

[Aid to Yemen prevented starvation but more is needed, says UN humanitarian chief](#)

Tue, 2022-03-15 23:43

NEW YORK: Nearly \$14 billion of international aid donated to Yemen in the past seven years has made an “enormous difference” to the people of the country, according to the UN’s humanitarian chief, Martin Griffiths.

It has helped to prevent mass starvation and stabilized morbidity and mortality rates in the war-ravaged country, he said.

However, he told the Security Council on Tuesday that 75 percent of that “exceptional, extraordinary and generous” sum came from only six donors: the US, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, the UK, Germany and the EU. He thanked all donors and stressed the importance of taking stock of the contributions and the humanitarian benefits in Yemen they have helped to achieve.

“First and foremost ... there has been no mass starvation in Yemen, as we were so often reminded might be coming,” Griffiths said as he called for continued efforts to prevent starvation and famine amid rising food insecurity.

“The country has started down that dark road several times, including early last year, only to be pulled back by timely, well-funded humanitarian action. That is an important success.”

He also stated that the aid effort has helped keep morbidity and mortality rates steady during the conflict.

“In other words, without the level of the response, many more people in Yemen would have fallen sick and many, died,” he said. “That is another critical result. These and other achievements are the result of collective action, not the action of one.”

He was speaking during a meeting of the Security Council to discuss the situation in Yemen ahead of a high-level pledging event for the country on Wednesday that will be co-hosted by Sweden and Switzerland. Aid agencies are seeking almost \$4.3 billion of funding so that they can continue to help more than 17 million Yemenis across the country.

“Tomorrow’s event is not just about the money, though that is hugely important,” said Griffiths. “It is also an opportunity for the international community to show we are not giving up on Yemen, even after all these years and with new crises emerging – and that is a very important message.”

He said that the situation in Yemen continues to represent a “chronic emergency,” as hunger, disease and “other miseries” rise faster than aid agencies are able to ease them.

"23.4 million people now need some form of assistance," Griffiths said. "That is three of every four and that is the astonishing figure which is so deeply troubling.

"Among them, 19 million will go hungry and that is an increase of almost 20 per cent since last year. And we believe – and I use these words carefully – that more than 160,000 of these people will face famine-like conditions."

Despite many international calls for a ceasefire and peace talks to resolve the conflict in Yemen, hostilities persist along nearly 50 front lines, Griffiths said, includes Marib, where a Houthi offensive has continued for two years.

"Last year, hostilities killed or injured more than 2,500 civilians and forced nearly 300,000 people to flee their homes," he said, adding that 4.3 million people have been displaced in Yemen since 2015.

Yemen imports a third of its wheat supply from Ukraine. The war raging in the latter country after the Russian invasion last month might restrict imports and push up the cost of food, which has already almost doubled in Yemen in the past year, Griffiths said. Fuel shortages are also contributing to rising food prices, he added.

Hans Grundberg, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres's special envoy for Yemen, told the Security Council that the people of the country have been denied the chance to live in peace for too many years and a concerted joint effort by the international community is needed to break "this never-ending cycle of violence and lay the foundation for a sustainable peace."

Briefing council members on the latest developments in the security situation, Grundberg said that hostilities continue unabated on many fronts. Among other examples, he highlighted the continuing Houthi offensive in Marib which "has caused enormous harm to civilians" for two years.

"The violence also continues to spill into the region," he said. "On Feb. 21, shrapnel from a drone intercepted over Jazan city's King Abdullah Airport wounded 16 civilians."

The fact remains that there can be no sustainable military solution to the conflict, the envoy said, and "as always, we see civilians paying an unacceptable price for choices they have no influence over."

UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund, reported this month that at least 47 children were killed or maimed in Yemen during the first two months of this year alone. More than 10,200 children have been confirmed killed or injured in the past seven years, but the actual number is probably much higher, the organization said.

Grundberg also warned that the economic crisis continues to escalate and is likely to get worse. The value of the Yemeni currency has fallen by 20 percent against the dollar in Aden and the surrounding governorates, raising concerns of another sharp decline in the exchange rate, rising prices and a deepening of divisions in the national economy. He called for tangible

measures to help stabilize the currency.

Fuel shortages are particularly acute in Houthi-controlled areas, Grundberg said. These shortages, in combination with currency depreciation, will affect civilians even more as households prepare for Ramadan. Yemenis also continue to live with severe restrictions on freedom of movement, he added.

“The closure of Sanaa airport prevents many Yemenis in the north from traveling abroad,” he said. “Ongoing fighting, the proliferation of checkpoints and the closure of access points, especially in Taiz, impede the movement of Yemenis within the country.”

Grundberg said that he aims to explore with various factions the options for immediate deescalation measures that could reduce violence, ease the fuel crisis and improve freedom of movement.

“With Ramadan approaching, I hope the parties will engage swiftly and constructively with my proposals to bring the people of Yemen some much needed hope and relief,” he added.

“In this regard I am looking forward to the opportunity to engage with the leadership of Ansar Allah (the official name for the Houthi movement) in Sanaa on this issue and on how we can move the political process forward.”



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GCC offers to host peace talks between Yemeni factions, including Houthis, in Riyadh
Fighting rages outside Yemen's Marib as UN envoy meets leaders

[Iraq MPs to vote for president on March 26](#)

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Tue, 2022-03-15 21:42

BAGHDAD: The Iraqi parliament on Tuesday scheduled a March 26 session for deputies to hold a delayed vote on the country's president.

Parliament also released a final list of 40 candidates for the post, a largely ceremonial role reserved for the Kurds.

Among the frontrunners are Barham Saleh, the incumbent and member of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, and Rebar Ahmed of the Kurdistan Democratic Party, the PUK's rival.

Lack of a quorum and legal issues have held up the contest, adding to war-scarred Iraq's political uncertainty because the president has to name a prime minister backed by the largest bloc in parliament.

On February 13, the supreme court ruled out a bid by veteran politician Hoshyar Zebari backed by the KDP to run, after a complaint filed against him over years-old corruption charges.

Iraqi politics were thrown further into turmoil following the October 2021 general elections, which were marred by a record-low turnout, post-election threats and violence, and a delay of several months until final results were confirmed.

Intense negotiations among political groups have since failed to form a majority parliamentary coalition to appoint a new prime minister to succeed Mustafa Al-Kadhemi.

The largest political bloc led by firebrand Shiite cleric Moqtada Sadr, had backed Zebari for the presidency.

Tensions rose Sunday with Iranian missile strikes on Irbil, capital of an autonomous Kurdish region in northern Iraq.

Tehran said the attack targeted Israeli sites, but Kurdish authorities denied any such presence.



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[Ex-PM Siniora won't run in Lebanese elections](#)

Tue, 2022-03-15 20:10

BEIRUT: With the candidacy deadline for the Lebanese parliamentary elections ending on Tuesday at midnight, over 875 applications had been submitted as of Tuesday afternoon.

Lebanese Interior Minister Bassam Mawlawi said that work is underway "to secure IDs and personal status extracts, and all other voter needs.

"We are working to secure electricity during the voting process and until the sorting of ballots ends."

The elections are scheduled to be held on May 15 amid a severe economic collapse that Lebanon has been enduring for two years and the possibility of the country slipping into further deterioration in the coming months.

According to Mawlawi, 7,000 polling stations will be allocated throughout Lebanon.

Meanwhile, Fouad Siniora has become the latest former premier to announce that he will not be running in the elections.

In January, former premier Saad Hariri announced his withdrawal from political life, expressing his conviction that "there is no room for any positive opportunity for Lebanon in light of the Iranian influence, international confusion, national division, rise of sectarian tensions, and the deterioration of the state."

Hariri had also instructed members of the Future Movement, which he heads, to not contest the elections under the movement's name, but he did not call on his supporters to boycott them.

Former premier Tammam Salam and the current Prime Minister Najib Mikati also announced that they will not stand along with Lebanon's former ambassador to the UN, Nawaf Salam, who is currently a permanent member of the International Court of Justice in The Hague.

Siniora told a press conference: "My decision not to run for the elections does not mean that I will be boycotting; on the contrary, I hope my position makes room for the new generation. I will be fully invested in the elections in all their aspects, without running for office."

He urged citizens to turn out to vote "so as not to allow opportunists to gain ground amid calls not to participate in this national duty."

According to sources close to Siniora, he is seeking "to prevent Hezbollah from penetrating the Sunni environment, through Sunni figures close to the axis of resistance led by Hezbollah, the strategic ally of Iran."

Siniora said: "I call on our people in Beirut, Sidon, the north, the Bekaa Valley, Mount Lebanon, and all over Lebanon to participate in these elections."

"The Lebanese people's uprising showed us the need to renew political blood, support promising faces, and facilitate the way for experts who had not been given the chance to serve the nation."

Dar Al-Fatwa, Lebanon's highest Sunni religious authority, said it would not interfere with the elections, adding that it will neither support a candidate nor a list.

"Our role is limited to advising people to choose the best candidate for the

state-building project and strengthening the unity of the Islamic ranks based on national foundations,” Dar Al-Fatwa said.

With Hariri’s withdrawal from political life, Siniora has been trying to fill the void in the Sunni community. However, the Future Movement is not pleased with his actions and is even accusing him of treason.

Meanwhile, Progressive Socialist Party leader Walid Jumblatt tweeted on Tuesday: “In this suffocating social and economic crisis that Lebanon is experiencing, we are paying for the Arab countries abandoning us. We are reaping the fruits of the petty and absurd statements made by senior leaders against the Gulf,” in reference to briefings from Hezbollah leaders about the Gulf states in recent months.



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Lebanon political factions gear up for May elections
Lebanon PM Mikati says he will not run in May parliamentary election

[GCC offers to host peace talks between Yemeni factions, including Houthis, in Riyadh](#)

Tue, 2022-03-15 19:05

AL-MUKALLA: The Gulf Cooperation Council is sponsoring unprecedented and comprehensive peace talks between warring factions in Yemen, including the Iran-backed Houthis, that could begin in Riyadh before the end of this month.

“The Gulf Cooperation Council will invite all Yemeni components, both supporters and oppositions, and the putschist Houthis would have some seats in the talks,” a senior government official told Arab News. The talks might start on March 27 and would continue for at least one week, they added.

Former Yemeni government ministers and outspoken politicians such as Ahmed Al-Maysari, Saleh Al-Jabwani and Abdul Aziz Al-Jubari would be invited. “Almost no one will be excluded,” the official said.

Meanwhile, a car bomb attack on Tuesday on a convoy in which a Yemeni southern military commander was traveling in Abyan province killed two soldiers and seriously injured two more, according to a Reuters report that quoted a military official.

Brig. Gen. Abdul Latif Al-Sayed survived the assassination attempt, said Mohammed Al-Naqib, spokesman for the Southern Armed Forces. Two assailants were also killed, he added.

Al-Sayed is the commander in Abyan of the Security Belt, the military forces of the separatist Southern Transitional Council. In October last year, the governor of Aden, who is a member of the STC, survived a car bomb attack in the port city that killed six people.

The announcement of the proposed GCC-sponsored peace talks came the day after Yemeni President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi met Nayef Falah Al-Hajraf, the council’s secretary general, in Riyadh. SABA, the official Yemeni news agency, reported that the two men discussed GCC support for moves to end the war in Yemen and the Houthi coup, based on peace talks, continuing efforts to fully implement the Riyadh Agreement and other issues.

They also reportedly discussed the GCC’s financial support for the devalued Yemeni riyal, to address deteriorating services and to alleviate the suffering of the Yemeni people.

Yemeni officials said the peace talks are contingent on the Houthis accepting the invitation. They added that the rebels might intensify their military operations across the country, and in particular outside the besieged central

city of Marib, in an attempt to improve their negotiating position if they agree to participate.

“They will carry out major military operations in Marib and on other fronts to thwart any agreement (and force acceptance of) their onerous conditions that they have repeatedly floated during previous talks,” the official said.

The Houthis have rejected previous peace proposals, including the Saudi initiative, and insist that the Coalition to Restore Legitimacy in Yemen must first halt its airstrikes and lift alleged restrictions on Sanaa airport and Hodeidah seaport.

Najeeb Ghallab, undersecretary at Yemen’s Information Ministry, told Arab News that the internationally recognized government of Yemen would strongly support any Arab initiative to end the war, but warned that Houthi resistance could sabotage the proposed peace talks.

“We are most supportive of any Arab role to bring Yemenis together under the umbrella of the Gulf Cooperation Council,” he said.

However, he added that powerful factions inside the Houthi movement, which benefit from the war, and Iran, which uses the rebels as its stooge, would reject any calls for peace.

“The Houthis believe that gathering Yemenis ... under one umbrella will weaken their role,” said Ghallab.



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Coalition intercepts drones launched by Houthis toward Saudi Arabia
Houthis condemned for storing weapons in housing complex as blasts kill residents

Abu Dhabi crown prince to Japanese PM: UAE keen to maintain energy security, global markets stability

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Tue, 2022-03-15 13:05

DUBAI: Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince spoke with Japan's prime minister about the Ukraine crisis and assured him that the United Arab Emirates is keen to maintain energy security and keep global markets stable, Emirates News Agency reported on Tuesday.

Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan also told Prime Minister Fumio Kishida that his country is keen on boosting relations with Japan in the energy field.

Earlier on Tuesday, Kishida said he had agreed with the crown prince to work together to help stabilize the international crude oil market as the Ukraine war has disrupted the market, bolstering the importance of Gulf crude exporters for energy importers like Japan.



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