

Yemen: A Man Made Human Catastrophe

Severe Acute Malnutrition Threatens the Lives of a 500,000 Children

Prepared by Paul Tippell for London and South East Region United Nations Association, 16 March 2018

Summary

The U.N. humanitarian chief, Mark Lowcock has warned that Yemen will face "the largest famine the world has seen for many decades, with millions of victims." In a recent House of Commons debate Andrew Mitchell MP said "There is deep concern that an almighty catastrophe of biblical proportions is unfolding in Yemen before our eyes, and a considerable fear that Britain is dangerously complicit in it."

This note presents key aspects of the humanitarian crisis and proposals for the UK to play a leading role in seeking a ceasefire and peace process. Andrew Mitchell MP is the only European politician that has been to both north and south Yemen, Sana'a and up to Sa'dah in the Houthi area, and in the Government area and also to Saudi Arabia in the last three and a half years.¹ The paper presents his proposals for initiating a peace process.

The Humanitarian Crisis

With Yemen's health system near collapse, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) warned on 12 Dec 17 that nearly 2.2 million children are acutely malnourished and require urgent care, while at least 462,000 are suffering from Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) – a near 200 per cent increase since 2014.

More than 20 million people, including 11 million children, are in need of urgent humanitarian assistance. Some 17 million people do not know where their next meal is coming from. The 1 million cholera cases are the worst the world has ever seen. November saw the steepest rise in cases since the outbreak started, a situation aggravated by the Saudi fuel blockade which has shut down water and sanitation services for millions.² Children are losing their lives all the time because they are malnourished and don't have the ability to fight off even a cold.

As recently as the 26 November 2017, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has warned that more than 11 million Yemeni children – almost every single Yemeni boy and girl – are in acute need of humanitarian assistance. UNICEF estimated that every 10 minutes a child in Yemen is dying from preventable diseases, noting that the outbreak of acute watery diarrhoea and cholera this year is not a surprise, because the water and sanitation system throughout the country is almost entirely devastated and the health system is on its knees.

On the 30th December 2017, UN Aid Agencies reported that 75 per cent of Yemen's population is in need of humanitarian assistance, including 11.3 million children who cannot survive without it. At least 60 per cent of Yemenis are now food insecure and 16 million people do not have access to safe water and proper sanitation. Less than half of Yemen's health facilities are fully functional and medical staff has gone months without being paid their salaries.

¹ <http://cambridgeglobalist.org/?p=1141>

² BBC Rapid rise in the number of cholera cases which now stand at 1 million <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-42440805>

Yemen imports up to 90 per cent of its daily needs. Since the war started, and the Saudis imposed a blockade, commercial imports, including food and fuel, have been cut to 20-30% of pre-war levels.³

A Peace Process

It is reported that Oman has agreed to host peace talks and the Houthis have agreed to join. "We're open for negotiations with all parties to the conflict," said Muhammad Al-Bukhaithi, deputy head of the department of external relations of the Houthis.⁴

Andrew Mitchell MP is the only European politician that has been to both north and south Yemen, Sana'a and up to Sa'dah in the Houthi area, and in the Government area and also to Saudi Arabia in the last three and a half years.⁵

Andrew Mitchell says we need an immediate ceasefire in Yemen. Britain holds the 'pen' on Yemen at the United Nations Security Council which means that the UK is in a unique position to set the agenda and propose new resolutions. He says that as 'pen' holder at the UN Security Council we have a responsibility to put forward a new resolution aimed at initiating peace talks and bringing all parties to the conflict to the negotiating table.

Andrew Mitchell says we desperately need a resolution to replace 2216, agreed to 2015, which called for the Houthis to withdraw and give up their weapons. It did not seek to engage all parties to the conflict in peace negotiations, nor did it take account of the political situation and military reality on the ground in Yemen. 2216 does take account of the political situation and military reality on the ground in Yemen; the war is unwinnable by either side and front lines have hardly moved. Mitchell says that 2216 is unrealistic and that the people of Yemen desperately need a ceasefire and for the UN to initiate a peace process. He says "We are supporting President Hadi, who has virtually no support in Yemen and is the only President I have ever come across who has to make an official visit to his own country."⁶

The Houthi president and their foreign minister have told Andrew Mitchell that they will accept Britain chairing and mediating any Yemen-Saudi negotiations within a UN structure. Secondly, if there is a ceasefire then the Houthis will undertake to withdraw their forces and weapons from the Saudi border areas and accept a 20-kilometre demilitarised zone within Yemen.^{7,8}

"In Britain, our government has made the strategic decision that our commercial and security relationship with Saudi Arabia is the most important thing, but by passively supporting, or passively acquiescing in what the Saudis are doing, we are making ourselves both less safe, because tens of thousands of young Yemenis are being radicalised, and also damaging our commercial relationship, because it won't be long before the pressure for an arms embargo will be unavoidable. So it is a disaster on every single front. The way in which these conflicts finish, as is always shown in history, is by negotiations. The requirement is to have a negotiation that has three rings to it: the negotiation between the Saudis and the Houthis; the negotiations with all the militias and many forces which you referred to; and the bottom up negotiation with all the different parts of civil society. The aim currently of everybody should be to move from fighting into what will be a very long, very messy, very difficult negotiation about the future of Yemen." says Andrew Mitchell⁹

Andrew Mitchell says that the UK urgently needs to promote a neutral and more even handed and balanced approach at the UN Security council and push for an urgent new resolution to replace 2216 calling

³ <https://tradingeconomics.com/yemen/imports>

⁴ <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20180213-oman-to-host-yemen-peace-talks-houthis-agree-to-join/>

⁵ <http://cambridgeglobalist.org/?p=1141>

⁶ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/01/16/exclusive-britains-confused-yemen-policy-increasing-risk-uk/>

⁷ <http://www.middleeasteye.net/columns/war-yemen-why-uk-should-chair-peace-talks-1435742886>

⁸ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/01/16/exclusive-britains-confused-yemen-policy-increasing-risk-uk/>

⁹ <http://cambridgeglobalist.org/?p=1141>

on all sides to enter into ceasefire and peace negotiations. He is calling for the Government to urge the Saudis, and all sides to the conflict to **commit to talks without any pre-conditions**.

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