

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

**Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator,
Mark Lowcock – Remarks at the opening of the High-Level Pledging Event for the
Humanitarian Crisis in Yemen**

Virtual Meeting, 02 June 2020

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for joining us today.

The situation in Yemen is catastrophic.

COVID-19 is spreading rapidly across the country. Available data suggest a much higher rate of severe illness and death than in many other countries. Health facilities are turning people away because they're already full, or they don't have what they need to treat people with the virus.

This is what more than five years of war have done to Yemen. The health system is in a state of collapse.

COVID-19 comes on top of the many problems already facing Yemen – economic collapse, destroyed infrastructure, hunger, disease and displacement.

Yemenis themselves say things are worse today than at any time in their recent history.

And yet so far this year, the world has offered less help than it did last year. Never have we had so little money for humanitarian action in Yemen this late in the year.

So we have come together here today to see what the world wants to do about that.

The United Nations and our partners have put forward a clear, workable plan.

We are currently delivering humanitarian assistance to more than 10 million people across the country every month.

That has helped bring Yemen back from the brink of famine, curb the largest recorded cholera outbreak in history and support families fleeing violence.

Aid agencies are also racing to contain COVID-19. We are supporting rapid response teams in every single district, importing essential supplies and providing reliable information to help millions of people protect themselves.

Delivering aid in Yemen is never easy, and we need much more from everyone if we are to continue this work.

From the authorities, particularly in the north, we need an end to the unacceptable constraints that hinder our programmes. We have seen concrete progress on several of these issues recently. This is positive and we want to build on it. But much more is needed.

Agencies will keep working with donors and the authorities to ensure this progress continues. Our programmes have also been carefully calibrated to keep risks to manageable levels.

But I need to be clear that no one with staff on the ground working in Yemen right now sees these constraints as our most formidable challenge right now.

Because the biggest challenge is the money.

Of 41 major UN supported programmes in Yemen, more than 30 will close in the next few weeks if we cannot secure additional funds. This means many more people will die.

COVID-19 rapid response teams are funded only until the end of June. Next month, we could start winding down treatment for severely malnourished children. Support for cholera facilities will also start to reduce.

With your help, Yemen can avoid all this.

So I want to thank all of you who have already contributed to the response this year.

And we have heard some important pledges.

But again, I must be clear: pledges will not save lives unless they are paid. And so far, most of the pledges made remain unpaid.

Excellencies, Yemen is now on the precipice. Right on the cliff edge, below which lies a tragedy of historic proportions.

So what we ask of you today is

- First, generous pledges, consistent with what you provided last year
- Second, a guarantee to pay promptly
- And third, flexible financing to allow the aid agencies to focus where the needs are greatest. I want in particular to warn that cutting funding to one part of the country or another because you are concerned about the behaviour of those in control is tantamount to the collective punishment of the innocent and the vulnerable, people who have no say on who is in charge in the places they live.

And so we will now hear from all of you whether the world is prepared to watch Yemen fall off the cliff, or, alternatively we are going, as we still can, to stop that happening.

Thank you.