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**Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs**

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

*New York, 14 October 2021*

*As delivered*

Thank you very much, Mr. President.

As we sit here today, the humanitarian crisis in Yemen continues to deepen. More than 20 million people – two-thirds of the population – need assistance from aid agencies.

The most immediate cause of this suffering is the war. In recent weeks, conflict has intensified. Yet a ceasefire – and all the benefits this would bring – remains elusive.

In parallel, Yemen's economy is collapsing, leaving millions destitute. This collapse is a direct result of the war and, more indirectly, a result of the perverse incentives the war has created.

Hemmed in by violence and with fewer chances to take care of themselves, millions of Yemenis are looking to humanitarian organizations for help. But aid work is about to get much harder in Yemen, mostly because agencies are, once again, starting to run out of money.

I will focus my remarks today on these three issues – growing conflict and instability, economic collapse and the aid operation – and what they mean for civilians.

Mr. President,

Yemen is growing more violent – not less.

Over the last few weeks, Houthi forces have intensified their brutal offensive in Marib, taking more territory there and in neighbouring parts of Shabwah governorate.

In Aden, clashes also erupted earlier this month between rival armed groups, leading to several days of violence that shut down parts of the city and raise grave concerns for the future.

Fighting, shelling and air strikes have also continued in Sa'ada, Hajjah, Hudaydah, and along nearly 50 other front lines.

The impact on civilians is grim. Hostilities in September killed or injured 235 civilians across the country. That's almost eight people every day – the second-highest figure in two years.

The fighting in Marib is taking a particularly heavy civilian toll. Last month, almost 10,000 people were displaced in Marib – the single highest figure so far this year. Since late September, Houthi forces have encircled Al Abdiyah district in south-west Marib, which is home to nearly 35,000 civilians, many of whom previously fled there to escape fighting in other areas.

Several recent mass-casualty incidents have also shocked the world, including a missile attack in Marib on 3 October – attributed to Houthi forces – that killed three children and injured 21 other civilians.

All parties to the conflict must uphold their obligations under international humanitarian law, including taking constant care to spare civilians and civilian objects throughout military operations.

The parties are likewise required to facilitate humanitarian access. Aid agencies need safe, timely and sustained access to all affected communities in Marib and elsewhere.

We also urge all parties to ensure civilians' freedom of movement, including safe passage for those fleeing conflict areas.

And like the Special Envoy, we are also gravely concerned by the pervasive human rights violations that the conflict is fuelling – including the shocking execution of nine individuals by Houthi authorities in Sana'a last month following proceedings that do not appear to have met the standards of a fair trial or due process under international law.

International law requires effective accountability for serious violations. In this context, it is unfortunate that the mandate of the Group of Eminent Experts, the only independent international entity investigating and issuing public reports on human

rights in Yemen, was not renewed last week.

Mr. President,

While conflict and instability are endangering civilians' lives, livelihoods are also under attack.

As Under-Secretary-General Griffiths said in August, it is Yemen's economic collapse that is driving most needs in the country – including the risk of famine.

Because nearly everything must be imported, people and businesses are extremely vulnerable to changes in global prices and, especially, exchange rates and import taxes.

The Yemeni rial is now trading around 1,270 rial to the US dollar in Aden. That is nearly six times higher than before the war.

At the same time, fewer essential goods are reaching key ports in the first place. In Hudaydah and Saleef, commercial food imports in September were 8 per cent below last year's average. Fuel imports were an alarming 64 per cent lower.

There are several immediate steps that could stem Yemen's economic collapse and so help reduce the pressure on the people of Yemen and the aid agencies trying to help them.

Foreign exchange injections through the Central Bank would quickly bring down prices, just as they did in the past. The Government is ready to work with everyone to devise an effective programme for this.

It is also time to loosen constraints on economic life. That means ensuring all Yemen's ports are fully open, including by lifting import restrictions on Hudaydah and Saleef.

It also means paying civil servant salaries. A quarter of the population depends on these salaries. They are also essential to keeping basic services afloat like water, sanitation, healthcare and education.

And it means taking steps to remove other barriers to business. These include measures like issuing bonds to lower insurance premiums that drive up prices of imports, as well as expanding programmes to clean up mines and other explosives that have been strewn across the country.

There are workable proposals on the table to achieve all of this. The impact would be both quick and transformative. The UN is eager to help.

In the meantime, Mr. President, we remain focused on the humanitarian operation.

Aid agencies are now helping nearly 13 million people across the country. That's about 3 million more people than just a few months before. Our best assessment is that this expansion has considerably pushed back the immediate risk of large-scale famine.

That is a major success and a direct result of more donor funds coming in over the last few months. This generosity is making an enormous difference.

But this success may prove short-lived, as aid agencies don't have enough money to keep going at the scale required. In the coming weeks and months, up to 4 million people could see their food aid reduced. By the end of the year, that number could rise to 5 million people.

Funding for water delivery and hospitals will also run out by the end of November. Water, sanitation and hygiene programmes have only received 12 per cent of the funds they need this year; health programmes have received just 15 per cent. Similar gaps persist in shelter and other sectors.

We are calling on everyone to do everything possible to sustain the momentum we've built over the last several months and keep famine at bay.

That means increasing support for all humanitarian sectors in Yemen right away and – crucially – working hard to ensure the level of support does not drop next year.

Agencies are committed to doing our part to help donors maintain their support. In the coming months, we will publish an impartial, nationwide needs assessment and evidence-based response plan for 2022. Your continued support will be crucial for this work, and we will keep you updated as we progress.

Mr. President, perhaps more than everything else I've just described, Yemen needs a political solution to end the war. We support everything the Special Envoy has just said on this.

A nationwide ceasefire – with no pre-conditions – would be an excellent place to start.

Thank you.