Seven million Yemenis close to starvation: UN

Seven million Yemenis are closer than ever to starvation, the UN humanitarian coordinator in the country warned almost two years since a conflict escalated between the government and rebels.

"Seven million Yemenis do not know where their next meal will come from and are ever closer to starvation" in a country of 27 million people, Jamie McGoldrick said.

"Over 17 million people are currently unable to adequately feed themselves and are frequently forced to skip meals -- women and girls eat the least and last," he said in a statement.

Yemen's war pits the internationally recognised government of President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi against Huthi rebels allied with forces loyal to former president Ali Abdullah Saleh.

The fighting has intensified since a Saudi-led coalition intervened in support of the government in March 2015 after the Huthis seized the capital the previous September.

Since early January, pro-government forces have pressed a major offensive aimed at recapturing Yemen's Red Sea coastline, and retook the southwestern port of Mokha earlier this month.

"I am deeply concerned with the escalation of conflict and militarisation of Yemen's western coast. It is coming at a great cost to civilians," McGoldrick said.

UN special envoy urges immediate end to deadly attacks on civilians in Yemen

The UN special envoy for Yemen, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, on Thursday 16 February 2017 called for an immediate end to the deadly attacks on civilians in the war-torn Middle East country.

"Women and children in particular have been subjected to unspeakable suffering in this brutal conflict," said the envoy. Ahmed made the appeal in a statement issued here after at least six women and a girl were killed and dozens of people were wounded as a result of an alleged airstrike, which hit a funeral in the Arhab district of Sanaa Governorate on Wednesday afternoon.

"Attacks on civilians are unjustifiable, regardless of the circumstances," the statement said. "This should stop immediately." "Every day, across Yemen, civilians are killed by indiscriminate attacks by all parties to the conflict on residential areas in complete disregard of the rules of international humanitarian law," the statement said.

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Unexploded rockets have landed inside the rebel-held port of Hodeida, he said, "reducing even further the number of ships and imports vital for Yemen's food supplies. "Given that the country is 80-90 percent dependent on imported food staples, I am compelled to raise the alarm," the UN official said.

"If left unabated, these factors combined could accelerate the onset of famine."

Also on Tuesday, the UN children's agency warned that 462,000 children were suffering from acute malnutrition.

The UN aid chief warned last month that the impoverished Arabian Peninsula country was sliding deeper into humanitarian crisis and could face famine this year.

Stephen O'Brien said that without "immediate action", famine was "a possible scenario for 2017".

More than 7,400 people have been killed since the intervention began nearly two years ago, including around 1,400 children, according to the United Nations.

"I call on all parties to adhere to their obligations under international humanitarian law and respect the sanctity of civilian life," the UN envoy said in the statement.

The ongoing military clashes on the Red Sea coast is also aggravating an already catastrophic humanitarian situation, the statement noted, adding that tens of thousands of civilians have been caught in the war zone without access to humanitarian assistance and unable to flee to safety.

"The military activities in the region threaten to disrupt the import of commercial and humanitarian supplies which could have a terrible impact on the food security for large parts of the population," the statement said.

"I urge all parties to ensure the unhindered movement of commercial and humanitarian supplies, without which millions of Yemenis are at risk of death and famine," said the envoy.

"This deterioration of the humanitarian situation again underscores the need to end the violence and to achieve a sustainable cessation of hostilities and enduring solution to the Yemeni conflict through an inclusive political process."
International, independent probe of alleged violations in Yemen needed – UN deputy rights chief

Describing the situation in Yemen as one of the world’s worst humanitarian crises – ‘and one that is entirely man-made’ – the United Nations human rights deputy chief today urged the national commission of inquiry to fulfill its mandate of investigating all alleged violations of international and Yemeni laws.

“We encourage the Yemeni National Commission to make progress on all aspects of its mandate to investigate all allegations of violations of international law and Yemeni law, including those that go beyond the extent of the Commission’s cooperation with OHCHR [the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights],” UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights Kate Gilmore told a UN Human Rights Council session in Geneva yesterday.

She said that OHCHR has re-established its engagement with the National Commission on a programme of joint activities and a list of thematic priorities. The first of these activities took place from 21 to 23 February, in Doha, Qatar, which was a capacity-building workshop on international humanitarian law, investigative methodologies and lessons learnt from UN commissions of inquiry.

The de facto authorities in the capital, Sana’a, have officially communicated their intention not to extend cooperation to the National Commission or to any OHCHR team tasked with implementing the Human Rights Council resolution.

In response, OHCHR has urged the authorities to reconsider that decision and called on all parties to follow through on their commitment to cooperate with the National Commission and OHCHR.

She said that calls for an international and independent commission of investigation have been dismissed by some as potentially undermining the National Commission.

However, there are no persuasive reasons to believe that an international and independent investigation could not operate alongside a national commission of inquiry as the existence of one does not exclude the other, she explained.

The National Commission’s first publications failed to comply with internationally recognized standards of methodology and impartiality, she pointed out.

Still, Ms. Gilmore argued that the violations allegedly committed in the ongoing conflict are of such gravity that impunity simply cannot be accepted. In the absence of credible mechanisms for national remedy, international and independent alternatives are essential.

“The High Commissioner has no choice but to reiterate his call for an international and independent commission of inquiry into all allegations of violations of human rights and humanitarian law, regardless of the alleged perpetrators,” she said.

Such an approach would also support the efforts of the Secretary-General’s Special Envoy on Yemen to reach a negotiated and durable settlement of the conflict, she added.
Yemeni health system crumbles as millions risk malnutrition and diseases

“Hospital staff have not received their salaries for the past 5 months. There are acute shortages of certain medicines and we need more fuel to ensure the hospital has electricity,” says Dr Khaled Suhail, Director of Al-Tharwa Hospital in Yemen’s third largest city, Al-Hudaydah.

With more than 1200 employees and 320 beds, Al-Thawra Hospital is the main functioning health facility in Al-Hudaydah and neighbouring governorates. Every day, around 1500 people seek care at the hospital, a 5-fold increase since 2012 due to the influx of people displaced by ongoing conflict and the closure of other health facilities in the area.

Last week alone, several thousand displaced men, women and children arrived in Al-Hudaydah Governorate, overwhelming already weakened health facilities and overburdening vulnerable host communities.

The Al-Hudaydah port, one of the main entry points to the country, is functioning at minimal capacity, significantly increasing the prices of goods, including medicines, and reducing economic activity in the city. As a result, many patients are unable to pay the minimal fees for hospital services.

Despite this, no one is turned away from Al-Thawra Hospital and hospital staff provide care to everyone, regardless of whether they can afford to pay. Recently, however, the hospital had to stop providing food for inpatients due to lack of funds.

“The World Health Organization (WHO) assists us by providing fuel and medicines for emergency interventions, and supporting the hospital’s therapeutic feeding centre.” explains Dr Suhail. “However, with no funds for operational costs, we never know if we will still be open one month from now.”

Collapsing health system in Yemen

Since the escalation of the conflict in March 2015, health facilities across Yemen have reported more than 7600 deaths and close to 42 000 people injured. The country’s health system has been another victim of the conflict.

The budget allocated to health authorities has been drastically reduced, leaving health facilities without funds for operational costs and health care workers without regular salaries since September 2016.

“With more than 14.8 million people lacking access to basic health care, the current lack of funds means the situation will get much worse,” says Dr Nevio Zagaria, WHO Acting Representative in Yemen.

Only 45% of health facilities in Yemen are fully functional and accessible, 38% are partially functional and 17% are non-functional. At least 274 of those facilities have been damaged or destroyed during the current conflict. Highly specialized medical staff, such as intensive care unit doctors, psychiatrists and foreign nurses have left the country.

Nutrition crisis

Almost 4.5 million people in Yemen, including 2 million children, require services to treat or prevent malnutrition, representing a 150% increase since late 2014. Of special concern are almost 462 000 children suffering from severe acute malnutrition and at risk of life-threatening complications such as respiratory infections or organ failure.

“Last year more than 100 children died from severe malnutrition in our therapeutic feeding centre” says Dr Suhail. “The majority of children who come here are from Al-Hudaydah city itself. Those from outside the city can’t afford the cost of transport, so many children simply die at home.”

WHO has established 15 therapeutic feeding centres in 7 governorates, and plans to open an additional 25 centres as the numbers of malnourished children increases across the country.

Urgent funding needs

“We are asked to fill gaps created by the collapsing health institutions,” says Dr Zagaria, “but last year, WHO received less than half of the US$ 124 million required.”

This year United Nations agencies and nongovernmental organizations working to support health care in Yemen are appealing for US$ 322 million, of which WHO is requesting US$ 126 million.

“We urgently need resources to help support the health system as a whole, and are calling on.
Yemen, FAO sign cooperation agreements

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) on Tuesday signed cooperation agreements with Water Users' Associations in the Sana'a Basin.

The agreements aim to contribute to the activities of the project for managing use of water and the improvement of the life in rural environment implemented by the FAO and financed by the Dutch government.

The project will provide funding the associations to establish or rehabilitate rainwater facilities.

Under these agreements, Water User Associations would implement these activities, thereby promoting technical expertise for the local community and helping farmers to better use rainwater and reduce production costs so as to ensure jobs and a better level of food security.

During the signing ceremony, the FAO Resident Representative in Yemen Dr. Salah al-Hajj Hassan stressed the importance of the Sana'a Basin project, which has a concrete impact on the increasing efficiency of the irrigation and sustainability of agricultural production in order to achieve food security and preserve water resources for future generations.

He welcomed the continuous support of the Dutch government for water projects in Yemen and the government agencies involved in the implementation of the projects in the country.

Millions of Yemen Children Still Not Immunized Against Polio

The World Health Organization is spearheading a nationwide polio vaccination drive in conflict-ridden Yemen to immunize more than five million children under age five against this crippling disease.

Yemen has been polio free since 2006. Efforts are underway to try to make sure children in this war-torn country remain free of this potentially deadly disease.

But it will not be easy. WHO spokeswoman, Fadela Chaib, says thousands of local volunteers are putting their lives on the line as they go door to door to reach and immunize more than five million young children against polio.

She said that there are no so-called “days of tranquility.” She says the guns will not fall silent during this nationwide vaccination campaign.

“So, what they do is they will look at the geography of the country and try to target places where it is possible to go with the maximum of security,” Chaib explained. "And, what we usually do with our partners is talk to the local authorities, religious ones or the parties in conflict to try to secure a maximum of security for our staff and volunteers.”
UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency launched in 7 February 2017 a major campaign to spread awareness about the dangers of crossing the Gulf of Aden and Red Sea from Africa to war-stricken Yemen and highlighting the horrendous conditions and rising risks in Yemen.

More than 117,000 refugees and migrants arrived in Yemen in 2016. Many were lured by smugglers to take the perilous boat journey across the high seas in search of protection or better livelihood prospects. UNHCR is alarmed that so many people are heading to a country where the conflict is worsening, displacement is growing, and arrivals face a very uncertain future.

“It’s a humanitarian catastrophe inside Yemen,” said Amin Awad, UNHCR Middle East and North Africa Director. “We have to speak out. UNHCR cannot sit by while so many people, mainly young, board smugglers’ boats after making uninformed decisions about Yemen and the desperate and dangerous situation there.”

UNHCR has launched the campaign with the help of prominent musicians from the region – led by singing star and former refugee Maryam Mursal – who have created a song with key messages to make people think very carefully before deciding to cross to Yemen. The country has been torn by war since March 2015 and an estimated 7,100 people have been killed, 44,000 injured, and more than 2 million displaced.

Almost 19 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance. Although Yemen is a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, UNHCR believes that war and insecurity mean conditions there are not conducive for asylum.

UNHCR has long been warning against the risk of crossings to Yemen. Prolonged conflict and insecurity facilitate the proliferation of criminal networks targeting new arrivals. Women and children are also at particular risk of sexual violence and trafficking. UNHCR has received reports of physical and sexual abuse, deprivation of food and water, abduction, extortion and forced labour by smugglers and criminal networks as well as arbitrary arrest, detention and deportation.

For new arrivals seeking international protection, access to asylum systems in Yemen is extremely challenging and individuals may be unable to register their asylum applications or have their presence documented by the authorities, particularly in the north of the country. Prevailing insecurity and war seriously restrict the ability of UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations to reach out to the population in need of humanitarian assistance.

The song and video at the core of the multi-lingual campaign were created earlier this month in Cairo by Mursal and fellow musicians, Aarmaanta from Somalia, Yeshie Demalash, Dawit Nega and Tadele Roba from Ethiopia and Hany Adel from Egypt. They helped create the music, devise the messages and write the lyrics during a workshop with local musicians and refugees, including shipwreck survivors with harrowing tales.

Their song carries the message that the sea crossing can be deadly and, referring to often ruthless smugglers, it urges people to think hard before they leave. The song and video will help spread the message through social media and other platforms, including in languages common in the area.

The music was arranged by acclaimed Hollywood producer George Acogny and the video was directed by Amr Salama, a young Egyptian film director. The campaign is being launched in collaboration with the International Emerging Film Talent Association (IEFTA), a Monaco-based international NGO.
Four people from Ta’iz died on the eve of Eid Al-Adha (a Muslim holiday celebrated every year) last year after their car plunged off the road. They were travelling from Aden to Taiz to spend the holiday with their families. People still remember the horrible car accident that took the life of Ziad Abdullah from Alqabaitah, Lahj, and badly injured three other passengers who were riding with him.

Such heartbroken stories are not but many. People lost their loved ones because of the steep and bumpy road connecting Taiz to Lahj. It had been reported that approximately twenty cars had crashed and overturned just recently on the Alkhasheen road killing and injuring people.

Taiz to flee the conflict in Taiz to Lahj and Aden. It is also the only way in and out from Taiz as both Haifan and Karish roads are blocked most of the time by the warring factions. It has been estimated that at least 200 cars and trucks use this rough road everyday for travelling between Taiz and Lahj and then to Aden and for moving goods.

Funded by the World Bank, UNDP has partnered with the Public Works Project (PWP) under the Emergency Crisis Response Project (ECRP) to rehabilitate community infrastructure and assets to benefit crisis-affected communities from temporary income through labor intensive activities.
THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

MESSAGE ON INTERNATIONAL DAY OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN SCIENCE

For too long, discriminatory stereotypes have prevented women and girls from having equal access to education in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM). As a trained engineer and former teacher, I know that these stereotypes are flat wrong. They deny women and girls the chance to realize their potential – and deprive the world of the ingenuity and innovation of half the population. On this International Day, I urge commitment to end bias, greater investments in STEM education for all women and girls as well as opportunities for their careers and longer-term professional advancement so that all can benefit from their ground-breaking future contributions.