

Humanitarian Tragedy in Yemen: Famine, US-Saudi Blockade on Food and Medicine

Vanessa Beeley Interviews Yemen's Ministry of Health Spokesperson, Dr Youssef Al-Haderi

By [Dr Youssef Al-Haderi](#) and [Vanessa Beeley](#)

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

Theme: [Crimes against Humanity](#), [Law and Justice](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

The “humanitarian” tragedy in Yemen has been in the news a lot recently. What most media and NGOs fail to clarify is that this is not some mysterious “famine” that has organically transpired as a result of a war – the Yemeni people are being deliberately starved and that [starvation is aided and abetted by the UN](#) and a number of its agencies via the illegitimate Resolution 2216 that should never have been adopted in the first place.

Many have applauded the recent senate vote that appeared to favour debate over the potential U.S withdrawal from Yemen but more astute observers and analysts picked up on the cynical use of the “Farm Bill” to obfuscate and bury the real intention to remain in Yemen:

Don't let Congress hide its deceitful resolution in the [#FarmBill](#) that made [#SJRes54](#) impossible & blocked the War Power Act and all debate on Yemen. They're doing all they can to keep this lie from you [#ExposeTheFarmBill](#) [#Yemen](#) [@VanessaBeeley](#) [@HussainBukhaiti](#) [@2flamesburning1](#) pic.twitter.com/YgKGMt2I4A

— LastAmericanVagabond (@TLAVagabond) [December 16, 2018](#)

UN chief, Antonio Guterres has been congratulating himself on “progress made” in the recent Yemeni peace talks in Sweden. An alleged ceasefire was negotiated between Ansarullah (Popular Resistance movement) and the Saudi-backed “rebels”. However, a recent tweet from Yemeni journalist, Hussain Albukhaiti, has revealed that this claim by the U.N is another red herring:

Since Sweden agreement&ceasefire
More than 40 [#Saudi](#) [#UAE](#) strikes on [#Hodeidah](#) [#Yemen](#)&hundreds of coalition backd forces artillery shells on
- Police station in 7July street
- killo16 road
- Kamaran cigarettes factory
- Alshaab City
- Nana factory
Also cluster bombs injurd 3kids

— Hussain Albukhaiti (@HussainBukhaiti) [December 16, 2018](#)

On Friday 14th December I put some questions to the Yemen Ministry of Health speaker, Dr Yousef Al-Haderi.

Vanessa Beeley: Thank you so much for giving your time to answer my questions. The first must be, in your opinion, what is the war in Yemen about and where will it end?

Dr Yousef Al-Haderi: Since the first revolution in Yemen on 26 September 1962, these great powers in the world have managed to contain the Yemeni people politically, intellectually and economically so they did not fight us as they have during this ugly war. They enslaved us and ruled us through their puppet presidents.

Yemen's geographical location, the third best in the world, and Yemen's rich resources, oil, gas, rock, agricultural and fishing abundance and diversity of landscape should make Yemen one of the world's wealthiest countries but this has not happened because of this policy of "making us poor to keep us under control".

The movement that originated in northern Yemen, Saada, called Ansar Allah or as western media like to say, the Houthis, rose out of the poorest societies and it identified the root cause of Yemen's poverty - the American system and that is why they adopted the slogan "death to the American regime. Their revolution which succeeded on 21st September 2014 then provoked American agents in the region, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, to try to persuade the new government in Yemen, represented by Ansar Allah, to continue the mercenary path of dependence upon the U.S that had been taken by former presidents in Yemen. The Ansar Allah movement and leadership rejected this move completely.

When the global powers, represented by the American, British and Saudi regimes saw that the Ansar Allah movement was able to eradicate all the terrorist entities in Yemen, such as Al Qaeda, which previous Yemeni regimes had been unable to achieve, they sensed the threat that the Ansar Allah movement represented for their colonial projects which had been supported by the deliberate planting of these terrorist groups and they launched the aggression against Yemen on 26th March 2015.

The Saudi-led "Operation Decisive Storm" was launched by the former Saudi Ambassador to Washington (current Saudi Foreign Minister) Adil Al-Jubair from inside the White House. On the first day terrible massacres were carried out among the children of Yemen, one of them in the north of the capital, Sana'a (Bani Hawat) and in the middle of the capital. The same night, children and civilians were deliberately targeted in their homes as they were sleeping. Twenty three days later on the 20th April 2015, a powerful neutron bomb was used in Sanaa and every area of the city was bombarded. Thousands of homes were destroyed. All of these crimes were committed with U.S endorsement and support.

The endgame is clear. After the Saudi coalition was able to bring down a number of Yemen's provinces in the south - a campaign that was characterised by chaos, murder, assassinations, terror and fear - as witnessed by international NGOs and journalists. We witnessed the establishment of dozens of secret torture and detention centers, similar to those established by the U.S in Iraq, the Abu Ghraib prisons. Even those who support the U.S and its Saudi coalition could not return to Aden, they were refused entry by the U.S Saudi Emirates. The Island of Socotra and the province of Hadramaut were occupied by the U.S. The provinces to the east of Yemen on the border with Oman were occupied by Saudi

proxies and forces to open a channel for its oil to the Arabian Sea in the south of the Arabian Peninsula. The Yemeni people living there experienced deepening hunger, poverty and disease, they received no benefits from this occupation.

Today, we are nearing the end of the fourth year of this aggression, which has been mobilised by all the most powerful countries of this world, all the resources of this world and all the armies of this world using all the weapons at their disposal. Weapons that are internationally prohibited like U.S and U.K supplied cluster bombs. We can say that the war will not end until the alliance of aggression breaks down and the Saudi regime collapses. The alliance has attempted to weaken us with every weapon in their arsenal – bombing, starvation, disease, cholera, terrorism, diphtheria, malnutrition, malaria – but they do not understand that we will not yield until Yemen is free, we will never surrender even if they occupy our homes and lands.

The cessation of this aggression depends entirely upon the vigilance and humanity of the peoples of this world, not upon their criminal governments who profit from our suffering.

VB: Do you have any hope in the current peace talks in Sweden?

Dr YaH: There is no hope in the current peace conversation, and the reason is that the other side did not come to dialogue with us, but sent their mercenaries who not have the ability to make decisions. They do not even have the right to return to their country while they claim they “liberated” which translates as an occupation. When we have American, Saudi Arabian and the UAE government representatives at the same table with Ansar Allah, we will be able to say there is hope.

New: In [#Yemen](#), Air Strikes Continue; Now UN of [@AntonioGuterres](#) Says The “Immediate Ceasefire” It Described Actually Means Tuesday, As Guterres Continues Partnering with [#Saudi](#) Crown Prince MBS' MiSK Foundation <https://t.co/bACPyiZEbe> [pic.twitter.com/Ua0DmO3Tnm](https://t.co/Ua0DmO3Tnm)

— Inner City Press (@innercitypress) [December 16, 2018](#)

VB: Most people in the West have been sold the idea that fugitive/resigned former President Mansour Hadi is the head of the interationally recognised government in Yemen. You are the Health Minister of the current, constitutionally elected Yemeni government. Please describe the government in situ. Does it have popular support? Why will the international community not recognise this government?

Dr YaH: I am the official spokesman of the Ministry of Health in the Yemeni capital Sana’a, which was formed constitutionally through the Constitutional Council of Representatives, which is still in Sana’a, which is more than the quorum. I believe that the continuation of the international recognition of the Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi as president of Yemen is due to American and Saudi money and the ruling of the United Nations. Hadi presented his resignation on January 19th 2015 and that was preceded by the end of his presidency of consensus on 21st February 2014. His presidency was extended by one year but he was never constitutionally elected. For me, there is no legitimacy for those who will murder their own people, besiege and starve their own people. He destroys his own people upon instruction from the U.S and the Saudi coalition.

Everyone can see that the entities that promote American hegemony are effectively besieging or killing their own people or putting economic pressure upon their people or simply ensuring the spread of chaos in their country. We see this in Yemen, Syria, potentially in Iran and North Korea among many others. Unfortunately most of the world is subjected to the devastation brought about by American hegemony in varying degrees. The U.S believes, it alone can determine who or what is legitimate or illegal. "Legitimacy" must be determined by the people of sovereign nations not by external and predatory forces.

Hadi's internationally recognised government has been living, for four years, in the luxury hotels of Riyadh, Dubai, Cairo and Istanbul. It does not exist in Yemen, even in those areas it claims to have "liberated". It can never go back to Yemen. Our government in Sana'a is recognised by the people of Yemen. It brings stability, freedom and justice. There is no suppression of doctrinal, sectarian or partisan considerations at all.

The number of people living in the areas of Yemen occupied by the Saudi coalition does not exceed 25% of the 27 million Yemenis. 75% live in the areas controlled by the Sana'a's government and the popularity of this coalition government is evident in the fighting fronts and popular support. They are supported by religious and national factions alike and there is a marked absence of public rejection or uprising against them - something which is a common occurrence in the provinces of the coalition-occupied south.

VB: Does Iran recognise the Yemeni government? Why has Iran not taken a more active role in defending the rights of Yemenis diplomatically?

Dr YaH: Unfortunately the Iranian government has not done enough against the injustice that is the aggression against Yemen. We find more popular support from the American people than from the Iranian government. They refuse to recognise the Sana'a government in terms of diplomatic support and to be honest Iran's inaction effectively supports the humiliation of Yemen by the International Community. The Iranian media support covers only economic or humanitarian aspects of the conflict and never addresses the root causes. We have never received any support from Iran even though we would always maintain that the Iranian people are just as humane as the American people and all peoples who stand with the Yemeni people against their global oppressors.

[For further insight into the lack of Iranian and Russian support, listen to Vanessa Beeley's interview with historian, Dr Isa Blumi - [here](#)]

VB: Has Russia played a role in Yemen since the Saudi coalition aggression began in March 2015?

Dr YaH: The Russian regime, like the American regime, has special objectives in Yemen and in the Middle East in general. There is an exchange of roles between the two superpowers in the world, in Syria and in Yemen. Russia adopted resolution 2216 without using the veto. This reflects the extent of its complicity. Russia welcomed Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman at the 20th summit in Argentina despite the discovery of his crimes against Yemen and against the Saudi journalist Martyr Jamal Khashoggi.

VB: How many children have died of preventable diseases since the conflict began, because of the blockade on food and medicine?

Dr YaH: The statistics that I will list for child mortality are not complete as the Ministry of

Health is unable to record accurate figures due to specific issues. There are many children who die silently - they die in their homes after their parents were unable to provide them with hospital because of poverty, siege and lack of money, just for example.

Malnutrition: - 2,300,000 children (less than 5 years) with 1:3 suffering from a type of malnutrition, including 400 thousand children with severe acute malnutrition, one child dies every ten minutes (according to UN reports And the World Health Organization).

2890 Yemeni people have been infected with diphtheria since its re-emergence (October 2017 to date), of whom 169 died, children represent 90% of these statistics.

Cholera and associated diarrhea: - About 1357,998 Yemeni people have been affected during the period 27 April 2017 to date, of whom 2678 died, children represent 70% of those deaths.

Malaria and dengue: - There are about half a million Yemeni people suffering from malaria and 30 thousand died from the disease, the majority are children.

130 medicines needed to treat chronic diseases and life saving medicines are not available in the Ministry of Health because of the economic blockade and the closure of Sana'a airport since 8 August 2016 until today. These drugs include kidneys, renal dialysis, cancer, diabetes, thalassemia, heart, epilepsy. Tens of thousands have died as a result of the lack of these medicines, the majority are children.

Since the closure of Sana'a airport on August 8th 2016 until today, some 200,000 Yemenis have been unable to travel abroad to receive appropriate medical treatment that is not available in Yemen. So far, 28,000 patients have died, 40% are children.

A 12 years-old Abdullah is 11 kilogram little more than the average one year old, despite his family is too poor but they spent the little money they have trying to save him.

Millions of [#Yemen](#)'s children can't be treated because their families in desperately poor [#YemenCantWait pic.twitter.com/8aHmnQEu0Z](#)

— محمد الحجيلي (@MohammedHojily) [December 16, 2018](#)

VB: Have attempts to import necessary lifesaving items been delayed or denied entry and by whom? Could you give an example of those items?

Dr YaH: Oil and basic foodstuffs and 120 pharmaceuticals have been banned from entering Yemen except through very complex conditions and only by the sea not through Sana'a airport which is closed. Because of the U.N Verification and Inspection mechanism imposed on ships entering Djibouti port, medicines remain blockaded there for months and many medicines will have perished by the time they finally enter Yemen, if at all. Wheat, for example, will be rendered inedible after storage in high temperatures. The procedures do nothing more than add cost onto the items for the already poverty-stricken civilians. The closure of Sana'a airport and the transferral of the National Bank to Aden (from Sana'a) also have a negative effect. For kidney treatment, for example, Sirolims, Ticrolims, Brucraf, Salsypt, Kidney Dialysis, Insulin etc we can only provide enough for 5% of patients through international organisations.

VB: How are the 5000 (or more) kidney patients coping bearing in mind they are unable to receive the necessary dialysis?

Dr YaH: Eight thousand dialysis patients receive the lowest weekly washings (2 washings each week), although it should be minimum 3 washings per week, and instead of 5 hours per wash, we do only 3 hours (to create time for the rest of the patients) Where dialysis machines work 24 hours / 7 days - 4 dialysis centers have been closed by the Saudi bombardment. 27 centers are still functioning but we are unable to provide equipment or to repair devices thanks to the blockade. We struggle to have enough of the washing solutions. If we did not have the cooperation of some international organisations and the help of Yemeni society, we would have witnessed another humanitarian catastrophe. Even so, we cannot cover all needs and 1200 patients have died of renal failure as a direct consequence of the blockade.

VB: Does it still apply that any surgeries for cancer will be performed free of charge?

Dr YaH: In Yemen, there is no health insurance for citizens at all. Health care is charged for even in public hospitals although the payment is less than in private hospitals. This was one of the main reasons for the uprising in September 2014. The new Minister of Health, appointed in June 2018, introduced a policy to reduce the pain and suffering of patients, especially those with cancer and they have access to free procedures in public hospitals in Sana'a. A new law has also been introduced which will enter into legislation in 2019 - the Fund for the care and treatment of cancer. We hope that this will go some way to relieving the suffering of cancer patients.

VB: How many hospitals remain operational across Yemen?

Dr YaH: In areas governed by the Sana'a government, 79 hospitals provide health services to 75% of Yemenis (24 million Yemenis out of 27-30 million) and 2,000 health centers throughout Yemen. The Saudi coalition air force destroyed 345 health center hospitals completely destroyed or partially destroyed. Of these, 4 hospitals are run by Doctors Without Borders and about 45% of hospitals and health centers have stopped working because of the blockade. Health work in Yemen is only 55% operational and they are overwhelmed by the spread of epidemiological, psychological and physical diseases.

VB: Right before the talks in Sweden, some injured Yemenis were reported to have been allowed to fly out. How many were able to fly out?

Dr YaH: The 200,000 people who suffer from these physical diseases, such as cancer, heart, kidneys, bone etc have been collectively punished by the coalition of aggression's refusal to allow them to travel. 28,000 have died as a result. The World Health Organisation and the UN expressed a willingness to conduct two trips per month, 100 patients each trip. Those who managed to travel before the peace talks are the war wounded, whether fighters from the frontlines or the civilians injured in Saudi bombing raids. No more than 50 such patients have been able to leave for treatment and one trip was organised as a prerequisite for the Sana'a delegation to participate in the "peace" talks. 50,000 injured are still waiting for permission to travel for treatment, thousands of them with permanent disabilities.

VB: What is needed most in terms of Humanitarian Aid? What is actually being given in adequate quantities?

Dr YaH: The Yemeni people do not require any assistance actually. They only require that the blockade and siege is lifted and the aggression stopped and that they be allowed to live in peace. We will regulate our own problems peacefully and easily. This is the most important demand from the Yemeni people.

VB: Who is ultimately responsible for the genocide in Yemen?

Dr YaH: Those who are officially responsible for the genocide in Yemen are those who own the money of mass destruction with which they buy weapons of mass destruction from the countries of mass destruction endorsed by the United Nations of mass destruction and met with global silence while Yemen is being destroyed. The American regime is mainly responsible, the UN and the Security Council follow closely as legal cover for the crimes committed by the US and its Saudi and UAE partners enabling them to commit the atrocities against the Yemeni people. Saudi Arabia and UAE are number three in the responsibility league table and then you have, as number four, the fugitive, illegitimate President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi and his political team at the UN or working as ambassadors in other countries.

Finally, I always welcome you and your questions at any time and whatever the questions without reservation, and thank you deeply for your constant solidarity with us. People are two types (either your brother in religion or your counterpart in creation) and we live in one land and one race and live one life and our destiny is one ... all respect to you and the people of the world.

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Vanessa Beeley is an independent journalist, peace activist, photographer and associate editor at 21st Century Wire. Vanessa was a finalist for one of the most prestigious journalism awards - the 2017 Martha Gellhorn Prize for Journalism - whose winners have included the likes of Robert Parry in 2017, Patrick Cockburn, Robert Fisk, Nick Davies and the Bureau for Investigative Journalism team. Please support her work at her [Patreon](#) account.

Featured image: Sara, a 10-year-old at al Thawra hospital in Hodeidah, Yemen, is half paralyzed by diphtheria, an illness that can be prevented by vaccination. She subsequently had to leave the hospital because of the violence. UNICEF/Touma/Yemen/2018

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