

**UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS AND  
EMERGENCY RELIEF COORDINATOR, STEPHEN O'BRIEN**

**Statement to the Security Council on Yemen**

**3 March 2016**

Mr. President,

The conflict in Yemen continues unabated since my last briefing to the Council on 16 February. By far, the most pressing concern today is the protection of civilians, millions of whom face relentless and often indiscriminate bombing and shelling of urban areas by the parties to the conflict every day.

This was again made starkly clear on Saturday, 27 February, when some 30 people were killed and 40 injured in an apparent air strike on a busy market in Nahem district of Sana'a Governorate. Among those killed in the attack were six children. This was one of four air strikes in Nahem district during February that reportedly killed civilians. Since the start of the conflict, over 2,000 children are estimated to have been killed or injured – including at least 90 children killed this year alone - in airstrikes, shelling, ground fighting and unexploded ordnance.

Protected places, such as hospitals, schools and homes continue to be hit by all parties. On 24 February, Coalition air strikes reportedly hit a health centre in Bidbadah district, Marib Governorate, completely destroying the facility and on 1 March airstrikes reportedly landed within 20 meters of a hospital in Sa'ada.

I reiterate my previous calls: airstrikes and random shelling of civilian areas violates cardinal rules of international humanitarian law and constitute unlawful conduit of hostilities. All parties in this conflict have an obligation under international humanitarian law to take every measure to ensure civilians and civilian objects are protected. It is unacceptable that health facilities or schools are being hit, and it is critical that the parties make guarantees that these locations will be protected.

Mr. President,

In the absence of a politically negotiated end to the conflict, the security situation across much of the country is rapidly deteriorating. In Aden, regular attacks by parties including Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, the so-called Aden and Abyan branch of the Islamic State, and local militants, take place against security personnel and other segments of the Government of Yemen. These attacks and general lawlessness in Aden have prevented the UN from re-deploying international staff there since October 2015 –

directly impacting our ability to assess needs and monitor response. Intense fighting around Sana'a, Marib, Taizz and Sa'ada also restrict our ability to deliver assistance where it is needed most.

The proliferation of checkpoints across the country further impedes humanitarian action slowing the transport of key goods and services and in some instances halting movement altogether. Command and control lines within armed groups is often tenuous, with agreements and guarantees reached at the national level not necessarily communicated downstream to the individuals at checkpoints. Despite permission to move, trucks are often held up and sometimes delayed for days or even weeks.

Bureaucratic requirements imposed by Houthi authorities also delay and impede the rapid delivery of humanitarian assistance. In one week alone in February, the Ministry of Interior in Sana'a refused travel permission to three separate UN-led missions from Sana'a to Ibb and Taizz. Increasingly movement of UN security staff into and out of the country is also being made difficult, having a direct impact on our ability to expand operations. Of particular concern, however, is the fact that for over three months, WFP together with FAO and UNICEF have been trying to conduct an Emergency Food Security and Nutrition Assessment throughout the country. Originally intended to be launched in October 2015, the assessment continues to be blocked by authorities in Sana'a. This assessment is critically needed in order to update information on food security and nutrition to inform humanitarian response.

Let me therefore remind all parties that providing timely and unimpeded access to humanitarian organizations is not only the fundamental prerequisite to any meaningful humanitarian response, but also an obligation under IHL. I call upon the Council to request all parties – in no uncertain terms – to stop any denial of access and facilitate life-saving needs immediately.

Despite these challenges, UN agencies and partners continue to deliver assistance, often at grave risk, across all sectors. In February, for example, over 3 million people received WFP food assistance, some 400,000 more people than the month before. The humanitarian community remains committed to expanding its overall response to 13.4 million people this year in Yemen. To achieve this, the Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan for 2016 appeals for US\$1.8 billion.

Mr. President,

On 12 February, the Secretary-General instituted the United Nations Verification and Inspection Mechanism (UNVIM) at the request of the Government of Yemen. The Mechanism, based in Djibouti, is intended to expedite legitimate commercial imports of critical commodities such as food, fuel and medicines.

All States and relevant organizations have since been notified of the Mechanism's procedures, including the International Maritime Organization. The nominations for the

UNVIM tripartite Steering Committee consisting of a representative of the Government of Yemen, the Coalition and the United Nations will be finalized this week, allowing the full commencement of UNVIM operations.

In recent months there has been a significant increase of fuel and other life-saving imports through Yemeni ports, and it is critical that every effort be made by all member states directly concerned to encourage, and not hinder, that trend. It is imperative that imports to Yemen and trading within Yemen be allowed to continue. I call on all parties to ensure protection of civilian infrastructure, including shipping ports and associated equipment.

I am also pleased to report that the WFP chartered vessel, the Mainport Cedar, which had been diverted and taken by the Coalition to the Saudi port of Jizan, was released on 25 February. Humanitarian food and medical supplies were subsequently delivered as planned to Hudaydah. The humanitarian IT equipment will be delivered to Aden on 6 March

Mr. President,

Once again, I underscore the urgent need for this Council and the international community more broadly, to impress upon the parties to this conflict their obligations to take greater measures to protect civilians, to facilitate unconditional and sustained access to all parts of Yemen. I also ask the Council to press the parties to resume peace talks and agree to a cessation of hostilities.

Thank you.