



Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

**UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS AND
EMERGENCY RELIEF COORDINATOR, MARK LOWCOCK****Briefing to the Security Council on the humanitarian situation in Yemen**

New York, 14 December 2018

As delivered

Thank you, Mr. President.

A fortnight ago in Yemen I got a glimpse of what life is like in the world's worst humanitarian crisis. I talked to families who fled violence raging in their communities, some of them living for years under a plastic sheet.

I met young mothers who had rushed desperately malnourished children to hospitals. For some, it was their second, third or even fourth visit, because their families can't afford the food or medicine to keep them well once they've been discharged.

So, I can again confirm again what humanitarian agencies have known for a long time: a terrible tragedy is unfolding in Yemen. And it is getting worse. Millions of people are starving, sick and desperate. They have one message for the world: this war needs to stop.

You have just heard Martin describe the progress made this week in Sweden. For the first time in a long time, we can see a sign that, perhaps, things might start to get a bit better.

But the people I met see no tangible improvement yet. This week's success must not lead to complacency – in fact it must do the opposite. Commitments must be implemented. Working towards peace must be accelerated.

In the meantime, millions of Yemenis still desperately need assistance and protection.

Mr. President,

We have recently had further confirmation of just how bad the situation has become. Last week, a consortium of agencies published the Integrated Phase Classification analysis for Yemen, or IPC.



Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

Their report is the most detailed, rigorous food security survey ever conducted in the country. Data was collected in 330 of Yemen's 333 districts, analysed and scrutinized by multiple organizations and reviewed by independent Headquarters experts before publication.

The results decisively confirm Yemen's descent toward famine. Even for experienced aid workers, the numbers are shocking. More than 20 million Yemenis – two thirds of the population – are now food insecure.

10 million of them are severely food insecure – more than twice the number of four years ago. More than half the districts across the country have slipped into “emergency” conditions – nearly 60 per cent more than last year.

And for the first time, the IPC documents what are called “Phase-5” conditions in Yemen. The technical term for Phase-5 is “catastrophe”. It is characterized by extreme food gaps, very high malnutrition rates and excess mortality. Nearly a quarter of a million Yemenis are literally on the brink of starvation.

The IPC is also clear that the war is the primary cause of this crisis. It is no coincidence that two-thirds of the people most at risk of starvation live in Hajjah, Hudaydah, Sa'ada and Taizz. They are the places where the violence has been most intense this year.

As we have told you before, the economic crisis is also playing a major role. Yemenis' livelihoods and access to income have been decimated, and agricultural production has fallen by nearly a third. These developments have left millions more Yemenis unable to afford food and other essential goods. And food prices are 150 per cent higher than they were before the crisis.

If there is any good news in the IPC report, it is that humanitarian assistance – especially food aid or money to buy food – is having a major impact. It shows that millions of Yemenis are less hungry than they would be without aid help. The IPC also tells us what areas and which people are worst affected.

The United Nations and partners are rushing now to reach those people and prevent the catastrophe from spreading. We will also do more survey work on an ongoing basis, so we can spot the most vulnerable before it is too late.

Mr. President,

Since October, I have been seeking your support for five measures to prevent famine from taking hold. These five steps are more urgent than ever.

So where do we stand on them today?



Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

The first is a cessation of hostilities. Up to now, we have only seen a reduction in fighting in some areas – not a full cessation. In the last week, nearly 450 conflict incidents were reported across Yemen, about a third of them in Hudaydah.

So agreement on Hudaydah that Martin just described brings us closer to a real cessation. As the details are being worked out, we continue to call for a full cessation of hostilities across the country.

The second point is to protect the supply of food and essential goods, and to facilitate aid operations. This means keeping all ports open, easing entry and movement restrictions, protecting humanitarian supplies and facilitating aid workers in doing their jobs.

Restrictions on humanitarian access are a serious and growing problem.

I had a useful discussion in Aden with the Prime Minister on imports. Last month, the Government of Yemen lifted restrictions on food imports introduced through Decree 75. In November, food imports through Hudaydah and Saleef ports – where most food enters the country – rose by 15 per cent, although the quantity remained below what is needed.

We also continue to call on the Government to lift restrictions on fuel imports, which are needed to power hospital generators, to keep water networks running and for other critical tasks across the country. These restrictions are currently blocking over 70,000 tons of fuel from entering Hudaydah port. I had a constructive discussion with the Prime Minister on that, and I hope to see positive action soon.

Operations at Aden port, where congestion has been a severe problem, have also started to improve after the Government instructed port authorities to accelerate processing times following my discussions with the Prime Minister. We hope this trend continues. As an immediate step, we want to see the release of some 1,250 World Food Programme containers that have been stuck at Aden port for months.

The Red Sea Mills in Hudaydah, which I have talked about repeatedly over the last three months, are another instructive example. Access to the mills has been impossible since fighting escalated around them in September. Fighters have regularly impinged upon the compound, and the site was repeatedly struck by mortar fire. Early last month, the mills came under the control of Government-backed forces. But access since then has been hampered by difficulties in moving across front lines and concerns that the area – potentially including the entrance to the mills – may have been mined.

Because of all this, enough food to feed 3.5 million people for a month has now sat useless in a warehouse for more than three months. I discussed this issue both with the operators of the mills in Sana'a and with coalition authorities in Riyadh. As of today, we have no idea if the Red Sea Mills can still operate or how much of the donor-funded grain has been damaged or spoiled.

The Red Sea Mills are just one site among a very large number of mills, silos and warehouses located in and around Hudaydah. If these sites are hit or damaged, aid operations could very quickly grind to a halt.



Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

That is one reason why the progress Martin has described on Hudaydah is so important, and why we have to do everything we can to make sure it translates into action.

In Sana'a, I raised my serious concerns about the restrictions and bureaucratic impediments humanitarian organizations face, including delays in visas and customs and Ngo registration, and unacceptable interference with humanitarian operations. I raised those issues with senior representatives of the de-facto authorities, including their president of the supreme political council.

These were constructive discussions. But I have since heard worrying reports that a raft of new restrictions has been introduced, especially for protection activities. Some of these restrictions have come from local authorities and not from the Sana'a level. Based on the firm assurances I received during my visit, I hope that de facto authorities in Sana'a will move quickly to lift these and other restrictions. I am following up on the assurances I was given.

In all my conversations in Yemen, I also sought commitments from all parties to ensure that fighters stay away from hospitals and other civilian sites, and that no armed forces recruit children.

Greater commitment is needed on all sides to the protection of civilians in this crisis, especially women and girls.

The third area is stabilizing the economy.

Foreign currency injections over the last two months from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have been effective in stabilizing the exchange rate, financing imports of essential goods and starting to pay pensions and civil servant salaries.

Today, the Yemeni rial is trading at just over 500 rial to the dollar, which represents a marked appreciation compared to a few weeks ago. But a dollar still costs more than twice as many rials as before the current conflict. Research indicates the exchange rate needs to come down to about 440 rial to the dollar before it will have a wider impact on people's ability to afford food and other essential goods.

To achieve this, as well as to finance imports and pay salaries and pensions, and meet minimum costs reliably, the Government of Yemen is going to need billions of dollars in external support for its budget in 2019. Again, I had constructive discussions with the Prime Minister on that.

We are seeing some progress in paying pensions, and payment of some civil servant salaries on both sides.

But as the IMF statement of yesterday made clear, we need more decisions and more sustained action in a similar vein. Otherwise, what we are going to see is that recent progress, which is improving some people's ability to buy food and other essential goods, will be lost again.



Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

The fourth area is funding for the UN response plan. Agencies are moving now to expand operations. Next year, we need to feed 12 million people every month, including 10 million severely food insecure people and 2 million people displaced in acute need. That 12 million number is a 50 per cent increase from today.

In total, we plan to assist 15 million people – that is half the population. That includes programmes to roll back cholera and water-borne diseases, to address malnutrition and improve living conditions for the most vulnerable displaced people. To ensure that all the food, medicine, household items and other supplies – as well as the aid workers – reach their destinations quickly and safely, our logistics programme must also be financed to expand significantly.

This is all going to need a lot of money. The 2019 Humanitarian Response Plan is costed at US\$4 billion. About half of that is for emergency food assistance.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates recently pledged to provide another \$500 million for humanitarian aid in Yemen. That is on top of their joint contribution of \$930 million to the UN appeal this year.

Our understanding that most of this new money will be channeled through next year's UN-coordinated response plan. That would be a boost to our fund raising, and we hope it will jump-start contributions from other countries. On 26 February, the Secretary-General will convene a high-level pledging conference in Geneva, co-hosted by the governments of Switzerland and Sweden.

The fifth area is the most important, and that is for the parties to continue to engage seriously with Martin's process, including implementing the agreements reached in Sweden.

Mr. President,

The five points I have been emphasizing are, to remind you, a package, not a menu: we need more action on all of them.

Notwithstanding the good news from Sweden, there is a long way to go.

I have earlier today chaired another detailed discussion on Yemen with the heads of all the key UN and other operational humanitarian agencies.

Our collective assessment is that the good news we have heard this week has not yet had any material impact on the millions of people who need assistance. Access, the economy and resources are major priorities. The lesson is two-fold: progress is absolutely possible, and we need much more of it right now.

So, I again ask for practical and political support from the Council in the five areas I have outlined.

United Nations



Nations Unies

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

Thank you very much.