

YEMEN

OVERVIEW

Following the extremely welcome talks in Stockholm in December, the UK passed a new resolution on Yemen at the United Nations Security Council. This means Yemen has taken a vital step closer to peace.

Now the UK needs to use its position as UNSC penholder to turn the political promises of Resolution 2451 into practical change. This means full implementation of what was agreed at Stockholm and that real, tangible steps are urgently taken to address the still grave humanitarian crisis.

It has now been almost four years since hostilities escalated in Yemen, and the suffering of millions of children and their families has only grown worse. The numbers are staggering. **Today, 24 million people need humanitarian and protection assistance,¹ including over 11 million children.**

HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

Millions of Yemeni women, men and children are malnourished, with an estimated 85,000 children under five who may already have died from extreme hunger or disease. These famine-like conditions have been exacerbated by denial of access to humanitarian and commercial goods; the destruction and shutdown of much of the country's medical and education systems; massive cholera and diphtheria outbreaks; and almost four years of escalated conflict. **This is causing a child to die every 10 minutes from preventable causes** - though due to poor monitoring of civilian harm and the breakdown of the health system we believe the *true figure is far higher*. **The famine-like conditions are creating irreversible damage to what could potentially become a lost generation of children; denied education, essential nutrition, or safety from violence.**

In an environment where more than half of all health facilities are closed or partially functioning, **there has been a surge in child mortality, driven by communicable diseases and chronic malnutrition**. Much of a child's future is determined by the quality of nutrition during the first 1,000 days. If children do not get the right nutrients during this period, the damage is often irreversible.

We have seen the emergence of swine flu for the first time this conflict, which is an extremely concerning development. The cases have so far claimed 84 lives in Ibb and Sa'ada. We will be closely monitoring and will update accordingly.

All parties have obstructed the distribution of humanitarian assistance and prevented humanitarian access. The current ceasefire in Hodeidah is tenuously holding, however, progress on the ground, including implementation of the measures agreed at Stockholm, including securing a guarantee of humanitarian corridors has not yet been secured. Such measures, however, are imperative if humanitarian aid and essential goods such as food, fuel and medicines can get across the country to those who need it most.

PROTECTION CRISIS

While the ceasefire in the port city of Hodeidah seems to be holding, there has been an increase in violence in other parts of the country, including Taiz, Hajjah and Sa'ada, increasing protection risks for children and their families, including those that have been previously displaced by violence in Hodeidah.

On **9th August 2018**, a coalition airstrike hit a bus in Sa'ada that was carrying dozens of children for a summer school trip. ICRC has confirmed that there were 130 victims; **51 people died, including 40 children, and 79 people were injured, including 56 children**. After international outcry, a Saudi and Emirati led-coalition (SELC) spokesperson stated that the airstrike was "legitimate military action [...] in

¹ <https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/GHO2019.pdf>

accordance with International Humanitarian Law”. However, following the outcomes from the Joint Incidents Assessment Team (JIAT) investigation, the SELC admitted that the attack was ‘unjustifiable’.²

Since the escalation of the conflict in March 2015, the Yemen Data Project has counted more than 18,942³ air raids, one approximately every 102 minutes for almost four years. Approximately half of all known targets have been against non-military sites, including hospitals, schools, markets, factories, and farms. These attacks, along with teacher non-payments and local insecurity, have closed two-thirds of Yemen’s schools; **creating an exploitation crisis as child marriage, child labour and military recruitment fill the void.**

The UN Group of Eminent Experts report in August 2018 found “little evidence of any attempt by parties to the conflict to minimize civilian casualties”, with coalition air strikes being found to have caused most direct civilian casualties. The Group also found reasonable grounds that the SELC’s ‘severe naval and air restrictions in Yemen’ constitute a violation of the proportionality rule of international humanitarian law.⁴

WHAT CAN THE UK GOVERNMENT DO:

1. **Ensure implementation of the Stockholm Agreement.** This includes sustained pressure on parties to implement all aspects of the peace agreement, and support to the UN to conduct their role in monitoring and facilitation of the agreement;
2. **Call on parties to engage constructively in the ongoing peace process,** and to work with the UN Special Envoy in good faith, **without preconditions;**
3. Ensure parties to the conflict take tangible steps **to address the country’s humanitarian crisis,** including supporting the work of the UN Relief Chief Mark Lowcock, and delivering his five recommendations to prevent famine;
4. **Ensure humanitarian access** so that aid and commercial goods, including **food, medicine, and fuel, gets into and across the country,** to everyone that needs them; and
5. **Demand that all parties abide by their obligations under international law, including the protection of children and civilians more broadly.** Where there are alleged violations of international law, call for independent investigations and ensure anyone found guilty are held accountable for their crimes.

² <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-saudi-strike/deadly-yemen-air-strike-was-unjustified-coalition-team-idUSKCN1LH3JO>

³ Yemen Data Project November 2018 Update <https://mailchi.mp/17cf33c9bbb7/december2018-yemen-data-project-update-426035>

⁴ <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=23479&LangID=E>