

Can the Already Very Serious Humanitarian Crisis in Yemen Worsen Further?

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Global Research, July 26, 2024

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Law and Justice](#)

On July 23 the UN Envoy for Yemen Hans Grundberg informed the Security Council that recent developments in the Red Sea, Israel and inside Yemen “show the real danger of a devastating region-wide escalation.” This statement was made in the context of Israel’s air strike on Yemen and the preceding strikes by the Houthi rebels against Israel and ships in the Red Sea.

Further Grundberg noted with distress, “It is alarming that there are no signs of de-escalation, let alone solution.” While this escalation is deeply worrying in itself, what is no less worrying is the impact this can have on the already very serious humanitarian crisis in the country. While attacks and the resulting damage can deepen the humanitarian crisis, these also increase the possibilities of disruption of humanitarian aid.

In 2020 when the USA had suddenly made big cuts in the humanitarian aid for Yemen, along with cuts made by Saudi Arabia and UAE, this had led to terrible results with sudden big increase in hospital admissions of seriously ill and malnourished children.

So what should be clearly decided now is that regardless of political developments, a clear decision should be taken that no cuts in humanitarian assistance will be made.

Amidst all the worrying news, one good development has been that there are reports of the government and Houthi rebels resolving differences to some extent. At the level of the people also, there are growing signs that they want unity and peace. The southern separatists should also respond to the growing need for peace and unity. If internal peace and unity can increase, then at least the distribution of humanitarian assistance can improve significantly so that those most in need can be assured of this help reaching them in time.

In addition clearly there is need for increasing humanitarian assistance considerably as funds availability just now is considerable short of real needs.

Yemen has a population of 34.7 million and nearly two-thirds of people are in need of humanitarian assistance, although some estimates mention an even higher number.

Yemen is the poorest country of West Asia with high levels of poverty and malnutrition reported even before the present conflict started. In the course of the nine-year conflict during 2015-24 the humanitarian situation has steadily worsened. Some estimates mention nearly 370,000 conflict-related deaths with a high percentage of child deaths. Over 3 million people have been displaced, several of them multiple times. In addition there are several displaced people and refugees from Somalia staying in Yemen. Disease outbreaks and

starvation deaths have been reported from time to time. As the number of hungry and vulnerable people is very high, any further deterioration of food availability can lead to famine conditions on a much larger scale and famine deaths.

Clearly in these conditions there is need for increasing humanitarian assistance, internal peace and unity as well as de-escalation of international conflict. Foreign interventions in Yemen's conflict had considerably aggravated the distress of the people of Yemen at various stages and attempts should be made to at least partially make up for this by increasing humanitarian assistance.

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