

# The Killing of Children in Yemen: UNICEF's Henrietta Fore's Address to the UN Security Council

By [Henrietta Fore](#)

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*On 15 May 2019, UNICEF **Executive Director Henrietta H. Fore** addresses the United Nations Security Council. "Since the fighting in Yemen began four years ago, 7,300 children have been killed or seriously injured. These are verified numbers. The actual numbers are no doubt higher. The fighting still rages across 30 active conflict zones — home to nearly 1.2 million children. Each day, another eight children will be killed, injured or recruited to the fighting. Every 10 minutes, another child will die from a preventable cause," states Fore.*

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## **AS PREPARED**

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**UN Security Council: Yemen**

**New York, NY**

**May 15, 2019**

Thank you, Mr. President.

Last month, a group of schoolchildren in Sana'a were doing what children around the world do every day, sitting in their classrooms, learning. Most were under the age of nine. It was almost lunchtime, when a sudden incident shattered the windows. Shrapnel and broken glass flew into the classrooms.

Imagine the fear these children experienced. Imagine the horror their parents felt for sending them to school that day — all so they could gain what every child deserves: an education. And imagine the pain endured by the families of the 14 children who never made it home at all. Or the desperate worry felt by the families of the 16 others who were critically injured, left fighting for their lives in the hospital. Or the other students who will live with the trauma of that day for the rest of their lives.

In any conflict, children suffer first, and worst.

Since the fighting in Yemen began four years ago, 7,300 children have been killed or seriously injured. These are verified numbers. The actual numbers are no doubt higher.

The fighting still rages across 30 active conflict zones — home to nearly 1.2 million children.

Each day, another eight children will be killed, injured or recruited to the fighting.

Every 10 minutes, another child will die from a preventable cause.

Like a lack of food, with 360,000 children suffering from severe acute malnutrition. In fact, half the children under five years old in Yemen — 2.5 million — are stunted. And stunting is irreversible.

Like a lack of a simple vaccination — with 151 children dying of diphtheria since last August. Or like cholera and severe acute watery diarrhea. Despite the best efforts of the humanitarian community — including over two million doses of oral cholera vaccines delivered over the last year — there are over 135,000 suspected cases reported so far this year among children. Over 3,300 people have died of cholera since 2017 — including 153 children since January alone. A number that will increase as we head into the rainy season. And as always, the children die first.

And the UN has verified the recruitment and use of over 3,000 children by all parties to the conflict since the conflict began. That number is likely much higher. A flagrant and outrageous violation of international law.

As children's lives are at risk, so too are their minds.

More than two million children are out-of-school. And one in five schools have been damaged or destroyed in the fighting. A huge blow to their future potential.

The situation has only gotten worse.

While the ceasefire has largely held in Hudaydah, other areas are seeing a rise in violence — in Abs, Haijah, Taiz, Al Dhale'e and elsewhere.

Hospitals, clinics and water systems are in ruins — with half of the country's hospitals and clinics destroyed.

In short — the systems that every child and family needs are failing.

At the same time, Yemen's economy is in freefall.

A new report<sup>[1]</sup> commissioned by UNDP shows that Yemen — already one of the least-developed countries before the war — has lost an additional two decades' worth of development gains since the war began.

Mr. President, we are at a tipping point. If the war continues any longer, the country may move past the point of no return.

As a global community, we must ask ourselves: Can Yemen afford losing a generation of children? Can the region — and indeed, the world — afford the instability and crushing poverty that will result? What will happen if Yemen descends into a full-blown famine? What happens now that the water table is so low that the small aquifers are below the required well depth? In some ways, this can be worse than famine, as lack of water can sicken and kill children. Are we prepared to subject a generation of children — and perhaps, their children — to this bleak future? How long will we continue allowing Yemen to slide into

oblivion?

Our teams are working around the clock to prevent this from happening.

Last year, UNICEF and our humanitarian partners treated 345,000 severely malnourished children. Children whose mid-upper arm circumference is less than 11 centimetres — or three adult fingers in circumference.

We're delivering safe drinking water to over five million people every day — including 1.7 million children — in the 15 main cities through municipal water systems.

We're providing cash incentives to 7,000 health workers and 135,000 teachers and school staff — as many have not been paid in over two years.

And with key donors, we're helping to keep alive almost nine million of the most vulnerable Yemeni people with emergency cash assistance.

But this work only addresses the symptoms of the catastrophe in Yemen.

To truly shape a better future for Yemen and its children, we need your engagement and influence to end this war on children. Now.

Yemen is spiraling perilously close to the brink.

We call on the Council to speak with one voice to protect the children of Yemen and stop grave violations against them.

We urge all parties to the conflict to open doors to immediate, long-term humanitarian access, and to allow days of tranquility to vaccinate and help children.

If we cannot reach them, we cannot keep them alive.

We must also re-double our support for the efforts of the UN Special Envoy to reach a negotiated political solution — one that puts children first.

As we fail these children, we fail more than their basic rights.

We fail humanity itself.

When I was in Sana'a and Aden, I visited hospitals and clinics shattered by the conflict.

I witnessed heartrending struggles to survive.

A newborn baby struggling to breathe in an incubator after all power was lost in the emergency room.

A distraught mother with a child thin and malnourished, begging for food.

A father weeping with so little money he was forced to choose between keeping his wife alive or his children.

Is this how we show our humanity to others?

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### Note

[1] *Assessing the impact of war on development in Yemen*, (2019)

<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ImpactOfWarOnDevelopmentInYemen.pdf>

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