana’a and other parts of the country.

Civilian casualties continue to be reported at alarming rates. In December, 358 civilians were reportedly killed or injured as a direct result of hostilities – a figure that is tied for the highest in three years. Again, I urge all parties to take constant care to spare civilians and civilian objects as required by international humanitarian law.

As we have reported many times, the war is also causing hunger, displacement, economic collapse and the deterioration of basic services. As in many crises, women and girls are bearing the brunt.

Even before the conflict, Yemen consistently ranked at or near the bottom of global gender equality indices. But the war has made the situation far worse for women and girls.

This manifests itself in a myriad of ways, including restrictions on basic rights like freedom of movement, reduced access to education, and higher rates of illiteracy and poverty. Access to health

care is more limited, due in part to a lack of female healthcare workers in conflict areas and long distances to health facilities. Access to reproductive healthcare is particularly precarious, with one woman dying every two hours during childbirth from almost entirely preventable causes.

Risks of exposure to sexual and gender-based violence have also increased, with some groups particularly vulnerable – including those who are displaced, impoverished, have disabilities or are part of the Muhamasheen community.

Madam President,

As people struggle to survive, the humanitarian community is doing everything we can to help. In 2021, aid agencies assisted more than 11 million people every month.

But this work is being continuously hampered for entirely avoidable reasons. This brings me to my second point: the humanitarian response in Yemen faces far too many constraints.

The biggest constraint right now is funding. Last year's response plan was 58 per cent funded, making it the lowest funded appeal for Yemen since 2015.

In December, the World Food Programme announced cuts in food assistance for 8 million people due to funding shortages. Other vital programmes, including water, protection and reproductive health services, have also been forced to scale back or close in recent weeks for lack of funds.

We expect this year's aid operation to need roughly as much money as last year, or about \$3.9 billion to help 16 million people. Nationwide assessments are under way now to provide evidence for the 2022 response plan. I call on all donors to sustain – and if possible, to increase – their support this year.

But funding is far from the only constraint. Humanitarian access and security also remain challenges.

Bureaucratic impediments persist and include significant delays in approving aid projects, issuing staff visas and facilitating movements, and importing necessary equipment is also harder than it should be.

Attempts at interference are also rife – mostly by local authorities in Ansar Allah areas – and include efforts to change beneficiary lists, determine geographic locations or influence selection of partners.

Many of these constraints can disproportionately affect women and girls. Protection programmes, for example, face especially difficult challenges. Female humanitarian workers also face restrictions that limit movement and impact their participation in the response.

Security challenges have also persisted. Despite assurances to the contrary, Ansar Allah authorities have not provided access to the two UN staff detained in Sana'a in November. Access to a third detained UN worker, arrested in Marib in December, is currently being arranged with Government officials. We will keep the Council informed as these situations develop, and we renew our call for full respect of UN privileges and immunities.

I also want to reiterate the central importance of safe, predictable passage into and out of Yemen – both for humanitarian workers and supplies, as well as for commercial imports that Yemenis need to survive.

On 19 December, Ansar Allah authorities suspended humanitarian flights through Sana'a airport, citing technical issues with airport communications equipment. Flights resumed on 27 December.

These kinds of disruptions risk undermining the aid operation and staff safety. I call on Ansar Allah authorities to avoid unilateral flight cancellations in the future. I also request the Government to authorize the import of equipment to repair the faulty communications infrastructure at Sana'a airport.

On a related note, I wish to recall that the continued functioning of all points of entry for humanitarian cargo and commercial imports – including Hudaydah port – remains crucial to prevent further suffering and a worsening of humanitarian needs.

And regarding the Safer tanker, I wish to note that the United Nations continues to engage all stakeholders to find a pragmatic, workable solution. Everyone is aware of the grave danger posed by the tanker, and we appreciate the recent constructive engagement of the parties, Member States and other stakeholders on this important issue.

Madam President,

My last point focuses on what we can do – beyond increasing funding and improving access – to strengthen the aid operation and reduce people's suffering.

Improving the way aid agencies work is one place to start. An inter-agency evaluation of the humanitarian response in Yemen is now under way. The evaluation is an important opportunity, and initial findings are being integrated into the 2022 response plan. Final results should be available in March.

One area where we are already seeking to improve is in creating a more inclusive response. This means, among other things, a more enabling environment for women and girls, promoting gender parity among our staff and supporting more investments in gender-sensitive programming.

It also means amplifying women's voices at all levels. Today's meeting is a good example of this approach, and so I am very pleased to be briefing alongside Ms. Al-Aghbary.

But Madam President,

Humanitarian aid – no matter how effective or inclusive – cannot by itself solve the crisis in Yemen. As I've said before, economic collapse, accelerated by the conflict, is the biggest driver of people's needs.

The UN economic framework lays out a way to strengthen the economy and deliver lasting improvements in people's lives right now. This requires a mix of financial and political commitments that, together, could quickly reduce the scale of humanitarian needs.

These commitments include resuming foreign-exchange injections through the Central Bank. Foreign-exchange injections worked in the past and are especially urgent now to protect a recent – and fragile – partial recovery in the exchange rate of the Yemeni rial. As you know, the exchange rate is key to people’s ability to afford food and other essential goods, nearly all of which must be imported.

These commitments also include policy decisions to lift import restrictions and use import revenues to pay for basic services delivered by public institutions. This, too, will help bring down prices and improve people’s lives.

And we must do more to strengthen livelihoods, skills development and financial services. Ensuring access for women to these kinds of programmes is especially important to boost household incomes, improve food security and reduce needs.

But Madam President, the most transformative change will come only with an end to the fighting that is supported by a lasting and just peace agreement. This is what Yemenis want above all else, and I strongly support everything the Special Envoy is doing to help them achieve this.

Thank you.