Yemen faces worsening threat of famine: UN aid chief

“International aid agencies are losing the fight against famine in Yemen, where 3.5 million people may soon be added to the eight million Yemenis already facing starvation, the UN aid chief warned.

A sharp drop in the value of Yemen's currency that has sent fuel prices spiraling compounded with renewed fighting has led to a worsening of what the United Nations already considers the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

"We are losing the fight against famine," Mark Lowcock, the under-secretary-general for humanitarian affairs, told the Security Council.

"We are already seeing pockets of famine-like-conditions -- including cases where people are eating leaves because they have no other form of sustenance," he said.

The council was meeting at Britain's request to discuss the worsening crisis in Yemen, where a Saudi-led coalition is fighting Iran-aligned rebels who control the capital Sanaa.

Lowcock said the situation had deteriorated "in an alarming way in recent weeks" and that the crisis may be approaching "a tipping point, beyond which it will be impossible to prevent massive loss of life".

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UN Envoy working to 'overcome obstacles' barring resumption of Yemen peace talks

Martin Griffiths met the delegation headed by Yemen's Minister of Foreign Affairs Khaled al Yamani, where, according to a statement issued by the Envoy, they discussed "the expectations of these consultations and relevant issues to the peace process, in particular Confidence Building Measures".

The Special Envoy thanked the Yemeni Government for "their positive engagement with his efforts to relaunch the peace process" and acknowledged the efforts made by them and the Saudi-led Coalition that is supporting their military campaign to oust Houthi rebels from the country, “to facilitate the convening of these consultations”.

Fighting between the two sides which escalated in 2015, has caused a humanitarian crisis which has put nearly eight million on the edge of starvation, sparking the world’s worst cholera epidemic and leaving the vast majority of Yemenis in need of aid.

According to news reports, the Houthi delegation was either unable or unwilling to leave the capital Sana’a to attend the consultations, and the Government has reportedly given a 24-hour deadline for them to arrive in the Swiss capital.

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Yemen faces worsening threat of famine: ….

The stark warning came ahead of next week’s gathering of world leaders at the United Nations for the annual debate on global issues that will feature meetings on Yemen.

After a lull in fighting, Saudi-backed government forces this week launched a series of attacks on rebel-held Hodeida, the Red Sea port city that also serves as the entry point for humanitarian aid deliveries.

The fight for Hodeida, which the Huthis seized in 2014, was put on hold for 11 weeks as the United Nations struggled to bring warring parties to peace talks in Geneva.

But the talks collapsed earlier this month after the northern Yemeni rebels refused to attend.

Three quarters of Yemen’s population -- or 22 million people -- are in need of humanitarian aid, including eight million who need food relief to survive, according to UN figures.

The Yemeni rial has lost 30 percent of its value over the past month, driving a sharp increase in the cost of food, almost of all of which is imported.

Lowcock called for council support for immediate measures to stabilize the economy, support the exchange rate and keep all ports and main roads open.

"The lifeline through which the aid operation runs now hangs by a thread," he said.

The Saudi-led alliance intervened in the Yemen conflict in 2015 in a bid to bolster embattled Yemeni President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi, whose government is recognized by the UN, in his war against the Huthi rebels.

Nearly 10,000 people have been killed in the war.

UN Envoy working to ‘overcome ….

Mr. Griffith reiterated the need to reach “an inclusive political solution to the conflict in Yemen. Yemeni people who live under dire humanitarian, economic and security conditions hope for a quick settlement of the conflict”.

He added that he was “mindful of the challenges associated with bringing the parties together to Geneva, bearing in mind that they haven’t met for two years” and said he was hopeful to see the Houthi delegates arrive.

“He continues to make efforts to overcome obstacles to allow the consultations to go forward,” the statement concluded.
With only 50 percent of health facilities fully functional, the war in Yemen has led to a large and dramatic increase of people who need medical care from 5 million prior to the war to 16.4 million putting a lot of pressure on already-fragile health facilities. The latest cholera outbreak is only but an example of the impact of the failing health system.

“Some people lose their lives just because they can’t afford their medical treatment,” said Dr. Abdulghani Murshid, head of Amran General Hospital.

Amran Governorate is an example of how Yemen crisis has crippled more than of its health services. Amran General Hospital is the largest public provider of health services in Amran governorate, yet it is in a dire need of medical services because more than half of its facilities have stopped functioning due to the ongoing war.

The number of patients per day has dramatically increased to 800 cases and 60 cases in the inpatient unit; 200% compared to the prewar time. Most of these patients are Internally-Displaced Persons (IDPs) and vulnerable and conflict-affected people. These already-poor communities have no other choice but to seek treatment in this public hospital with subsidized services, which lacks operational costs and highly-qualified cadre.

"The nursing staff in the hospital weren't equipped enough, especially in terms of some essential skills and knowledge," said Dr. Abdulghani Murshid, Director General of Amran General Hospital, as he described the situation in the hospital in light of the difficult crisis in the country due to the lack of resources and the ongoing conflict in the country.

Under the USAID funded and supported Yemen Emergency Crisis Response Project (YECRP), the Social Fund for Development (SFD) implemented a project to train 27 nurses in Amran General Hospital to enable them to improve their nursing capacities, in addition to preparing a new Intensive Care Unit (ICU) in the hospital to cope with the high and increasing number of patients.

**Ambitions amidst Struggle**

During her childhood, Fatima Al-Ma'khadi, Head of the ICU, had always dreamt of wearing the white gown of doctors.

"I suffered a lot when I started working as a nurse at Amran General Hospital. At that time, I realized that I was not qualified to do anything more than just administering injections. I remember being very embarrassed when patients would ask for my help about medicines prescribed by doctors because I don't understand English," Fatima spoke bitterly about her experience.

Altaf, Head of the Neonatal Nursing Unit, started working as a nurse volunteer at the hospital after receiving a three-year nursing diploma. She wanted to finish high school and join college, but she couldn't due to the difficult financial situation of her family.

"I enjoyed my work despite the scant amount of money I used to get. However, I had great difficulty because of my low medical attainment. I wanted to study more and improve my skills," said Altaf.

Taking care of newborns is very challenging. While Yemen has a high infant mortality rate, Altaf seeks to save the lives of infants who lack the necessary health care.

He discussed with her a number of topics related to the water situation in Yemen.

They discussed and reviewed the water situation on the island of Kamran and the suffering of the citizens as a result of the exposure of water wells to the bombing of the US-backed Saudi-led coalition warplanes doubling burdens on the ministry.

The meeting discussed the water and sanitation situation in Hodeidah province in general and efforts to expand the service.

The Minister called for the humanitarian coordinator to play the necessary role to spare the Kamarn island's water installations from targeted by the US-backed Saudi-led coalition warplanes.

He praised highly the efforts of the humanitarian coordinator and its keenness to support the water and environment sector in Yemen.

He called upon the World Health Organization (WHO) to fulfill its obligations regarding the development of solutions and treatments for environmental hazards resulting from the medical waste of hospitals and health centers that are dumped directly into the sewage network without initial treatment.

He stressed the keenness of the ministry to coordinate efforts and partnership with organizations to move towards harnessing the allocated support in the field of water and environmental sanitation.

Grande stressed the need for coordination between WHO and the Ministry of Water and Environment to achieve common goals and promote integrated action.

She stressed the UN's keenness to continue to support the water and sanitation sector and referred to the ministry's efforts to curb the cholera epidemic.
"I was not ready to lose my child"

A midwife attends to a pregnant woman at UNFPA-supported Al Thawra Hospital in Hodeidah. © UNFPA Yemen

ADEN, Yemen – Seventeen-year-old Samah was six months pregnant when her house in Hodeidah was bombed.

“We ran with only the clothes we were wearing – there was no time even to get my abaya,” she recalled. “We travelled for two days to arrive here in Aden. It was the most exhausting two days of my life.”

The stress and exhaustion took a toll on Samah’s body. After reaching Aden, she developed complications in her pregnancy.

Samah is one of more than 90,000 pregnant women who were living inside Hodeidah when the violence there escalated, according to UNFPA estimates. Among them, an estimated 14,000 are at risk of complications that – without immediate medical treatment – put their lives in grave danger.

Yemen has one of the highest maternal mortality ratios in the region. In 2015, an estimated 385 women died in childbirth, or as a result of pregnancy-related complications, for every 100,000 births.

Today, maternal deaths are likely to have doubled.

Delivering care and supplies to pregnant women

In response to the crisis in and around Hodeidah, UNFPA is leading a rapid response mechanism to distribute life-saving supplies, in partnership with UNICEF and WFP.

The rapid response kits delivered through the mechanism include ready-to-eat foods provided by WFP; basic hygiene kits for the entire family, provided by UNICEF; and dignity kits for women and girls, provided by UNFPA.

The mechanism serves displaced pregnant women like Samah, as well as those who live in hard-to-reach areas or are stranded close to the front lines. In addition, the most vulnerable returnees can receive critical supplies and care at humanitarian service points located across the Hodeidah, Sana’a, Aden and Ibb Governorates.

These service points also have protection desks staffed by UNFPA-supported teams of social workers, offering support and referral to psychosocial support, counselling, legal aid and cash assistance. Since June 2018, more than 3,000 women and girls have been reached through these service points.

UNFPA also supports more than 150 health facilities providing emergency obstetric and neonatal care and assisting at complicated deliveries, serving both displaced women and those inside Hodeidah.

Hodeidah has been a lifeline for millions of people who depend on humanitarian assistance. Close to 70 per cent of all humanitarian aid and nearly all commercial food stocks for northern Yemen enter through its port and that of Saleef, just to its north. UNFPA’s emergency response to address the needs of women and girls in the area is supported by the European Union, Japan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and the Yemen Humanitarian Pooled Fund.

Safe birth, even here

Like Samah, Fatima found her pregnancy and her life in danger when the fighting escalated near her home, close to Hodeidah’s port.

“I had been trying to get pregnant for the last five years,” she told UNFPA. “I was thrilled when I found out I was pregnant this year, but our happiness was short-lived.”

Continuous bombing forced Fatima and her family to flee their home. She was eight months pregnant by then – and by the time she reached safety in the Mawiya district in Taizz, she was bleeding severely.

“We had no money to pay for a taxi or a doctor, so my husband could not take me to a hospital,” she recalled. “But after all these years of waiting, I was not ready to lose my child.”

Referred to a UNFPA-supported women’s space in Taizz, Fatima received the medical care she needed, along with a rapid response kit and cash assistance. She delivered a healthy baby in a UNFPA-supported maternity unit.

Samah, too, was able to deliver her baby safely. Arriving at a humanitarian service point in Aden, she was immediately referred to UNFPA-supported Al-Sha’ab Hospital in the city.

“If I had not managed to reach a hospital, I don’t think I or my baby would have survived,” she said. “Thanks to God, we are both safe and healthy.”
UNICEF: Education a Major Casualty of Yemen's War

The school year in Yemen is officially underway. But, the U.N. children's fund reports the country's ongoing civil war is keeping millions of children out of the classroom.

More than three years of fighting between the Yemeni government and Houthi rebels is having a devastating impact on children's health and well-being. The U.N. reports more than 11 million children or 80 percent of the country's children are dependent upon humanitarian aid.

Another major casualty of the war is children's education. The U.N. children's fund says the education sector is on the brink of collapse because of conflict, political divisions and chronic underdevelopment.

As a consequence, UNICEF spokesman Christophe Boulierac said around two million children are not going to school this year. Furthermore, he said nearly four million primary school children soon may not be able to get an education because of a severe shortage of teachers.

"About 67 percent of public school teachers — and this is across the country — have not been paid for nearly two years. Many have looked for other work to survive or are only teaching a few subjects. So, obviously, the quality of education is at stake. Children are not getting their full lessons due to the absence of their teachers. Even when schools are functioning, the schools' days and years are shortened".

Yemen also suffers from a shortage of learning facilities. UNICEF reports more than 2,500 schools have been damaged or destroyed by the war. Many schools also are being used as shelters for displaced people and some have been taken over by armed groups.

The agency warns children who are out of school run many dangers. It notes boys are at risk of being used as child soldiers. It estimates more than 2,600 children have been recruited by all armed groups.

UNICEF says girls are likely to be married off at an early age. A 2016 survey finds close to three quarters of women in Yemen have been married before the age of 18, and 44.5 percent before the age of 15.
Yemen: mortar attack on UN food silo ‘could affect vital aid deliveries to millions’

Briefing journalists in Geneva, WFP spokesperson Herve Verhoosel, said that on-going clashes taking place near the Red Sea Mill Silos, which is “a critical facility for WFP operations”, could impact the agency’s ability “to feed up to 3.5 million very hungry people in northern and central Yemen for one month.”

He added that a mortar shell launched by “an unidentified armed group” also hit a WFP warehouse in Hudaydah city, holding enough food to assist 19,200 in need.

According to WFP, the security situation in Hudaydah is “deteriorating rapidly” and threatens humanitarian assistance to the city and surrounding areas, where food supplies are critically low.

In another incident at the end of last month, a WFP truck was hit by shellfire while carrying out a delivery to Al Tuhayta, in southern Hudaydah. The truck, clearly marked with a WFP banner, was carrying around 30 tons of food assistance, enough for nearly 2,000 people for one month.

It was hit by an unidentified armed group two kilometres from its final destination, seriously injuring the driver.

The continuing violence is part of an offensive launched on Hudaydah in June by coalition forces supporting the internationally recognized Government of President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi.

It marks the latest escalation in more than three years of conflict between Government forces and the Houthi opposition, which controls the Red Sea port and the capital, Sana’a.

Hudaydah port is critical to the humanitarian effort in Yemen, the UN insists, because it is a primary gateway for food, fuel and medicine into the impoverished country, which imports nearly all of its daily needs.

Despite the deteriorating security situation, WFP’s operations are ongoing, Mr Verhoosel said, “and we will do everything we can to ensure our operations continue throughout the region without interruption.”

He explained that in August “and despite high levels of conflict in southern Hudaydah, we provided emergency food assistance to around 700,000 people, out of 900,000 people in the governorate considered to be at highest risk.”

Throughout Yemen, around eight million people are close to famine “and we cannot afford any activities that would disrupt our operations aiming to provide food and nutrition”, the UN spokesperson said.

He also reminded the warring sides that humanitarian workers should not be targeted and that the UN agency would “hold parties accountable” for any attacks on its facilities.

“We condemn any attempt by any side of the conflict to use humanitarian aid and facilities as a tool in this violent conflict and appeal to all parties to the conflict to let aid workers do their work,” he said. “WFP warehouses, trucks, facilities, silos and most importantly staff are neutral and should not be used by any party to the conflict or targeted by any party to the conflict”.

On Thursday, Lise Grande, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Yemen gave the stark warning that “hundreds of thousands of lives hang in the balance in Hodeidah”.

“The situation has deteriorated dramatically in the past few days. Families are absolutely terrified by the bombardment, shelling and airstrikes,” she added.

“People are struggling to survive”, she said.

“More than 25 percent of children are malnourished; 900,000 people in the governorate are desperate for food and 90,000 pregnant women are at enormous risk. Families need everything--food, cash, health care, water, sanitation, emergency supplies, specialized support and many need shelter. It’s heart-breaking to see so many people who need so much.”
UN Secretary General's Message on 
WORLD TOURISM DAY

“Tourism and the digital transformation”

The wide reach of tourism into many sectors, from infrastructure and energy to transport and sanitation, and its huge impact on job creation, make it a vital contributor to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. At the same time, tourism plays a pivotal role in advancing cultural understanding and bringing people together.

Yet tourism needs innovation in technology to realize its potential contributions. Its benefits need to flow to host communities. Governments can help to connect startups with investors to facilitate innovation, entrepreneurship, employment and a truly inclusive tourism sector.

Digital technologies have brought positive momentum to societies and economies around the world. They have connected us on a global level, helped to empower the most vulnerable and become our crucial allies for sustainable development. Our challenge is to continue harnessing this power for good while safeguarding against the risks.

On World Tourism Day, I call on governments to support digital technologies that can transform the way we travel, reduce the ecological burden of tourism and bring the benefits of tourism to all.