

THE FIGHTING MUST STOP – TO CREATE A SPACE FOR PEACE

Attacking Hodeida city, after its airport, would be a far greater threat to Yemeni civilians

The Saudi- and UAE-led coalition has ignored all warnings and combined forces have pressed ahead to take Hodeida airport. The advance must now stop and efforts be refocused on peace. Taking the battle to a densely-populated city will have a much higher humanitarian toll.

There has already been a fierce fight around Mandher, the village close to the airport, where 2000 residents were trapped in the middle of a war zone; there was no safe passage for civilians to evacuate and ambulances could not reach there to tend to injured people. As one resident said on 16 June: *'The humanitarian situation is at its worst and many people have been injured and two have been killed. The people want to a chance to evacuate to Hodeida or any other place but they couldn't.'*

Those who can leave, do. Several thousand people have fled from all three districts of Hodeida city (Hawk, Al Hali and Al Meena); many more are trapped and terrified, too afraid or unable to leave.

The longer this continues, the deeper the humanitarian cost will be – in Hodeida and across the country – with impacts on food, water, nutrition, education and livelihoods. For example, it is currently the harvesting season for dates, but fighting is preventing farmers from harvesting and selling their crops. Already, 14 out of 26 districts in Hodeida are in 'pre-famine' conditions.¹

The Saudi- and UAE-led coalition has presented a 'relief' plan,² but this should be seen as an exercise in public relations. It is precisely this same coalition that deepened suffering with its port blockade in November 2017, which prevented or reduced humanitarian and commercial trade for months. And many areas under Coalition control are suffering from extreme food insecurity right now.³

DISPLACEMENT AND FEAR: ONE FAMILY'S STORY

'We fled from Al-jah to Turbah village. The first day there were armed conflicts, followed by almost four peaceful days. Then, both sides started fighting again, we had to move out of our homes seeking refuge in another place where we stayed for four days; however, the conflicts broke out again. My cousins and their four families along with my family had to move out again. We walked for almost a whole day; we faced troubles such as moving sands and shortage of water. My two-year-old daughter drank only a cup of tea at dawn and had nothing to eat till we arrived in the late evening.

Now, we are at Turbah village. Though we are safe and warmly welcomed from the people here, still we feel desperately sad for leaving our hometown. We left everything behind and ran away with just a T-shirt and a Maqtub [a traditional Yemeni piece of cloth].

We lost everything; our jobs, our palms, our sheep, everything we had is gone.

We have no jobs, no hopes and no life here as we used to.'



Photo: Children from Al-Jah village finally finding a safe place to rest. Photo: Ameen Al-Ghaberi/Gabreeze Yemen

URGENT ACTION NEEDED NOW

Civilians will not be safe while the offensive on Hodeida continues, regardless of any measures put in place to mitigate the risks. The only solution is for all parties to return to a viable peace process, to negotiate a lasting, inclusive peace in good faith. Now more than ever, the international community should exert every possible pressure on all parties to stop the bloodshed before it engulfs a densely-populated city, and engage in that meaningful peace process, supported by the UN Special Envoy. As part of this pressure, it is time for the international community to suspend arms supplies to the parties in conflict.

The international calls to uphold international humanitarian law and maintain aid supplies are not an adequate alternative to an immediate ceasefire. But if this terrible conflict continues, all the warring parties' international partners should remember that – as parties to the Geneva Conventions – they have a duty to ensure respect for international humanitarian law, including an obligation to ensure respect for the law by their security partners. They should also ensure adherence to human rights law. And they should remember that the use of explosive weapons in populated areas tends to cause severe harm to individuals and communities, and damages vital infrastructure. Therefore:

- The UN Security Council and the Coalition's international partners should demand an immediate cessation of the assault, before it continues to Hodeida city or beyond, and unconditional ceasefire by the Coalition and all Yemeni forces, including Houthi forces.
- Every relevant government should immediately suspend arms transfers to combatant parties in Yemen, and not grant future arms transfer licenses until there is no longer a clear risk that arms could be used to commit serious violations or grave breaches of international human rights or humanitarian law.
- The UN Security Council and the international community should support an inclusive peace process, engaging Yemeni women, youth and civil society, and reflecting the international community's commitments to women, peace and security.
- The UN Security Council and the international community should ensure that Hodeida and Saleef ports remain fully operational, and key routes remain open, so that that food, fuel, medicine and other essential goods can move freely across the country.
- Allies of Saudi- and UAE-led Coalition members should leverage their relationships to avoid the use of any explosive weapons in populated areas in Hodeida.
- The conference planned in Paris on 27–28 June, to be co-chaired by Saudi Arabia, should be cancelled, unless the Hodeida offensive is halted. It would be entirely inappropriate to proceed with the conference under the present circumstances. Under no circumstances should France agree to co-host such a conference with a party to the conflict.
- The UN Security Council should urgently hold an open meeting, in which all governments' statements can be freely reported, to collectively demand the implementation of the above recommendations. Members of the Coalition and its international partners, including the US, UK, and France, should not hide from public scrutiny behind closed doors at the Council, which has failed the people of Yemen for more than three years.

NOTES

1 Humanitarian Coordinator meeting in Sana'a, 14 June 2018.

2 Reuters. (2018, June 13). *Saudi Arabia and UAE announce five-point plan for relief in Yemen's Hodeidah*. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-relief/saudi-arabia-and-uae-announce-five-point-plan-for-relief-in-yemens-hodeidah-idUSKBN1J9365>

3 FEWSNET. (May 2018). *Continued port functioning critical as increased conflict continues in Al Hudaydah*. <http://fews.net/east-africa/yemen>

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For further information on the issues raised in this paper please email Dina Elmamoun: delmamoun@oxfam.org.uk

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Oxfam GB, Oxfam House, John Smith Drive, Cowley, Oxford, OX4 2JY, UK.

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