



## MEDIA BRIEFING

### No progress without peace: Failure to act will result in 20 years of child hunger in Yemen

In a report released today (3rd December) humanitarian agency, the International Rescue Committee (IRC), is calling on world leaders to catalyse opportunities for peace in Yemen and warning that failure to do so could lead to **20 years of rampant child hunger**.

The report sets out how the conflict is now at a crossroads and for the first time in many years, the international community and members of the UN Security Council (UNSC) are presented with an **opportunity to end the war** that has made Yemen the world's largest humanitarian crisis.

The report warns of the bleak future that awaits the millions of innocent civilians caught up in this devastating conflict should world leaders fail to deliver peace: as well as the rising humanitarian funding cost to donors **reaching a potential \$29 billion if the war continues for another five years. That is more than the entire annual humanitarian budget globally.**

The Rt Hon David Miliband, President & CEO of the IRC, warns that with the **UK distracted by Brexit debates and the erratic shifts in US Middle East policy, the international community risks letting the opportunity for peace pass by.**

Visiting Berlin for the annual Einstein Humanitarian Dialogue, Mr Miliband is calling on members of the UN Security Council, including Germany and the UK, to step up and take concerted actions to deliver the relentless diplomacy necessary to achieve lasting peace, stating:

*"Today's grim predictions are an insight into the colossal cost of the Age of Impunity: where wars are fought with a complete disregard for civilian life and neglected by politicians charged with ending the violence and holding perpetrators of international law to account.*

*The good news is that the huge efforts by humanitarian agencies, donor governments, and aid workers have helped reduce slightly the appalling levels of child malnutrition in Yemen. The bad news is that at this rate, it will take a further 20 years just to reach pre-crisis levels of child hunger. That's twice the agreed timetable for ending malnutrition around the world, as set out in the Global Goals*

*Yemen has become the modern face of extreme poverty. Trends show that people caught in crisis risk being even more excluded from sustainable development progress by 2030 than they are today. As we enter 2020, we have an opportunity to make the next ten years the decade of delivery, not the decade of disaster. For Yemen, that will require peace."*

#### 1. A rare window of opportunity for peace in Yemen

Recent developments in Yemen suggest a rare window of opportunity has opened to drive towards peace. Localised ceasefire proposals, prisoner releases, newly invigorated diplomatic back-channels, and belated progress in implementing aspects of the Stockholm agreement - the December 2018 deal that brought warring parties together for the first time in two years - are the first signs of life in what had been a stalled peace process. The November 2019 power sharing agreement between the Internationally Recognised Government (IRG) and the Southern Transitional Council

(STC) offers hope that political divisions in the south can be remediated and the ground set for more inclusive peace talks. However, success is far from assured.

Now, international partners of the warring parties have a choice. Either use their significant diplomatic influence to kick-start UN-led negotiations, bringing all of Yemen's political groups into inclusive nationwide peace talks; or watch as the country's humanitarian needs grow exponentially, trapping innocent Yemeni civilians in a cycle of aid dependence while footing the ever growing bill for the humanitarian response.

## **2. The Yemen War: a failure of diplomacy in an Age of Impunity**

The Yemen war has been fought by all sides with callous disregard for human suffering. Although 2019 has seen a reduction in the number of airstrikes and conflict activity, civilians continue to come under attack. Over 500 homes were hit by explosive weaponry in July 2019 alone. Airstrikes have destroyed farmlands, water and medical facilities, and landmines have been planted on farmland.

All parties to the conflict have violated their obligation to allow the unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief. Yemenis are not starving - they are being starved - by a byzantine set of conditions placed on humanitarian operations in the north and south of the country. The Humanitarian Response Plan for Yemen reports that 3 million people are considered "hard to reach" due to bureaucratic impediments on programming. Such actions are considered violations of international law. Yet, all violations in Yemen have become so commonplace they are now met with barely a shrug. Accountability for, or in fact condemnation of them, has been sorely lacking.

The Group of Eminent Experts (GEE), the only international mechanism mandated to monitor and report on the situation of human rights in Yemen has been blocked from entering the country by Saudi Arabia. No member state has invited the GEE to present to the Security Council, despite their findings showing "reasonable grounds" to believe that the conduct of the war by SELC and Ansar Allah may have resulted in violations of international humanitarian law. Instead, Security Council members, including the UK and the US continue to put their faith in Saudi led investigations of civilian casualty incidents. Investigations that have been criticized for lacking independence, impartiality, transparency, and detail.

Recent action by members of the UN Security Council on Syria demonstrates that this malaise does not need to be the new normal, similar robust diplomatic response to protect civilians in Yemen is possible. Yemen provides a test case for commitments to the rules-based order - a test the international community cannot afford to fail.

## **3. The UK must step up**

In recent months, distracted by turbulent national politics, the UK government has pulled back from their previously energetic engagement in the Yemen peace process - exemplified in the high level push for the Stockholm Agreement and the visit to Yemen by the former Foreign Secretary, Jeremy Hunt. Following the general election, the UK government must inject the same commitment and political engagement into pushing for peace by making Yemen the number one priority for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for 2020.

Any perceived absence in political engagement from the top in the UK would undermine the prospects of peace and the UK's reputation for foreign policy influence and conflict resolution. Securing an end to the war will require patience and trust. Trust built by showing a commitment to the region and the interests and concerns of all involved. At a time when President Trump's abrupt policy changes in the Middle East are making partners anxious about US staying power, the UK has an opportunity to re-establish itself as a trusted partner in Yemen's, and the region's future.

#### 4. The Cost of inaction: 20 years of child hunger

The cost of a failure to act is starkly illustrated by the food security status of the population. Yemen is now home to the largest food insecure population in the world. Just one year ago, in December 2018, famine conditions were declared in parts of the country. Aid has saved lives. The IRC's analysis shows that levels of child hunger (as represented by levels of Severe Acute Malnutrition - SAM) have declined at a rate of 8 percent between 2017-2019. Yet by merely maintaining this rate of decline it will take 20 years to return Yemen to pre-crisis levels of child hunger; levels already amongst the highest in the world. The drivers of food insecurity are complex but the connection to the war and the actions of warring parties is beyond question. Worrying analysis also suggests that if conflict were to persist, disrupting port operations or cutting off food supply for a prolonged period of time, famine conditions could return.

#### 5. Recommendations for the UK Government

- I. **The UK should publish a Plan of Action for 2020 to secure peace and address impediments to humanitarian access in Yemen in the first 6 weeks of any newly formed government.** This plan should include details of how the UK will use its seat on the UN Security Council to best advance the peace agenda, including by using the monthly reports on Yemen to call all parties to participate in meaningful dialogue. It should also set out a renewed policy on arms sales and military support to parties in the conflict following the Court of Appeals' ruling that previous sales to Saudi Arabia were unlawful. In doing so the government should extend the arms embargo until a nationwide ceasefire in Yemen is agreed.
- II. **The UK should address the imbalance in its position on violations of international law in Yemen, and consistently release official statements of condemnation when civilians are killed or civilian infrastructure is destroyed by any party to the conflict.** In particular, the UK should ensure coherence between its global leadership on efforts to address violation of international law in Syria and its position on Yemen. **The UK's action and early condemnation of violations of international law in Idlib, Syria, should set the standard for UK's response to all cases of civilian harm including those committed by all sides in Yemen.** If the UK is to show real leadership in the Middle East and contribute to sustainable peace in Yemen, it must be willing to lead the charge and call for independent investigation into breaches of it, including full, published investigations of attacks that kill civilians or destroy civilian infrastructure. At the heart of the UK's current position is a contradiction: a selective approach to condemnation of violations of international law. This must end.
- III. **The UK should continue to fund the humanitarian response, be prepared to increase funding if other donors fail to deliver on their commitments and make commitments that expand access to acute malnutrition treatment in Yemen at the Nutrition for Growth 2020 pledging event in July 2020.** Against a backdrop of late and reduced funding from key donors, including those from the Gulf, the UK must be ready to fill gaps and remind other member states of their responsibilities to Yemen. In addition, the UK should allocate funding and diplomatic activity at the July 2020 Nutrition for Growth pledging conference that will expand the reach and quality of nutrition programming in Yemen to address and rollback the impacts of child hunger there. DFID has demonstrated real leadership in the funding of the humanitarian response in Yemen by providing over £168 million in 2019, making it the fourth largest donor behind only the United States and the two members of the SELC warring parties.