

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

Statement to the Security Council on Yemen
New York, 16 February 2016

Mr. President,

The conflict in Yemen continues to kill and maim civilians, causing immeasurable suffering, while destroying livelihoods, homes, communities and essential civilian infrastructure. Much of this is the result of indiscriminate bombing and shelling by the parties. Since March 2015, more than 35,000 casualties, including over 6,000 deaths, have been reported by health facilities across the country. The United Nations has confirmed that at least 2,997 of those killed and 5,659 of those injured are civilians. Conservative estimates suggest that well over 700 children have been killed and over 1,000 more injured. There are reports that as many as 720 children have been forcibly recruited by the parties.

The conflict is exacting a terrible humanitarian toll. Some 2.7 million people have had to flee their homes. At least 7.6 million people are severely food insecure. Some two million acutely malnourished children and pregnant or lactating women need urgent treatment.

Chronic drug shortages, unpaid salaries, and conflict related destruction means that around 14 million Yemenis do not have sufficient access to healthcare services. Since March last year, nearly 600 health facilities closed due to damage, shortages of critical supplies or lack of health workers. Nearly 220 of these facilities used to provide treatment for acute malnutrition. In January alone, at least three health facilities were damaged - one hospital in Sa'ada Governorate and two facilities in Nahim district of Sana'a Governorate.

More than 1.8 million children have been out of school since mid-March 2015, bringing the total number of children out of school to more than 3.4 million when combined with pre-crisis figures. Over 1,170 schools are now unfit for use due to conflict-related damage, presence of displaced people, or occupation by armed groups.

Water infrastructure serving at least 900,000 people has been either damaged or destroyed by airstrikes, artillery and rockets. For instance last week, the water reservoir serving 40,000 people was completely destroyed, reportedly by an airstrike, in the capital, Sana'a City.

Mr. President,

UN agencies and their NGO partners are delivering assistance under extraordinarily difficult and dangerous circumstances across the country. For example, just this last Sunday, a Saudi-led coalition airstrike hit a building 200 metres away from the Diplomatic Transit Facility, accommodating UN and diplomatic personnel.

During January the humanitarian community provided regular monthly food rations to approximately 2.6 million people; direct water deliveries to over 234,000 people; and supplied fuel to water pumping stations for more than 3 million people. Health facilities reached over 102,000 people; around 36,000 children were screened for acute malnutrition and 3,700 malnourished children under five years were admitted to feeding programmes. Other relief items were provided to over 42,700 people.

Mr. President,

Despite these commendable and brave efforts, I am extremely concerned about the increasingly restricted humanitarian space we face to respond to the staggering needs of Yemeni men, women and children.

In addition to an already dangerous environment, parties to the conflict are contributing to the reduction of humanitarian access. The al-Houthis and allied groups remain inconsistent in allowing access and movement of humanitarian goods and personnel. Over the past week, while some UN agencies were given approvals, several others were denied for joint inter-agency missions to Ibb, Taizz and Sa'ada.

While humanitarian deliveries are ongoing in areas where Al Qaida in the Arab Peninsula is present, international humanitarian movement to these areas is extremely challenging and dangerous. This includes locations in the Hadramaut governorate, but also in Aden where severe insecurity prevails.

Humanitarian assistance reached the Taizz city enclave following a high level mission led by the Humanitarian Coordinator on 22 January. The area faces severe access restrictions by al-Houthis, and is home to over 200,000 people. Deliveries included food for around 18,000 people, non-food items for approximately 1,250 families; and medical supplies – including 170 oxygen cylinders and 30,000 units of dialysis sessions. Over the weekend, additional assistance has reached the enclave, including food for a further 18,000 people, cancer treatment drugs, surgical items, intravenous fluids and anaesthetic supplies, as well as HIV antiretroviral treatments. These are positive developments, and I note Al Houthi commitments on access to Taizz City made during talks in Biel and reaffirmed to the Special Envoy in his last visit to Yemen. Humanitarian deliveries into the enclave often require long and protracted negotiations with parties on the ground, however. Efforts are ongoing to establish a monitoring mechanism that will enable predictable access, as opposed to ad hoc 'one-time' deliveries.

Access to northern Governorates where needs are among the most severe in the country also continue to be challenging due to relentless conflict, including airstrikes – in

particular to communities along the border with Saudi Arabia where conflict is intense. Humanitarian agencies and partners are committed to implement an operational to deliver food, health and sanitation supplies to some 350,000 people in Sa'ada Governorate. This past month more than 276,000 people were provided food in the Governorate.

Recent communication received from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia regarding the safety of humanitarian workers in al-Houthi controlled areas has impacted the humanitarian community's planning, causing delays to important missions over the past two weeks. This follows the denial of entry to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on 17 January of the Regional Humanitarian Coordinator. On 11 February one of WFP's charter vessels, the MV Mainport Cedar, carrying humanitarian supplies and traveling from Djibouti with a scheduled and approved stop in the Yemen port of Hodeidah, was diverted by Coalition forces to the Saudi Arabian port of Jizan.

Mr. President,

The parties to the conflict have a duty of care in the conduct of military operations to protect all civilian persons and objects - including humanitarian and health care workers and facilities - against attack. The parties should also refrain from using explosive weapons in populated areas; these cause unacceptable harm by killing large numbers of civilians, destroying homes, severely hindering critical services over the immediate and longer term, and leaving behind explosive remnants of war. I remind all parties of their obligations under international humanitarian law to facilitate humanitarian access to all areas of Yemen.

UN agencies and their partners will continue to deliver impartial and neutral assistance across Yemen according to need, using the established de-confliction mechanism in Riyadh with the Coalition for humanitarian staff and supply movements, including those to and from sub-national offices in Sa'ada, Hodeidah, Ibb and Aden.

Mr. President,

Humanitarian assistance must be complemented by efforts to revive the economy and flow of much-needed commercial goods, which has been severely impeded by the ongoing conflict. Given the heavy dependence of Yemen on imported food and fuel, it will be critical to ensure inspections in line with Security Council resolution 2216, they they do not adversely impact the flow of commercial shipping into Yemen of basic items that Yemeni civilians rely on to survive.

I am pleased to report that the United Nations Verification and Inspection Mechanism (UNVIM) has now been formally launched. The mechanism must now contribute towards continued improvements in the levels of commercial imports into Yemeni ports outside the control of the Government of Yemen and which is not channeled through a UN agency or recognized international humanitarian organization.

The Secretary-General has formally requested the Government of Yemen and the Saudi-led Coalition to appoint representatives to sit on the Steering Committee by 22 February. All United Nations Member States have been informed. The mechanism will

operate for an initial six months out of Djibouti, and will move to Aden and/or Sana'a when the security situation permits. UNVIM monitors will also be based in Dubai, Jeddah and Salalah to work with the relevant authorities.

Mr. President,

In two days' time, the 2016 Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan will be launched in Geneva. This plan asks for US\$ 1.8 billion to address the most critical and prioritized needs across all governorates in the country, including food assistance for nearly 9 million people; water and sanitation support for 7.4 million people; urgent health support for 10.6 million people; and emergency interventions to mitigate growing and severe malnutrition rates. I cannot overstate the importance of donor support for this endeavour, nor the urgency we face in responding to humanitarian needs that only deepen as the conflict intensifies.

Nearly one year into the conflict, it is now more important than ever that we address the human catastrophe unfolding in Yemen. I again underscore the urgent need for this Council and the international community more broadly, to impress upon the parties to this conflict their obligations to facilitate unconditional and sustained access to all parts of Yemen, and to take greater measures to protect civilians. I also reiterate the urgent request that this Council press the parties to resume peace talks and agree to a ceasefire.

The Yemeni people are suffering. They do need you to act now.

Thank you.