

Statement by Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mark Lowcock, on Yemen

New York, 22 February 2021

As Yemen enters its seventh year of conflict, the United Nations, together with the Governments of Sweden and Switzerland, is organizing a high-level pledging event on 1 March to raise money for the relief operation.

Today, I spoke to people all over the country to hear first-hand about their daily struggle for survival, and ask what message they had for the leaders who will attend the pledging conference.

Here is what they told me.

Amjad is a former taxi driver in Hamdan district. He has a 10-month-old son, Walid, who is being treated for severe acute malnutrition. Food is scarce in his home. He told me: “Millions of families are in famine – thousands of children are dying – the only thing that is free is air, and even that is polluted because of the war. Our humanity has been stolen from us.”

Idris and his family of 12, including seven children, who are in Amran, will receive no aid for the next six weeks, because of cuts in the aid programme due to funding shortages. He said: “My children don’t ask for anything. They see our surroundings and understand, so they don’t ask for more. But the oldest boy, who is 14 years old, tries his best to find income. Sometimes he says he wants to go to the top of the mountain and kill himself because he cannot bring things for his little brothers and sisters.”

Khalil, a former teacher and a father of eight children, was displaced from Taizz to Amran four months ago. He told me he had to sell the gas cylinder they used for cooking yesterday. He said: “Please save us, rescue us from these conditions. If these conditions are worsened or not alleviated by the international community, it will be the largest famine and the whole world will witness it.”

Karim was displaced by conflict in Razih to Saada. His 9-month-old daughter is severely malnourished, and Karim has no money for drugs or the clinic to treat her. He told me to tell the world leaders: “Stop the war, lift the siege. We have no jobs, no food. There is no medicine available. Lift the blockade and allow us back to normal life.”

Eman, a mother of two, was displaced from Taizz six years ago to Ibb. She receives no food assistance. She told me: “Most nights my children go to bed without dinner and are hungry until morning.”

Adnan lives in Saada City with his family including seven children, two of whom have special needs. He told me about his 8-year-old daughter, Athkar: “A few months ago she started feeling very weak in her legs. We took her to the hospital, there was a problem in her hips. They did surgery and she is now under treatment. But medical services here are very poor. There is a scarcity of medicine. She is better but cannot walk. I don’t have enough food for her.”

Halima and her family of 15 members, including a father who is admitted in the local hospital’s intensive care unit, were displaced from Sirwah 10 days ago to Marib. She said: “We want peace. I hope peace will prevail and this war will end. Psychologically people are very tired of this conflict, they want to go back to their homes.”

Ashraf and his family, including parents, siblings and 10 children, have been displaced four times since 2015. The last time was four months ago. They are now in a camp for internally displaced people in Marib. He told me: “The conflict reached the area we were in, so we had to move. We don’t have shelter, we barely get enough water, it is difficult for us. We are living in a valley under the trees, we are using the branches as cover.”

Karima’s family, including her five children, father and brothers, who are fishermen, were displaced from Al Tuhaytaa in 2018. She told me: “We hope and pray for safety. There are no health centres near us. If a child does not feel well there is no facility to go to. We cannot travel at night if a child is sick. The children need vaccines. Babies have not received vaccinations.”

Salma, a mother of five, lives in Hajjah City with her husband, who has special needs. She said: “We now receive half the food assistance we used to receive. We are in a miserable situation. When we run out of food, we have to go to search for more. I cannot even beg from others as no one has anything to give.”

Saeed, a former fisherman displaced from Al Hudaydah, has lived in Ibb in a tent with his family of seven, including five children, for more than ten years. He told me: “We receive no assistance. We live in a torn tent – our children are getting sick in the cold. We eat only one meal a day.”

Mustafa, a former farm worker, fled Al Hudaydah with his family three years ago when their neighbours were killed by an air strike. He is now disabled and lives in Ibb with his 10 children. He told me: “We hope to get welfare, money and food to sustain families. If children get sick, they recover only because of heavenly power, because we can do nothing for them.”

Ahmed, who is a journalist, fled harassment and threats in Hajjah to move to Marib. He now lives with his wife and four children in a container. He told me: “I hope there will be peace and harmony prevailing in Yemen. I hope one day we will live in peace, have democracy, sit at the table and discuss solutions.”

Dr. Osman, a general physician in Aden City, worked as a volunteer in a COVID-19 treatment centre during the pandemic last year. He told me: “COVID is getting worse again. We are seeing more cases. We need vaccines for medical staff and PPE [personal protective equipment] for all health workers.”

These fourteen Yemeni people have been through far too much already. There are millions more just like them.

I hope that leaders around the world listen carefully to their voices, heeding their calls for more humanitarian assistance, and doing their utmost to bring this senseless war to an end.

Please pledge generously and pay promptly.

Note: The interviewees' names have been changed to protect their identities.