



**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, 09 January 2019

As delivered

Thank you very much, Mr. President.

The Stockholm Agreement, and your resolution 2451, is already having an impact. Reports from humanitarian agencies in Hodeida indicate that civilians are a little more confident and a little less afraid that they will be victims of air strikes or caught in crossfire as they go about their lives. But, as Martin has just said, it's very early days, and we must do everything we can to support the Stockholm Agreement. We must keep reminding the parties that international humanitarian law must be respected in all locations and at all times.

I cannot yet report to you that the wider humanitarian situation in Yemen is any better. It remains catastrophic. More than 24 million people now need humanitarian assistance – that's 80 per cent of the population. They include 10 million people just a step away from famine. More than 3.3 million people have been displaced – over 600,000 of them in the last 12 months.

Only half of health facilities are fully functioning. Hundreds of thousands of people got sick last year because of poor sanitation and water-borne diseases, including cholera. Needs have intensified across all sectors. Millions of Yemenis are hungrier, sicker and more vulnerable now than they were a year ago.

Humanitarian agencies are scaling up to meet these needs. In December, the World Food Programme [WFP] reached 9.5 million people with emergency food assistance – that's a record number. In the next few months, WFP will expand operations to reach 12 million people a month, including the 10 million most at risk of famine and 2 million acutely vulnerable internally displaced people [IDPs]. Humanitarian agencies continue to roll back cholera, to improve living conditions for displaced families in collective centres and informal camps, and to do everything possible to mitigate hunger and malnutrition for the 240,000 people facing catastrophic levels of food insecurity (in the "IPC Phase 5" level). Agencies are also preparing for large-scale returns to Hodeida as and when conditions allow. Altogether, operations in Yemen this year will, if funding is available, reach 15 million people – about half the population.



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None of this is problem-free. On 31 December, WFP issued a statement seeking action from the de-facto authorities over diversion of food aid from seven distribution sites in Sana'a. We know that aid diversion and attempted diversion are risks in all conflict settings. We take this extremely seriously – parties to conflict must not misappropriate relief items destined for civilians in need.

Because we are committed to an effective response, we had already contracted independent third-party monitors last autumn. In their first report, they found that 95 per cent of intended food aid beneficiaries contacted across the country confirmed that they were indeed receiving food aid. In some cases, rations were not always complete. These gaps could potentially be due to funding or access constraints, or other problems. More detailed independent monitoring of this sort is currently under way. It would not surprise me, Mr. President, if problems were to emerge in other parts of the country. But we will always act to find solutions when that happens.

It is also important to know that the Sana'a problem itself was identified through existing monitoring mechanisms, and that WFP, with support from the Humanitarian Coordinator, has acted decisively. They and the de-facto authorities are having intensive, constructive discussions on the way forward, and we are optimistic that the right measures will be in place before the next round of distributions is slated to begin. Steps to improve targeting and delivery mechanisms are being taken as we speak.

Mr. President,

Resolution 2451 sets out three main points related to humanitarian issues. I would like to update you on where we stand on those today.

The first point is access. The humanitarian scale-up that Yemenis need will not be possible if aid workers and supplies cannot travel safely and freely to where they are needed. Following the Stockholm Agreement, an immediate objective was to regain access to the Red Sea Mills and several humanitarian warehouses in Hodeida. This has not yet happened. It does need to happen quickly. Enough grain for 3.5 million people has now been sitting unused, possibly spoiling, for nearly four months in the Mills.

Unfortunately, over the last six weeks, de-facto authorities have blocked humanitarian supplies travelling from areas under their control to Government-held areas. They have also recently informed humanitarian agencies that 72 hours' notice is required ahead of any movements instead of the usual 48 hours. We are also concerned by administrative restrictions being



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imposed on international NGOs as they renew their operating agreements, as well as ongoing challenges with monitoring.

Restrictions are also being tightened on specific types of programming, including protection and support for victims of sexual and gender-based violence. Protection work is urgently needed in Yemen, where – to cite one example – verified reports of grave violations of children’s rights including killings, maiming and recruitment to military service increased by nearly 25 per cent in the last year.

Continuing delays and unacceptable pre-conditions for the planned medical air-bridge from Sana’a airport also mean that thousands of people with medical conditions for which treatment is unavailable in northern Yemen are condemned to suffer.

Taken together, these developments are delaying and interrupting critical humanitarian programmes. But solutions can be agreed. Just today, we received confirmation that 56 new visas will be granted to UN staff. That is an important step into the right direction.

Your resolution also calls for impediments to commercial imports to be lifted. In December, commercial fuel imports through Hodeida and Salif were higher than at any time since August 2017, although they do remain below estimated requirements. This is a significant improvement, and we hope that fuel imports will continue to increase in the coming months. The number of clearance requests to enter Hodeida and Salif ports also more than doubled in December compared to the previous months. We hope this is a sign of rising commercial confidence following the Stockholm Agreement – but of course it only makes a difference if those requests are then agreed.

While the situation on fuel imports improved and more ships sought to reach the ports, commercial food imports in December plummeted to just 163,000 metric tons, which in fact is the lowest figure recorded since UNVIM began monitoring in July 2016. This is deeply concerning in an environment where a serious threat of famine persists. Overall, average monthly commercial food imports are now 25 per cent lower than they were a year ago. Ongoing import restrictions also mean no commercial containerized cargo has entered Hodeida port for over a year.

Severe congestion at Aden port also remains a problem. Despite some recent progress, WFP still has nearly 500 containers stuck in Aden port. In some cases, they have had to re-route cargo via Salalah in Oman and then overland into Yemen at considerably greater cost and risk. I hope that the Government of Yemen, the de-facto authorities and other stakeholders will take all steps necessary to ensure the smooth, unimpeded flow of commercial and humanitarian imports



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through all Yemeni ports, as required by resolution 2451. This should include re-opening Ras Isa port, which has been closed since June 2017.

As I told you last month, I raised all these access issues with those I met in Sana'a and in Aden in November. I also sent a follow-up letter to the president of the Ansar Allah supreme political council last month. A constructive dialogue is continuing through the Humanitarian Coordinator. And I remain hopeful that the de-facto authorities and the Government of Yemen will act quickly to fulfil the strong commitments to humanitarian action that I received.

Mr. President,

The second humanitarian point in resolution 2451 relates to the economy. Your resolution calls on the parties to strengthen the economy and the Central Bank, and to pay pensions and civil-servant salaries. The Yemeni rial is again losing value, with the exchange rate now hovering around 520 rial to the dollar. That of course is better than the 800-plus rial rate we saw several months ago, but significantly worse than last month's 450 rial rate. It's also more than twice pre-conflict levels.

Without intervention, the International Monetary Fund estimates that the exchange rate is likely to slide to more than 700 rial to the dollar this year. And as you know, because Yemen imports nearly all its food, fuel and medicines, this would be devastating for millions of people.

Foreign currency injections from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have been extremely helpful in strengthening the rial since October. But as I discussed with the Prime Minister in Aden, we need regular, predictable injections like this that will sustainably keep the exchange rate at an affordable level.

Your resolution also points out that paying pensions and civil-servant salaries across the country is another key element of strengthening the economy. In November, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates announced \$70 million in funding to UNICEF to cover teachers' allowances. Arrangements have now been agreed to deliver these payments, and they are expected to begin shortly. That should benefit millions of Yemeni children.

Martin's team, with the support of the Resident Coordinator, expects to convene discussions on the economy and strengthening the Central Bank soon. I hope this will quickly lead to practical and sustainable improvements.



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Mr. President, the third humanitarian point is your call on the international community to consider additional funding for the 2019 UN Coordinated Humanitarian Response Plan. Last year, we raised \$2.4 billion, or 83 per cent of what we required.

As humanitarian operations expand this year, in response to the deterioration in the situation we have seen especially over the last 6 months, humanitarian agencies will obviously need even more money. The 2019 Humanitarian Response Plan will be finalized in the next few weeks, and I expect it to require some \$4 billion – half of which will just be for emergency food assistance.

On 26 February, the Secretary-General will convene a high-level pledging conference in Geneva, co-hosted by the governments of Sweden and Switzerland.

In late November last year, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates announced they would contribute an additional \$500 million to combat hunger in Yemen in 2019. Given that we expect that the funds generously provided by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the UAE in 2018 to be fully spent by the end of March, this new pledge is extremely important. We are counting on all our donors to announce more generous funding at the February event.

Mr. President,

The important progress we have seen on the political track, which Martin just briefed you on, deserves our full and continuing support. But it does not of itself feed a single starving child. Millions of Yemenis are looking to us for assistance and protection, and we need to see more and faster progress on all the humanitarian elements of your resolution to make any practical difference to their lives.

Thank you.