

'Catastrophic' humanitarian blockade in Yemen putting millions at risk, UN warns

7 November 2017 – A blockade on basic supplies to war-ravaged Yemen is threatening millions of people and should be lifted immediately, the United Nations said on Tuesday.

The call follows a reported decision on Saturday by Saudi Arabia, which is leading the coalition fighting Houthi separatists in the country, to close air and sea ports in Yemen.

The three-year conflict has claimed the lives of well over 5,000 civilians and contributed to one of the world's biggest humanitarian disasters, according to the United Nations.

Yemen imports up to 90 per cent of its daily needs and seven million people are being kept alive by humanitarian aid.

"Humanitarian operations are being blocked as a result of the closure ordered by the Saudi-led coalition, Jens Laerke, a spokesperson for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs ([OCHA](#)) told reporters at the regular press briefing in Geneva.

He said the UN has received reports that in some areas, the blockade is now impacting the daily life of Yemenis, with fuel prices jumping up to 60 per cent overnight and cooking gas jumping up to 100 per cent. "Long lines of cars are queuing at gas stations," he added.

Mr. Laerke said humanitarian flights to and from Yemen were put on hold, and the coalition had asked UN personnel to tell all ships arriving at the sea ports of Hodeida and Saleef "to leave."

He told reporters that the current situation in Yemen is "catastrophic." Some seven million people are on the brink of famine and were only being kept alive thanks to humanitarian operations.

"That lifeline has to be kept open and it is absolutely essential that the operation of the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) be allowed to continue unhindered," he stressed.

Echoing these concerns, the Office of the UN high Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)) also expressed alarm at a series of attacks on civilians in recent days that have killed dozens of people, including several children.

On 1 November, OHCHR said, two airstrikes Saudi-led coalition hit a market in Saada governorate, killing 31 traders and guests at a hotel.

The following day in Taiz, a Houthi shelling left five children dead,

according to OHCHR Spokesperson Rupert Colville.

He added that survivors said the children were playing in the street when a rocket from a Houthi-controlled area fell on them.

Mr. Colville added that UN human rights chief Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein will soon be appointing an expert panel mandated by the Human Rights Council to investigate alleged violations and abuses of international human rights and international law committed by all parties to the conflict.

If possible, the Group of Eminent Experts will identify those responsible.