



**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, 15 April 2019

As delivered via VTC

Thank you very much, Mr. President.

While the ceasefire in Hudaydah has, as Martin has just said, largely held, we have seen, as he has also indicated, a pronounced escalation of violence in other parts of the country.

In Hajjah, just north of Hudaydah, conflict has intensified in several areas.

Fierce fighting in Kushar District displaced up to 50,000 people in February and March and was marked by continuous reports of shelling and air strikes causing scores of civilian casualties.

In the Bani Hassan area of Abs District over the last two weeks, fighting has forced nearly 100,000 more people from their homes. About half have fled to other areas in Abs, which is an extremely poor and water-scarce district now hosting upwards of 300,000 displaced people.

The active front-lines are now just a few kilometres from Abs District's main water source, which serves about 200,000 people. If fighting damages or cuts off this facility, we could very quickly see a major catastrophe. If fighting moves south to the Hudaydah border, up to 400,000 more people could be displaced.

In Taizz, fierce fighting in March among different factions in a Government-controlled area resulted in numerous casualties.

Conflict has also intensified on established front lines in Al Dhale'e and along the northern border in Sa'ada and Al Jawf, displacing thousands more families.

On 26 March, an air strike in Sa'ada landed close to a hospital supported by Save The Children, killing eight civilians – including five children.



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On 2 April, armed men broke into a hospital supported by Médecins sans Frontières in Aden. They kidnapped a patient and killed him outside the hospital.

On 3 April, three women were reportedly killed and two children injured by an artillery shell landing near a school in Hudaydah.

On 7 April, large explosions at a warehouse in Sana'a killed 14 children attending school nearby. 16 more were critically injured. Most of them were not even nine years old.

As the international community continues to support the Stockholm Agreement, it is critical that we do not lose sight of escalating violence elsewhere. In my briefing to you on 14 December, I called for a cessation of hostilities across Yemen.

I am reiterating that call today. All the men with the guns and the bombs need to stop the violence. We again remind the parties that international humanitarian law binds them in all locations and at all times.

Mr. President,

Humanitarian agencies are also confronting an alarming resurgence in the cholera epidemic, which we had successfully rolled back last year. After two years and more than 1.5 million suspected cases, cholera has affected nearly every Yemeni family in some way.

Two weeks ago, Dr. Mohammed Abdul Mughni, a highly respected paediatrician treating cholera patients at a public hospital in Sana'a, himself died of the disease. He had just described the outbreak as “disastrous”, telling journalists that “we are working to the extremes of our strength.”

So far in 2019, nearly 200,000 suspected cases of cholera have been reported. That's almost three times as many as in the same period last year. About a quarter of cases are children under five.

This spike has come months before the usual increase during the main rainy season in August. The means that current trends – if they are not brought under control – could quickly result in mass morbidity and death. Early rains are partly responsible, but the major drivers remain forced displacement and conflict-induced collapse of public infrastructure, including the country's water and sanitation systems, and the public institutions that provide basic services.



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We've seen the consequences of the destruction of the health system elsewhere too. More than 3,300 cases of diphtheria have been reported since 2018 – the first outbreak in Yemen since 1982. Earlier this year, new measles cases surged to nearly twice the levels reported at the same time in 2018 – itself a record-breaking year.

As Martin has just reminded you, about 2 million school-age children remain out of school, and some 2,000 schools are unusable because they've been damaged, they are hosting displaced people or they have been occupied by armed groups.

Overshadowing everything is the continuing and very real risk of famine. In the past four years, millions of families in Yemen have been reduced to paupers; they have little or no income, even as the prices of basic commodities they need to survive increase relentlessly.

Mr. President,

Humanitarian agencies are doing everything we can to save lives and protect people across the country. Last year, we reached an average of 8 million people a month, making Yemen the world's largest aid operation.

This year, we are doing more. So far the World Food Programme has delivered emergency food assistance to more than 9 million people every month. They intend to increase this to 12 million people in the coming months.

Thousands of humanitarian personnel are staffing some 1,500 cholera treatment facilities in 147 districts across the country. Emergency response teams are treating patients, distributing hygiene kits, chlorinating water sources, sponsoring clean-up campaigns and educating the public. They are, as Dr. Mughni said, working tirelessly.

Humanitarian agencies have, Mr. President, kept millions of people alive, so far. But we still face two major challenges.

The first is access. We still encounter far too many restrictions on humanitarian action.

The Red Sea Mills in Hudaydah, which we've talked to you about before, are a compelling example. The Mills contain enough grain to feed 3.7 million people for a month, and they became inaccessible in September last year, as Coalition-backed forces advanced into the city.



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Ever since then, we have faced serious challenges in accessing the Mills, which Martin and I both addressed in public statements in February. A UN team was able to conduct a one-day visit, finally, on 26 February. That mission allowed us to establish that most of the grain could still be salvaged if it is immediately fumigated. Efforts have repeatedly been made since then to cross the front lines, to bring in workers to do the fumigation and to start milling the grain – a process that would take several weeks.

We continue to work with all the parties to find the safest, most efficient way to get this food to millions of desperately hungry people who need it as soon as possible.

The litany of other problems we have reported to you on access continue. Movement and customs clearances are withheld, visas are denied, project agreements are side-tracked, and missions are delayed at checkpoints.

Most of the restrictions we are currently facing are imposed by Ansar Allah-affiliated authorities in the north. We appreciate their recent decision to grant additional visas and we hope this will lead to further improvements in the access situation.

In Government-controlled areas, we also continue to engage the Coalition on requirements introduced last December at Dhubab checkpoint, which have caused delays for agencies seeking to deliver aid in Government-controlled areas along the west coast.

Commercial food imports through Hodeidah and Saleef in the first quarter of the year were about 40 per cent lower than the previous quarter, and average food prices were more than twice the pre-crisis level.

Commercial fuel imports are only 30 per cent of estimated requirements. Correspondingly, fuel prices have nearly quadrupled in some places in the past several weeks. People are waiting for days to secure the very limited supplies of fuel which are available.

With huge numbers of desperately poor, desperately hungry families being priced out of local food markets, decision makers on all sides need urgently to find ways to speed up the berthing of ships in Hodeidah, ease credit requirements and facilitate in-country shipments of fuel.

As I discussed with the new Governor of the Central Bank two days ago, we also need to see the exchange rate stabilise at a level which, as Martin has alluded to, makes it affordable for ordinary people to buy food.



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Mr. President,

We are increasingly concerned about the Safer oil tanker, a floating storage and offloading facility about 8 kilometres off the coast of Ras Isa terminal in the Red Sea. Used to store and export oil since 1998, the tanker currently has about 1.1 million barrels of oil on-board. It is in poor condition and has had no maintenance since 2015. Without maintenance, we fear that it will rupture or even explode, unleashing an environmental disaster in one of the world's busiest shipping lanes.

We have been working with all parties to address this risk, supported by funding from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, starting with a technical assessment. Final approvals for the assessment have been pending since September. We hope that recent indications that a UN project will soon be able to begin work on this critical issue prove correct.

Mr. President, the second, potentially insuperable, challenge we face is funding.

In February, donors pledged \$2.6 billion for humanitarian action in Yemen this year, including a further \$1 billion joint pledge for the United Nations by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Last year's contribution from these two donors was channelled through the United Nations as a single, unearmarked grant early in the year, which I consider a best practice in humanitarian donorship. That was also a major factor in enabling us last year to stem the cholera outbreak, to enable us to roll back food insecurity in half of pre-famine districts and to help us save more children suffering from complicated severely acute malnutrition – more children than we were able to save in any other comparable operation globally.

While we were encouraged by the pledges made in Geneva, I need to tell you that nearly four months into the year, the UN Yemen response plan has actually received – received in cash – only \$267 million. This is about 10 per cent of what was pledged, and 6 per cent of requirements. And it is 80 per cent less than what we had received in cash at this time last year.

Mr. President,

UN agencies are rapidly running out of money for essential relief activities. The World Health Organization projects that 60 per cent of diarrhoea treatment centres – the central approach we have to tackling the cholera outbreak – could close in the coming weeks, and services at 50 per cent of secondary care facilities could be disrupted.



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The World Food Programme reports that its pipeline for food vouchers and the in-kind food pipeline will break in June, unless they immediately receive new money.

Closing or scaling back such programmes – at a time when we are struggling to prevent widespread famine and roll back cholera and other killer diseases – would be catastrophic.

And so I implore all our donors to convert their pledges – the pledges they made in Geneva – into cash as quickly as possible.

Mr. President,

We remain keenly aware that – as Martin said – a sustainable peace would be the most effective remedy for the humanitarian crisis in Yemen. Without peace, we will simply go on treating the symptoms of this crisis, instead addressing the cause.

Let me summarize. Violence has again increased. The relief operation is running out of money. Barring changes, the end is nigh.

Thank you.