



**“The war destroyed  
our dreams.”**

Why the international community  
should invest in Yemen’s peace.

International Rescue Committee

## Glossary

|      |  |       |   |
|------|--|-------|---|
| EU   | European Union                                   | STC   | Southern Transitional Council   |
| GBV  | Gender-Based Violence                            | UAE   | United Arab Emirates  |
| GEE  | Group of Eminent Experts                         | UK    | United Kingdom  |
| IPC  | Integrated Food Security Phase Classification    | UN    | United Nations  |
| IRC  | International Rescue Committee                   | UNDP  | United Nations Development Programme  |
| IRG  | Internationally Recognised Government (of Yemen) | UNFPA | United Nations Population Fund (formerly United Nations Fund for Population Activities) |
| ISIS | Islamic State in Iraq and Syria                  | UNSC  | United Nations Security Council   |
| JIAT | Joint Incident Assessment Team                   | UNSCR | United Nations Security Council Resolution  |
| NGO  | Non-Governmental Organisation                    | US    | United States   |
| SAM  | Severe Acute Malnutrition                        | WFP   | World Food Programme  |
| SELC | Saudi and Emirati-Led Coalition                  |       |   |

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**Front cover:** A displaced woman stands with her twin daughters Yusra and Yumna outside the house they rent at a settlement for displaced people on the outskirts of Aden, Yemen. *Will Swanson/IRC*

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# Executive Summary

The war in Yemen has turned the country into the world's largest humanitarian crisis. A crisis that is man-made and predictable, and therefore one for which solutions are within reach. For nearly half a decade, the international community has held the country's increasingly vulnerable population back from the brink of catastrophe with life-saving humanitarian assistance. Aid saves lives, but to address the factors which continue to drive the suffering of Yemeni civilians demands an urgent acceleration of efforts to reduce violence and secure peace.

Recent developments in Yemen suggest a rare window of opportunity has opened. 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.

Yemen is now at a crossroads. International backers of the warring parties, including the UK, US and France have a choice. They can either use their significant diplomatic influence to build on recent developments and 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 Yemeni civilians in a cycle of aid dependence. The UN estimates 500,000 more Yemenis will die if fighting lasts until 2022, including 300,000 from hunger and/or lack of healthcare.<sup>i</sup>

The cost of the failure to act is starkly illustrated by the food security status of the Yemeni 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. Today, 80 percent of the population – 24 million people – are in dire need of humanitarian assistance. 16 million people – half the population – are facing severe food shortages<sup>ii</sup> and living on the verge of famine. The cost of malnutrition will be counted for years to come with measurable impacts on the long term physical and mental development of children.<sup>iii</sup> Analysis also suggests that if conflict were to persist, disrupting port operations or cutting off food supply for a prolonged period of time, there is a likelihood that famine conditions would return.<sup>iv</sup>

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 and 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.<sup>v</sup> IRC analysis further shows that if the war continues for another five years it will cost the international community as much as \$29 billion in humanitarian funding.

Humanitarian aid can and has saved lives in Yemen, but to reverse these food security trends a cessation in hostilities is essential. 2018 may have been the deadliest year of Yemen's war – but with robust diplomacy by the international community, 2019 could be the last.

This report argues that efforts to resolve the war in Yemen are at a vital inflection point. It demonstrates the catastrophic impact that failing to turn the positive signs for peace into actual commitments will have on Yemenis, using food insecurity and hunger as an illustration of the suffering faced on a daily basis by millions of civilians. It concludes with the following recommendations:

## Recommendations:

- International supporters of the warring parties, including the UK, US and France should use all diplomatic tools to incentivise and/or pressure the parties to launch an immediate nationwide ceasefire and return to inclusive, meaningful peace talks.
- Permanent and elected members of the UN Security Council should be prepared to reinforce the efforts of the UN Special Envoy and use all opportunities to call for peace.
- International donors should maintain pressure on the Ansar Allah (Houthi) authorities and the Internationally Recognised Government to lift all humanitarian access restrictions and ensure all air and seaports are open and fully functional.
- In 2020 and moving forward, international donors including those from the Gulf, should maintain funding levels, deliver on their funding commitments in a timely manner, and continue to channel their contributions through the UN appeal.
- The Internationally Recognised Government, Ansar Allah and international donors, should take steps to address Yemen's economic collapse and support Yemen's future recovery.
- All warring parties, and the international community, should make a clear commitment to the protection of international law, and pursuing accountability for violations of it.

# Current State of the Conflict

The 2015 decision by the Saudi and Emirati-Led Coalition (SELC) to back President Hadi in Yemen's civil war transformed the conflict into an international crisis with geopolitical ramifications. Nearly half a decade later the conflict has created the world's largest humanitarian crisis and displaced 3 million people,<sup>vi</sup> including over 350,000 this year alone.<sup>vii</sup>

Far from cementing Hadi's position, ensuring Saudi and Emirati national security, or diminishing Iranian influence,<sup>viii</sup> the war has empowered separatist forces, strengthened Iran's regional influence, created new threats to Saudi and Emirati national security as well as the global energy supply,<sup>ix</sup> and left a void of governance filled by terrorist groups including Al Qaeda and ISIS.<sup>x</sup> Today there are around 30 front lines of Yemen's war<sup>xi</sup> and while conflict continues and civilians suffer the impacts of violence, displacement and unimaginable humanitarian need, strategic advances and territorial gains over the past year barely register on the map.

The war in Yemen has been proven to be a strategic failure for the SELC and their international backers, including the US, the UK and France. It is a war to which there is no military solution. Yet the national, regional and international security implications are dwarfed by the suffering that has been unleashed on ordinary Yemenis.

Adeeyah, a mother whose children suffered from acute malnutrition and were provided treatment by the IRC, summed up the horror of the war:

**“We witnessed death, we used to escape the shelling by hiding in the roots of the trees, airstrikes above us and Houthis’ rockets in front of us... My children used to get up at night screaming in fear... We were frequently unable to cook food due to the danger of having open gas cylinders during bombardment. I used to dream of having my own house... the war destroyed our dreams and [our] future. Now I only dream of peace and safety.”**

Airstrikes by the SELC, artillery fire by both sides, and the use of anti-personnel mines have disproportionately affected civilians in a war characterised by mass civilian incidents – attacks that have killed civilians at funerals,<sup>xii</sup> on school buses,<sup>xiii</sup> at markets,<sup>xiv</sup> and in hospitals.<sup>xv</sup> Estimates suggest that the conflict's death toll is now over 100,000.<sup>xvi</sup> At least 42 aid workers have been killed to date.<sup>xvii</sup> Although 2019 – especially the second half of the year – 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. These figures represent a terrifying trend – for civilians, the most likely location to be injured or killed at the end of 2018 was in their own home.<sup>xviii</sup>



**Above:** Adeeyah Abdo Alwan, 39, with her daughter Salaman in the kitchen of her temporary home in the suburb of Enma in Aden, Yemen. *Will Swanson/IRC*

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# Building on the Stockholm Agreement

December 2019 marks one year on from the Stockholm Agreement, the UN-brokered deal that committed warring parties to a halt of hostilities in the vital port city of Hodeidah and redeployment of forces from the wider governorate, and in doing so averted further humanitarian crisis.

The deal also sought to secure prisoner exchanges and de-escalation of the conflict in the city of Taiz in south west Yemen.<sup>1</sup> The agreement also established a common framework for dialogue between warring parties. However, implementation of the agreement has allowed for a tactical redeployment of forces by all sides, resulting in more active conflict breaking out on other front lines. Al Dhale'e governorate in central Yemen saw a 208 percent increase in fatalities in the five months following the Stockholm Agreement and the IRC has been forced to suspend or relocate its programming there on at least four occasions due to insecurity.<sup>xx</sup> Sa'ada and Hajjah, both Ansar Allah (Houthi) strongholds in northern Yemen where humanitarian access remains extremely restricted, continued to witness heavy fighting. The Stockholm Agreement has also been used to frustrate efforts to move the peace talks forward, with calls from the IRG in particular for full implementation of all the elements before further talks could begin.

Despite these unintended developments, there are indications of a possible path towards peace. Both Saudi Arabia and the Ansar Allah authorities have made overtures towards de-escalation with suggestions of localised ceasefires by both sides,<sup>xx, xxi</sup> Ansar Allah have released prisoners,<sup>xxii</sup> and

recent months have seen reinvigoration of diplomatic back-channels and talks between the two opposing parties.<sup>xxiii</sup> In October 2019, SELC airstrikes also reached the lowest level since 2015 with 83 strikes. The majority (82 percent) hit Sa'ada and Hajjah<sup>xxiv</sup> on the Saudi border, indicating a reduction in offensive operations across Yemen and a greater focus on border security.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) decision to withdraw troops, announced in July 2019, indicates an Emirati desire to extricate itself from the conflict. As recently as November 2019, the UAE's Foreign Minister Anwar Gargash said Ansar Allah "have a role in [Yemen's] future."<sup>xxv</sup> Finally, a power-sharing agreement reached between the Internationally Recognised Government (IRG) and the Southern Transitional Council (STC) addresses a key split within the anti-Ansar Allah alliance, and while imperfect, the deal should help stabilise southern Yemen, and creates the possibility of more inclusive peace talks by including representatives of the STC in the IRG's peace talk delegation. It is now vital that robust diplomacy and international support focuses on ensuring the agreement delivers on its potential to secure new, ambitious nationwide talks.



**Above:** A young Yemeni girl at a mobile clinic operated by the IRC on the outskirts of Aden, Yemen. *Will Swanson/IRC*

<sup>1</sup>The Stockholm deal proposed agreements on the exchange of prisoners, a truce in the vital port city of Hodeidah, the establishment of humanitarian corridors in Taiz, and a handover of the three Red Sea ports (Hodeidah, Al-Salif, and Ras Isa) to the United Nations Verification and Inspection Mechanism for Yemen (UNVIM).

# Spiralling Humanitarian Needs and Declining Funding

Yemen holds the unenviable title of the world's largest humanitarian emergency, and as 2020 approaches the crisis has broken another record: over 14 million people are now in acute need of humanitarian assistance,<sup>xxvi</sup> nearly half of the country's population. Millions more Yemenis are suffering from the mental trauma and stress of living through years of war with wide ranging impacts on physical health, education, increased risks of domestic violence, and their ability to work.

The humanitarian crisis in Yemen is man-made – a direct consequence of nearly 5 years of conflict that has destroyed Yemen's infrastructure, derailed its already-fragile economy and upended its agricultural capacity. Airstrikes and shelling have left only half of the country's hospitals still functioning.<sup>xxvii</sup> Yemen's economy has shrunk by 50 percent.<sup>xxviii</sup>

The international community has generously supported the humanitarian response, investing a total of \$8.3 billion into successive humanitarian appeals, delivering life-saving healthcare and nutritional support, food aid, and water to millions of Yemenis. In 2018, the same year famine conditions



**Above:** A young student at a home on the outskirts of Aden, Yemen. *Will Swanson/IRC*

were declared, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) – the two states responsible for airstrikes in the conflict – allocated \$930 million in non-earmarked grants, allowing the UN to significantly scale up in all sectors, delivering major improvements in malnutrition and cholera response. Additional funding from donors including the US, UK, and EU made the humanitarian appeal the best funded globally (80.7 percent) and meant that the numbers of people affected by famine were not higher. Yet despite these efforts, the impact of years of war is leading to ever increasing humanitarian needs.

In 2019 the humanitarian appeal requirement rose further still to a staggering \$4bn: the largest appeal in history. IRC analysis suggests that if the war continues for another five years it will cost the international community as much as \$29 billion in humanitarian funding.<sup>2</sup> Yet worryingly there is reason to believe that 2018 may have been a high watermark and that financing will not keep pace with the growing needs in Yemen.

For much of 2019 UN agencies have had difficulty raising the funding required for the Humanitarian Response Plan. Many major donors did not fulfil their pledges until well into the third quarter of 2019, meaning some programmes were forced to close – keeping aid from Yemenis who desperately need it. Injections of financing by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, UK, US, EU and others late in the year boosted the level of funding for the appeal from 45 percent to 65 percent, allowing programmes including support for food aid and malnutrition treatment centres to re-open.

However, as strategic interests in Yemen begin to shift (as reflected in the UAE's drawdown of military forces) and the crisis becomes protracted, the risk of donor fatigue along with the trend of late and reduced funding from Gulf partners becomes a major concern for the ability of operational partners to maintain essential service delivery. In response, international donors will increasingly have to step in to fill in the gaps – or watch as the crisis in Yemen plumbs new depths.

<sup>2</sup>IRC cost projection analysis based on Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan fund data from 2015 - 2019, including provisional requirements for 2020. Data retrieved from: <https://fts.unocha.org/countries/248/summary/2019>

# Food Insecurity in Yemen

As one of the world's poorest countries, Yemen faced food security challenges prior to the current crisis. Pre-2015, approximately a quarter of Yemen's food was produced domestically and the rest imported, leaving Yemenis vulnerable to price rises. At this time an estimated 160,000 children under 5 years old suffered from Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM)<sup>xxxix</sup> – the most extreme form of undernutrition, images of which have come to characterise the human suffering caused by the Yemen war.

The UN Development Programme (UNDP) has warned that even if the war ended this year, 14 percent of children under 5 years old and 17 percent of the wider population will be left suffering from malnutrition.<sup>xxx</sup> Today, conflict and mass displacement have devastated local food production, reinforcing reliance on imported food and food aid. At the same time Yemen has witnessed a drastic reduction in imports, combined with the collapse of the national economy (trends discussed in the next section) resulting in rapidly rising prices. Wheat flour, oil, red beans and onions – the most commonly consumed foods in Yemen – have risen to over twice pre-war costs while salaries have stagnated, thereby making food unaffordable for much of Yemeni society.<sup>xxxi</sup> Fulla, a mother of two young girls diagnosed with Severe Acute Malnutrition, told the IRC, “We used to have different kinds of food and vegetables. On Fridays we used to have meat or chicken. But here we cannot afford for meat or chicken, we only eat cooked lentils”.

The World Food Programme (WFP) aims to feed 12 million of the most vulnerable Yemenis every month.<sup>xxxii</sup> A full monthly household ration from WFP consists of: 75kg of flour; 10kg of pulses; 2.5kg of sugar; 200g of salt and 7 litres of cooking oil. The average family in Yemen has seven members meaning each member will receive just 300g of flour and 40g of pulses a day. Without access to additional sources of food Yemenis are forced into difficult decisions to feed their families: skipping meals, limiting portions, and selling assets. Today, more than half of all families in Yemen are forced into debt just to buy food.<sup>xxxiii</sup> Limited humanitarian funding in Yemen has also meant that for periods of 2019 households were only receiving half the WFP ration meaning limited resources were stretched even further.



**Above:** Displaced woman Nabihah Ahmed Thabit, 35, shares a meal with her family at their home in the suburb of Bir Ahmed on the outskirts of Aden, Yemen. *Will Swanson/IRC*

**“The war destroyed our dreams.”**



**Above:** Displaced woman Nabiha Ahmed Thabit, 35, with her son Hashim, 1, at an IRC mobile clinic operating in the suburb of Bir Ahmed on the outskirts of Aden, Yemen. *Will Swanson/IRC*

In 2018, the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC)<sup>3</sup> found parts of Yemen had fallen into famine conditions (IPC 5).<sup>xxxiv</sup> For those suffering the impacts of food insecurity, humanitarian assistance has saved lives. In 2018 the IPC team reported that without humanitarian food aid, 67 percent of Yemen's population would be in need of urgent assistance, while nearly a quarter of a million would be living under famine conditions (compared to the 63,500 found through their assessments).<sup>xxxv</sup> In 2019, the number of people who received food assistance increased by nearly 50 percent compared to 2018<sup>xxxvi</sup> – a record 12.4 million people were reached with urgent food aid in August alone.<sup>xxxvii</sup> Yet, recent expert analysis starkly demonstrates the continuing vulnerability of the Yemeni population. Any escalation in conflict or reduction in food imports will produce an entirely predictable outcome: further famine.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

Haifaa, a displaced mother of six living in Aden, explained what led her to seek assistance from an IRC mobile nutrition clinic: "Price increases because of the war make it very difficult for me to secure basic commodities for my children... I realised my children were getting sick because they didn't get enough food." Over the past year, the IRC has treated over 150,000 children for malnutrition. The immense effort of humanitarian partners to deliver food aid, livelihoods interventions, and nutrition programming to millions of Yemenis have also been effective at reducing the number of children under 5 years old requiring urgent care for SAM, with levels declining by 8 percent between 2017 and 2019.<sup>4</sup>

However, by merely maintaining this rate of decline it will take twenty years – until 2039 – for the number of children suffering from SAM to return to pre-conflict levels, which were amongst the highest in the region. A de-escalation in conflict however, offers an alternative – one that sets Yemen on a road to stability and allows Yemenis to reduce their dependence on aid.

Fulla is a mother of twin girls, Yusra and Yumna, who were treated on the outskirts of Aden by Aisha, a nurse working with the IRC's mobile health team.

**Yusra and Yumna were less than a year old when they began showing signs of severe malnutrition, but Fulla couldn't afford to bring them to the hospital. Having recently been displaced from Taiz, Fulla and her husband had no job or income. They came to the IRC's mobile health clinic where they met Aisha who examined the twins. After a month and a half of nutrition treatment by IRC's team, the twins began to recover. Aisha continued to support Fulla and the girls, and one year later Yusra and Yumna took their first steps. Fulla still dreams of showing the girls their home in Taiz.**

<sup>3</sup> The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) is an innovative multi-partner initiative for improving food security and nutrition analysis and decision-making. By using the IPC classification and analytical approach, Governments, UN Agencies, NGOs, civil society and other relevant actors, work together to determine the severity and magnitude of acute and chronic food insecurity, and acute malnutrition situations in a country, according to internationally-recognised scientific standards.

<sup>4</sup> IRC analysis based on levels of SAM reported in UNICEF's Yemen monthly situation reports from August 2017 to August 2019. UNICEF's reports found here: [https://www.unicef.org/appeals/yemen\\_sitepreps.html](https://www.unicef.org/appeals/yemen_sitepreps.html)

# The Impact of Food Insecurity on Women and Girls

Women and girls have been disproportionately affected by the war in Yemen, including by some of the worst effects of the food crisis. 1.1 million pregnant or lactating women suffered from acute malnourishment in 2018.<sup>xxxix</sup> Evidence from humanitarian crises globally shows that when food is scarce, women often sacrifice their own meals to allow other family members to eat, further increasing the risks they face. Women and children also account for roughly 75 percent of those displaced in Yemen.<sup>xi</sup> Amongst this group, female headed households are at some of the greatest risk of food insecurity – they have lower monthly incomes and because they have no male presence in the family are increasingly forced to take on non-traditional roles outside the home that expose them to the risk of violence,<sup>xli</sup> risks that have been intensified by the war. In November 2017, the UN reported that incidents of gender-based violence (GBV) increased by over 63 percent since before the conflict.<sup>xlii</sup>

Freedom from violence is essential for women and girls to live full and healthy lives. GBV stops women and girls' immediate needs from being met and prevents them from reaching their potential. This reality is clearly illustrated in Yemen where even women with a male in the family are increasingly cut off from essential services. Staff from Al Hakim, a Yemeni women's organisation, told the IRC "... movement restrictions were part of [women's] reality but it is now exacerbated as men want to protect women from the risks of gender based violence at checkpoints in order to preserve their honour".<sup>xliii</sup>

The desperation created by the crisis is also contributing to rising numbers of child marriages. More than two thirds of girls are married before the age of 18, compared to 50 percent before the crisis began.<sup>xliv</sup> Child marriage is often

a coping mechanism for families because they believe a husband's family can offer better protection or because it can raise dowry payments to cope with conflict-related hardship.<sup>xlv</sup> Yet, the risks of child, early or forced marriage are well established: these women and girls have children earlier and more frequently, and face higher risks of pregnancy-related injuries and death in childbirth.<sup>xlvi</sup>

Despite the serious and potentially life-threatening consequences of GBV, and poor health service access for women, these sectors suffered major funding shortfalls. As funding levels declined in Sept 2019, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) warned "Over 1 million Yemeni women need funds now, or they will lose access to life-saving reproductive health services, putting their lives and those of their babies at risk."<sup>xlvii</sup>



**Above:** Displaced woman Fulla Muqbel Mohammed Ahmed sits with her twin daughters Yusra and Yumna inside the house they rent at a settlement for displaced people on the outskirts of Aden, Yemen on Tuesday, January 8, 2019. *Will Swanson/IRC*

# The Drivers of Food Insecurity

Humanitarian needs in Yemen continue to rise. To understand why, it is critical to understand the drivers of food insecurity in Yemen.

**The conduct of war:** International law requires all conflict parties (state and non-state) to distinguish between civilian objects (including those related to food production such as agricultural land, crops, livestock and irrigation) and military objectives.<sup>xviii</sup> Yet destruction of civilian infrastructure, including that associated with food production and distribution, is one of the most visible effects of Yemen's war.

International reports suggest that airstrikes have struck markets, road infrastructure, and fishing boats (a key employment sector in Yemen).<sup>xix</sup> The latest report of the UN Human Rights Council enacted Group of Eminent Experts (GEE) notes: "Coalition air strikes destroyed farmlands, water facilities, essential port infrastructure and medical facilities. The Houthis planted landmines on farmland and used hospitals for military purposes."<sup>l</sup> Since December 2017, 397 landmine-related civilian casualties have been recorded.<sup>li</sup> De-miners in Yemen report that it may now be the most mined nation since World War II,<sup>lii</sup> with severe long-term implications for food production as well as the safety and security of Yemeni civilians.

For families like Nabihah's, an IRC client from Taiz, the fear of mines in the local area has restricted the amount of space on which they can raise their sheep – and the value of sheep is so low, they are left with only enough money to buy sugar and flour.

In armed conflict, international law further prohibits the use of starvation as a war tactic.<sup>liii</sup> While there is no evidence of intentional siege and starvation tactics, the war in Yemen has made it impossible for millions of people to produce food or earn the money they need to buy what limited food is available to them. It is important to understand, therefore, that the prohibition on starvation as a tactic of war is violated not only when a lack of food or denial of access to it causes death, but also when the population is caused to suffer hunger because of deprivation of food sources.<sup>liv</sup> The potential violations of Yemenis' rights to food are further illuminated by the GEE report which notes: "The Government of Yemen and the de facto authorities have deprived civilians from fundamental rights, notably the right to work, the right to an adequate standard of living, and the right to food and education."<sup>lv</sup>

**Economic collapse and unemployment:** The war in Yemen is estimated to have set the country back 21 years in its development.<sup>lvi</sup> Half a million jobs have been lost. The fishing and agricultural sectors, which employed nearly 70 percent of the workforce, have shrunk by a third.<sup>lvii</sup>

Today an estimated 80 percent of Yemenis live in poverty, a one-third increase since the conflict began<sup>lviii</sup> making Yemenis increasingly dependent on aid and remittances.<sup>lix</sup>

Ebtihal Ghanem, who now works for IRC, gave his experience of Yemen's economic collapse:

**"As a result of the displacement, my family spent all its savings to meet its basic needs and to rent a house to settle in... After the conflict in Aden, we found ourselves swamped in debt. There [were] no work opportunities and no source of income. We returned back home, we tried to begin from scratch, but it became more and more difficult for my family to fix the house and secure a source of income to pay the debt off, which increased daily due to the inflation rate."**

Historically, the civil service was a major economic driver and a source of employment for over 1.2 million people and their 7 million dependents<sup>lx</sup> - amounting to approximately 28 percent of the country's population. Since 2015 the collapse of state finances has seen these civil servants unpaid for years. Non-payment of salaries on this scale affects the entire country, with the reduction in income causing a reduction in spending, and ultimately a stagnation of the economy. Salary and pension payments slowly resumed in early 2017 – albeit erratically. Ongoing efforts by the Yemeni government to pay a subset of government salaries have yet to achieve success and continue to be largely dependent on foreign transfers with the scope for consistent future payments unclear.

Such trends are further compounded by the collapse of Yemen's economy and the absence of foreign exchange, in large part due to the reduction in oil exports.<sup>lxi lxii</sup> The implications can be seen in the skyrocketing prices of basic goods and the rapid devaluation of the Yemeni Rial (which is currently fluctuating between 540 – 575 Rial to the dollar<sup>lxiii</sup> – roughly double the rate when conflict escalated five years ago), serving to further push the price of food and essential goods beyond the reach of ordinary citizens. Mariam, a 20-year-old mother who fled airstrikes in Hodeida and settled in Aden, told the IRC that "prices increased [so much] that we cannot afford a can of milk for our baby".



Aisha Hassan Abdulaah Al-Waee, 33, screens a displaced child for malnutrition at a makeshift clinic on the outskirts of Aden. *Will Swanson/IRC*

**Restrictions on imports:** Yemen relies on imports for more than 80 percent of its food. Yet, all shipments of food, fuel and other imported items into Yemen are subject to UN or SELC approvals, secondary inspections and arbitrary berthing delays. The net effect of these policies is to reduce the willingness of international shipping companies to transport to Yemen, and slowing down all imports, including humanitarian supplies. While the speed of humanitarian imports into Aden Port has much improved in the second half of this year, previously it could take the IRC up to six months to clear shipments of supplies for health and nutrition programmes, undermining the delivery of essential services to Yemeni civilians.

Since the war began, food and fuel imports have declined. There has been progress in 2019, with fuel imports rising from the first to second quarter of the year.<sup>lxiv</sup> In June 2019, fuel imports met 51 percent of national requirements and food imports met 132 percent,<sup>lxv</sup> with over 350 million mega-tonnes of food imported.<sup>lxvi</sup> But these levels remain unpredictable, as represented by fuel import figures from September, which dropped 40 percent as compared to August to the lowest monthly total since April 2019.<sup>lxvii</sup> Prior to the October UN Security Council briefing on Yemen the IRG cleared eight ships carrying fuel, bringing October import levels up but still below recent average levels.<sup>lxviii</sup>

In addition, the combination of the Internationally Recognised Government's (IRG) efforts to control imports, the policies of the Ansar Allah movement and price manipulation have seen fuel prices in Yemen rise dramatically at the end of 2019. Today, prices are on average 140 percent above pre-crisis levels.<sup>lxix</sup> In Yemen, fuel is a life line. It is essential to transport food to markets, deliver food aid, and maintain public services including pumped water for drinking and irrigation. In October when fuel prices peaked, the number of people reporting to health facilities dropped by up to 50 percent due to increased travel costs and a reduction in the availability of mobile health teams.<sup>lxx</sup> For families of children affected by malnutrition – especially those in rural areas who cannot reach treatment facilities and rely on mobile units – such disruptions can be a matter of life or death. For the IRC, fuel price rises are most acutely felt in Hodeidah and Sana'a in northern Yemen. It has meant the cost of transporting drugs and medical equipment has risen 25 percent, quotes for supplies must be renegotiated delaying delivery of essential fuel to our frontline health facilities, and programme activities must sometimes be reduced to cover the increased costs.

**Impediments to humanitarian programming:** The lifesaving work of humanitarian actors across Yemen has been continually undermined by the deliberate actions of warring parties. The Humanitarian Response Plan reports that 3 million people are considered “hard to reach” due to bureaucratic impediments on programming.<sup>lxxi</sup> However, the reality is that many of those in need are not hard to reach, they are made hard to reach. Yemenis are not simply starving – they are being starved, by a byzantine set of conditions

placed on humanitarian operations in the north and south of the country. For instance, it can take months simply to secure the relevant paperwork (called sub-agreements) required to deliver a humanitarian intervention or to transport lifesaving items, including medication. And in the meantime, Yemenis wait.

In August 2019, The Yemen Humanitarian Fund had 39 projects (targeting 2.5 million people) awaiting clearance by either Ansar Allah-affiliated authorities or Government of Yemen, with projects stalled for three months on average.<sup>lxxii</sup>

Access inside Yemen is further restricted by a complex process of travel permits and insecurity. The GEE notes “All parties to the conflict have violated their obligation to allow and facilitate rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief for civilians by imposing restrictions on movement of humanitarian personnel and goods into and within Yemen.” One critical example of these violations are the Red Sea Mills near Hodeidah. Located close to the front lines, the mills had been inaccessible due to insecurity and political infighting since September 2018. Recent negotiations finally secured humanitarian access to enough grain to feed 3.7 million people for one month – a victory for the humanitarian operation and diplomacy, but not enough to last.

The SELC closure, since August 2016, of Sana'a airport further restricts movement of humanitarian supplies and leaves Aden airport (which is inaccessible to those in the north) as the only reliable international flight route into and out of the country – including for medical evacuations.

Recent announcements that Sana'a airport will be re-opened for evacuation of medical patients in need of life-saving assistance<sup>lxxiii</sup> are welcome, however, ultimately it is critical that all humanitarian and commercial flights are allowed.



**Above:** Aisha Hassan Abdulaah Al-Waee, 33, screens a displaced child for malnutrition at a makeshift clinic in an area populated by people displaced by conflict on the outskirts of Aden, Yemen. *Will Swanson/IRC*

# Diplomacy Left Lacking

This report has demonstrated that the conflict and stalled peace process in Yemen have created conditions that continue to drive humanitarian needs. Aid has saved lives, and in 2019 averted the worst outcome of the food security crisis. The Stockholm Agreement prevented further massive humanitarian suffering in the city of Hodeidah and allowed at least 10,000 of the city's displaced population to return home, but the agreement remains a localised effort. It is now incumbent on the warring parties and their international partners to ensure that signs of progress form a solid base on which to build Yemen's peace. Yet thus far, despite the strong work of the UN Special Envoy to Yemen, Martin Griffiths, and his team, the international resolve needed to end the fighting and impunity for violations of international law in Yemen has been insufficient.

Since Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt's participation at the Stockholm talks<sup>lxxiv</sup> and his visit to Aden,<sup>lxxv</sup> senior UK engagement on the crisis has been absent: distracted by Brexit precisely at a time when the Government could be demonstrating its foreign policy influence outside the European Union. In the US, President Trump's decision to veto a bipartisan resolution that would have ended US military support for the war demonstrated yet again that the administration remains unwilling to pressure the Saudis or Emiratis in public or hold them to account for their international law violations – pressure that is necessary to catalyse a move to the negotiating table. The UN Security Council, in which the UK is the lead member state on Yemen, has similarly failed to establish a framework for peace. Security Council Resolution 2216 acts more as an impediment to peace than a facilitator, by legitimising the SELC's engagement in the war and laying down unrealistic preconditions for negotiations.

This report has also recognised that the conduct of the war has contributed to human suffering. The GEE reports “reasonable grounds” to believe that the SELC and Ansar Allah may be responsible for violations of international humanitarian law in relation to air and artillery strikes.<sup>lxxvi</sup> Yet accountability for these potential crimes, or in fact condemnation of them, has been inadequate.

To date, no member state has been willing to invite the GEE to present its findings to the UN Security Council. Furthermore, the international response to violations has lacked the balance needed to encourage meaningful dialogue. For example, in September 2018 following the death of 400 civilians in one month including 40 children on a school bus, the UK expressed “deep concern” over the SELC mass casualty incidents, but officially condemned Ansar Allah attacks on Saudi Arabian infrastructure, specifically highlighting the lack of regard shown for civilian life.<sup>lxxvii</sup> The UN Security Council has followed a similar line, rightly condemning Ansar Allah attacks on Saudi Arabia,

but only calling in general terms on parties to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law, failing to single out the violations by the SELC.<sup>3</sup> Similar trends are evident in the positioning of the US Government.

Finally, the confidence shown by the International community in the Saudi *Joint Incident Assessment Team* (JIAT) as the primary mechanism for investigation of mass casualty incidents contrasts starkly with the findings of the GEE and Human Rights Watch, who highlight the lack of independence, impartiality, transparency, and detail in JIAT investigations,<sup>lxxviii, lxxix</sup> undermining the scope for real accountability.



**Above:** Adeeyah Abdo Alwan, 39, with here daughter Salaman outside her temporary home in the suburb of Enma in Aden, Yemen. *Will Swanson/IRC*

<sup>3</sup> The March 2018 Presidential Statement from the UNSC provides one such example: [http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s\\_prst\\_2018\\_5.pdf](http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_prst_2018_5.pdf)

# Recommendations



**Above:** Noor Hussien Belal, 20, from Shabwa in Yemen with her family in their home in Al Dhale'e, Al Dhale'e Governorate, Yemen. *Will Swanson/IRC*

To end the suffering of innocent Yemeni civilians the warring parties and the international community should adopt actions to address the political, economic and humanitarian dimensions of this crisis.

**International supporters of the warring parties, including the US, UK and France should use all diplomatic tools to incentivise and/or pressure the parties to focus their diplomatic efforts on an immediate nationwide ceasefire and a return to inclusive, meaningful peace talks.**

Inclusive peace talks with all of the war's primary military and political actors should be restarted and consistently supported through robust public and private diplomacy, applying all means of influence, including suspension of arms sales as well as steps that may incur reputational costs, such as ensuring Yemen is discussed in planning for the Saudi hosted G20 meeting in 2020. It was intensive, international diplomacy – not least public pressure and strong Congressional interest in the US and in the UK Parliament – that catalysed recent political developments. And sustained diplomacy is necessary to build on the fragile momentum in Yemen. To ensure that talks are truly inclusive, the UN Special Envoy to Yemen, Martin Griffiths, must also ensure that women's organisations are at the peace talks and that their views are meaningfully represented and considered.

**Permanent and elected members of the UN Security Council, particularly the UK as the UNSC "penholder" for Yemen, should reinforce the efforts of the UN Special Envoy and use all opportunities to call for peace.**

When appropriate the UK should take the lead in driving forward the adoption of a new UN Security Council resolution on Yemen that reflects the current realities on the ground, resolves the weaknesses of resolution 2216 and establishes mutual accountabilities for all warring parties to deliver and maintain peace. In the meantime, Council members should use all opportunities, including Council briefings, to call for a nationwide ceasefire and for the removal of impediments to humanitarian assistance. Finally, the Council should take steps to ensure warring parties comply with all existing relevant resolutions – including UNSCR 2417 which was unanimously passed in 2018 and condemns the starving of civilians as a method of warfare as well as the unlawful denial of humanitarian access to civilian populations.<sup>boxx</sup>

## **Recommendations (continued):**

**International donors should maintain pressure on the Ansar Allah authorities and the Internationally Recognised Government to lift all humanitarian access restrictions and ensure all air and seaports are open and fully functional.**

Donor pressure has proved successful in addressing some impediments to assistance delivery in north and south Yemen with lifesaving implications. Continued engagement is vital to ensure that all seaports and Sana'a airport are opened and fully operational for humanitarian and commercial traffic and to reduce bureaucratic impediments to the delivery of humanitarian assistance through the formalisation of (and adherence to) clear standardised procedures in line with humanitarian principles.

**In 2020 and moving forward, international donors including those from the Gulf, should maintain funding levels, deliver on their funding commitments in a timely manner, and continue to channel their contributions through the UN appeal.**

All donors should fulfil pledges made to the Yemen Humanitarian Response early in the year as non-earmarked grants to allow for strategic response planning, and channel their funding through the needs based UN-led Humanitarian Response Plan. In light of donor funding trends, international partners should be prepared to expand financing should pledges from Gulf donors decrease. Humanitarian donors, the UN, and NGOs, should also increase the priority given to women and girls' needs. For example the GBV sub-cluster and UNFPA's Yemen Humanitarian Response Plans should be fully funded. In the lead up to the Nutrition for Growth 2020 Summit, donors should make bold financial commitments to expand access to acute malnutrition treatment in Yemen.

**The Internationally Recognised Government, Ansar Allah and international donors, should take steps to address Yemen's economic collapse and support Yemen's future recovery.**

The IRG should commit to the payment of salaries of all civil servants responsible for the delivery of essential services. Ansar Allah should commit to contributing revenue to support such payments. International donors and International Finance Institutions should also provide technical support to Yemen's banking sector and provide regular injections of foreign exchange at a scale that will keep exchange rates stable, help return food and other commodity prices to more affordable levels and kickstart the country's flagging economy. Such efforts should be combined with intensive international dialogue to begin to frame a financing and capacity support strategy for the reconstruction of Yemen and revival of state institutions, to deliver a much-needed peace dividend.

**All warring parties, and the international community, should make a clear commitment to the protection of international law, and pursuing accountability for violations of it.**

All warring parties should make a public declaration to respect international humanitarian law and commit to independent investigation into breaches of it, including full, published investigations of attacks that kill civilians or destroy civilian infrastructure. The GEE remains the only accountability mechanism for Yemen. UN member states should: explore opportunities to expand the mandate for the GEE, including a focus on accountability, evidence preservation, public reporting, and expertise on gender and children; pressure Saudi Arabia to grant the GEE access to Yemen; and invite the GEE members to present the findings of their latest report during a formal session of the UN Security Council.



Yemeni children displaced by conflict play in a school they live in at the village of El Faf, Adhale Governorate. *Will Swanson/IRC*

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