

Yemen: amid major roadblocks, an 'unprecedented' response to an unprecedented tragedy

Despite continuing challenges in Yemen, the United Nations and partners have provided a robust humanitarian response to the world's largest humanitarian crisis, thanks to major donor support. However, as the situation continues to worsen for civilians across the country, aid agencies [warned on Monday](#) that international aid efforts must be sustained to avoid a major catastrophe and called for a political end to the conflict.

During a high-level event at UN Headquarters in New York, chaired by UN humanitarian chief Mark Lowcock, officials of the humanitarian and donor communities exchanged views on the scale of the need, what has been accomplished so far, and the roadblocks which remain across Yemen.

A tragedy of unprecedented proportions

The event started with the UN Humanitarian Coordinator [Lise Grande](#) stating that "there is no other place in the world where people are suffering so greatly".

The unprecedented scope and depth of the crisis in Yemen, now in its fourth year, has been repeatedly reported: three-quarters of the population require some form of basic assistance to survive; over 2 million internally displaced; 16 million in need of medical help. The figures are near-impossible to grasp.

The Humanitarian Coordinator painted a concrete picture: "One child is dying every 10 minutes because of the conflict... 70 per cent of girls are being married before 18 as a coping strategy... 8.3 million people have absolutely no idea when they wake up in the morning where their meal will come from... one in four Yemenis are malnourished..."

She also explained that the country's currency, the Yemeni Rial, has [depreciated by 300 per cent](#) compared to pre-crisis rates. "If the depreciation continues, we believe 12 million people could be at risk of starvation", she stressed.

Conflict in Yemen – already one of the poorest countries in the world before the crisis – escalated in March 2015, when an international coalition led by Saudi Arabia intervened militarily at the request of the Yemeni presidency. Airstrikes and ground-fighting have become a daily occurrence for millions of civilians. "It is officially estimated that 16,000 people have been killed," said Ms. Grande. "The real numbers are probably a lot higher," she added.

Hundreds of thousands of families no longer have a regular source of income –

including teachers, health workers, water and sanitation workers and other public servants. They have not been paid a regular salary in two years.

The Humanitarian Coordinator noted that the situation is particularly desperate in Hudaydah, an opposition-held governorate in western Yemen, where “vulnerability levels” are the worst and where, in the past three months alone, half a million people have been forced to flee their homes.

The world’s largest humanitarian response

Lise Grande stressed that “humanitarians have been and will continue to do everything they can do” to address these devastating levels of need.

To date, the humanitarian response, called “very efficient” by Mr. Lowcock, has achieved a lot. This led several of the high-level representatives attending the event, including the Yemeni Minister of Foreign Affairs and various top donors, to congratulate the humanitarian community.

According to Ms. Grande, the more than 150 relief organisations in Yemen are reaching “more people in absolute terms and a higher percentage of the population than in any other humanitarian response” in the world.

To name only some of the achievements listed by the Humanitarian Coordinator, every month, 8 million Yemenis receive food assistance; 1.7 children and pregnant or lactating women are receiving nutritional support; millions are receiving emergency cash transfers; over 1 million people are receiving protection services; and a third cholera outbreak was avoided with medical teams responding within 24 hours, instead of one week as was the case in 2017.

The Director-General of the [World Health Organization](#), Dr. Tedros Ghebreyesus, noted that 11 million people have been reached with vital health services, including vaccinations against cholera, diphtheria and polio. In addition, 2,000 disease surveillance sites have been established with trained personnel so any response required can happen in a timely fashion.

The expansion of the humanitarian operation across the country was made possible thanks to three factors, said the Humanitarian Coordinator: deconfliction, strong collaboration with the Government and local actors; and the support of donors above all.

Priorities ahead and remaining roadblocks

Ms. Grande listed three priorities for humanitarian organisations: reduce hunger and roll back malnutrition; prevent another cholera outbreak; and protect civilians at any cost.

She also provided the international community with a long list of requirements, topped by the need for the warring parties to stop fighting. “Humanitarians cannot solve the conflict in Yemen, only politicians can,” she stated.

Humanitarians cannot solve the conflict in Yemen, only politicians can – UN Humanitarian Coordinator in Yemen, Lise Grande

Other requirements included: the need for ports to remain open, the creation of a line of credit for importers of basic commodities, the creation of a medical aid corridor, the transfer millions of dollars in cash directly to families in need, as well as additional unearmarked funds for the response to continue.

These requirements were echoed by the other high-level speakers of the event, including WHO's Dr. Tedros, Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees [Kelly Clements](#), and the CEO of Save the Children International Helle Thorning-Schmidt who said that "saving lives in Yemen is an uphill battle" due to the many challenges faced by aid groups.

According to the UN [Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs \(OCHA\)](#), organizer of the event, impediments to humanitarian action include movement restrictions, attempted interference and harassment, fluctuating commercial import levels, and collapsing basic health, education, water and sanitation services.

Closing the event, the United Kingdom, Canada Kuwait, the USA and Denmark pledged their continued support to the international response to the Yemen crisis.

[Youth2030: UN chief launches bold new strategy for young people 'to lead'](#)

Noting that it was "a rare treat" to see so many young faces at the UN, to launch the new "Youth2030" strategy, UN chief António Guterres highlighted a list of challenges "the largest young generation in history" faces today.

He noted that "globalization, new technologies, displacement, shrinking civic space, changing labour markets and climate impacts," were putting huge pressure on youth everywhere, adding that more than one-fifth of young people are not in employment, education or training; a quarter are affected by violence or armed conflict; and young people remain excluded from development programmes, ignored in peace negotiations and denied a voice in most international decision-making.

At the same time, he pointed out that young people were "a vast source of innovation, ideas and solutions," who push for the needed changes in technology, climate action, inclusivity and societal justice.

"Empowering young people, supporting them, and making sure they can fulfil

their potential are important ends in themselves,” he stressed. “We want this for all people, everywhere.”

Moreover, to fulfil the [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development for a more peaceful, sustainable and prosperous world, “we need young people to lead,” he added.

In presenting [Youth 2030: The United Nations Youth Strategy](#), he called it “the UN’s strategy to engage with, but especially to empower young people.”

Saying that the Organization has for decades worked *for* youth, he expressed hope that the new strategy would make the UN “a leader” in working *with* them, “in understanding their needs, in helping to put their ideas into action, in ensuring their views inform our processes.”

“And as we change, we will work with our partners to do likewise” and spur new partnerships, the UN chief said, identifying five key areas:

Today is the start of a new era for young people at the United Nations – *UN Secretary-General*

1. Opening new routes to involve young people and amplify their voices.
2. Strengthening the UN’s focus on their accessing education and health services.
3. Placing their economic empowerment at the fore of development strategies, with a focus on training and jobs.
4. Working to ensure their rights, and civic and political engagement.
5. Prioritizing support for young people in conflict and in humanitarian crises, including their participation in peace processes.

“Today is the start of a new era for young people at the United Nations,” he said, encouraging everyone to help move it forward. He urged Member States to invest in and empower youth nationally; challenged businesses to provide young people with skills and opportunities; and called on civil society to speak out and keep up the pressure.

And to all youth, Mr. Guterres stressed: “Sign up. Volunteer. Vote. Be part of the solution.”

“We need you as partners and leaders. We need you as we build a peaceful and more sustainable world,” he concluded.

For her part, Henrietta Fore, Executive Director of the [UN Children’s Fund](#) (UNICEF) recounted that she’d often sat with young people to hear and share their ideas, enthusiasm and vision for the future.

She also listened to their worries, such as joblessness, lack of education, and violence at home and online, as well as at school and in the neighbourhoods where they live.

“And girls are worried about the discrimination and violence they face just

because they're girls," she lamented.

In kicking off [Generation Unlimited](#), or Gen-U, a multi-partnership initiative to ensure that all young people are in school, training or employment by 2030, Ms. Fore called on governments, businesses, foundations, academia, non-profits, communities and innovators to help with "cutting-edge solutions and new ideas."

"Our time. Our turn. Our unlimited future," she declared to a responsive crowd at UN Headquarters.

Noting that a "massive generation is about to inherit our world," the UNICEF chief concluded, appealing for "a legacy of hope and opportunities for them. And most importantly, *with* them."

Invest in health, education

At the same time, [World Bank](#) President Jim Yong Kim, expressed his personal concern over the world his two young sons stand to inherit, with billions of others.

Referring to the successful path of his native South Korea in recent decades, Mr. Kim said: "When aspirations are met with opportunity, you get dynamic economic growth."

He explained that because Korea invested in "health, education and all the things that are need," he had the opportunity to become World Bank President while the K-pop boy band BTS, also at the event, was able to forge a successful career in music and entertainment.

"The nature of work is changing very quickly and many, many countries are not prepared," Mr. Kim flagged, saying that jobs will be more digitally demanding and require more perseverance and determination than ever.

Pointing out that there are 1.8 billion people between ages 15 and 30, with developing countries housing half a billion underemployed, or holding insecure jobs and that 300 million have no employment or education, he stressed "we are in a demographic change of extraordinary proportions."

Noting that during 1960s and '70s young Americans used to say 'don't trust anyone over 30,'" he advised young people not to "trust anyone over 30 to make the most important decisions that are going to affect your future."

"Don't let us decide how much we spend on health and education," he stated, instructing youth to insist that enough is spent so that everyone can become whatever they want.

Maldives: UN hails peaceful elections, as opposition wins out

The United Nations on Monday commended “the commitment” to democracy in the Indian Ocean republic by voters in the Maldives, after opposition leader Ibrahim Mohamed Solih defeated incumbent Abdulla Yameen in Sunday’s presidential elections.

“We congratulate the Maldivian people for turning out in large numbers to exercise their right to vote,” UN Spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric said, briefing reporters in New York, noting “the peaceful and orderly conduct” of the elections.

“We commend the authorities and political leaders for a smooth polling day and for the commitment to a democratic Maldives.”

Mr. Yameen conceded defeat after the Election Commission said Mr. Solih had won by a margin of 16.7 per cent.

Earlier this year, UN [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) urged the Government to uphold the rule of law and ensure the safety of the people after Mr. Yameen declared a state of emergency and sent his soldiers into the Supreme Court, when it ordered the release of convicted opposition leaders.

At UN, countries pledge to be guided by Mandela’s legacy in working for a better world

The United Nations General Assembly on Monday honoured Nelson Mandela with a pledge to build a just, peaceful and prosperous world and to revive the values for which the former South African President and anti-apartheid campaigner stood.

At the [Nelson Mandela Peace Summit](#), held in New York, Member States adopted the first resolution of the [General Assembly’s 73rd session](#), “committing to demonstrate mutual respect, tolerance, understanding and reconciliation in [their] relations.”

“We resolve to move beyond words in the promotion of peaceful, just, inclusive and non-discriminatory societies, stressing the importance of the

equal participation and full involvement of women and the meaningful participation of youth in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security,” read the resolution.

Member States, many represented by their heads of State and government, also reiterated the importance of the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) and said that they remain committed to achieving sustainable development in its three dimensions – economic, social and environmental – in a balanced and integrated manner.

Sustainable development cannot be realized without peace and security – General Assembly resolution

“Sustainable development cannot be realized without peace and security, and peace and security will be at risk without sustainable development. We reaffirm our pledge that no one will be left behind,” they resolved.

Addressing the Summit, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres [spoke](#) of the growing pressure against human rights around the world, and urged everyone to draw inspiration from Nelson Mandela’s wisdom, courage and fortitude, to face the challenges.

“[That] is the only way to build the just, peaceful and prosperous world envisioned in the United Nations Charter, the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) and the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#),” said Mr. Guterres.

“Madiba was a global citizen whose legacy must continue to guide us,” he added.

Today’s Peace Summit coincides with the centenary year of Mr. Mandela’s birth.



UN Photo/Cia Pak

From left: Matamela Cyril Ramaphosa, the President of South Africa; María Fernanda Espinosa, the President of the General Assembly; and Secretary-General António Guterres unveil the statue of Nelson Mandela at the UN Headquarters in New York.

Unveiling of Nelson Mandela's statue

Earlier in the day, a statue of Nelson Mandela was unveiled at UN Headquarters by Mr. Guterres alongside Matamela Cyril Ramaphosa, the President of South Africa, and María Fernanda Espinosa, the President of the current session of the General Assembly.

Gifted by South Africa to the UN, the life-size statue shows Madiba with his arms outstretched and bears his warm and broad smile.

Speaking at the unveiling, Secretary-General Guterres [highlighted](#) Mr. Mandela's humility as a hallmark of his greatness.

"When he achieved the pinnacle of power as president of his beloved country, Madiba set an example that still resounds throughout Africa and the world – he stepped down after one term, confident in the durability of South Africa's newfound democracy ... He did not pursue power for its own sake, but simply as a means of service," said the UN chief.

Also speaking at the unveiling, Ms. Espinosa [recalled](#) Mr. Mandela's first landmark speech at the UN, in 1994, in which he spoke of the interdependence of all nations and asked what can and must leaders do to ensure that democracy, peace and prosperity prevail everywhere.

"It is my hope that the placement of this statue – within the physical boundaries of the UN territory – will serve as an inspiration and reminder to all Member States," added the Assembly President.

"A reminder that our differences are to be celebrated; that our work is wholly and unreservedly for the people for whom we serve; and that our efforts, in whatever form they take, should always be guided by the inspiration and the promise that Mandela has left us."

Global spotlight on world drug problem 'is personal' says UN chief

Drug addiction is "more than just a policy issue. It is personal." Mr. Guterres said at the event, noting that "the reality is that drugs and addiction are not abstract issues."

“All of us have stories” and “it is our duty to act – and act now,” underscored the UN chief.

He highlighted that he had lost a friend to drugs “at an unbearably young age, and also described how his sister had spent many years working as a psychiatrist at a drug treatment centre in the Portuguese capital, Lisbon.

“I saw the heavy toll it took on her day after day as she treated those suffering so badly,” he said, adding that he had “enormous admiration” for her. “I think I have done several tough jobs in my life. Nothing compares with what I have seen her do.”

Calling the situation “alarming,” Mr. Guterres pointed out that the global production of opium and manufacture of cocaine “has never been higher.”

“Some 450,000 people die every year from overdoses or drug-related health issues,” he underscored, adding that in recent years, “some 31 million people around the world” required drug-addiction treatment.

Non-medical use of tramadol in parts of Africa and the Middle East is threatening communities that are already fragile. And the United States is in an “utterly heart-breaking” opioid crisis, according to the UN chief.

He voiced concern that only one-in-six people who need drug-addiction treatment receives it, and for women, the figure is even higher.

National priorities may differ, but the global community shares a common goal: to protect people’s security, health and wellbeing –
UN Secretary-General

Mr. Guterres urged “strong action in two areas” to tackle this issue.

Firstly, he underscored the urgency to “crack down on drug trafficking and those who profit from human misery,” specifically by denying them safe havens and better cross-border cooperation; improving intelligence-sharing and analysis across drug supply chains; and targeting the links between drugs, corruption, arms, human trafficking and terrorist networks.

Secondly, he called for the need for drug-addiction treatment, with consumers being “first and foremost, patients and victims.”

The Secretary-General explained that this was the policy he employed as Portugal’s Prime Minister two decades ago, when the country had some of Europe’s highest drug abuse death rates and the highest rate of HIV amongst injecting drug users.

“And the policy worked,” he stated. “There was an increase in the quantity of drugs seized and in the efficiency of police and customs operations.”

Moreover, he said that drug consumption dropped “significantly, particularly among youth,” drug users declined by 50 per cent, and drug-related infectious

diseases and the number of people overdosing also plunged.

“National priorities may differ, but the global community shares a common goal: to protect people’s security, health and wellbeing,” he emphasized.

Mr. Guterres assured that the UN stands behind the UN Drug Control Conventions and the 2016 UN General Assembly Special Session outcome document.

“The United Nations system – and I personally – stand ready to support governments in meeting the challenge of the world drug problem,” he asserted.

“Failure is, indeed, not an option. Together we will succeed. We will never give up,” concluded the Secretary-General.

“Deliver a drug-free future”



UN Photo/Mark Garten

US President Donald Trump, hosting the event, called Mr. Guterres a “great friend,” noting that he was doing a “wonderful job” in a “very complex” situation, adding that the UN’s “tremendous potential” was “slowly but surely” being met.

The US President stressed the need to combat drug addiction and stop all forms of trafficking and smuggling.

“The scourge of drug addiction continues to claim too many lives in the US and the nations around the world,” said Mr. Trump. “Today we commit to fighting the drug epidemic together.”

Citing the 2018 World Drug Report, he pointed out that cocaine and opium production have hit record highs, noting that global drug-related deaths have gone up 60 per cent in 15 years.

Flagging the link between illicit drugs and organized crime, illegal financial flows, corruption and terrorism, he stressed: "It is vital for public health and national security that we fight drug addiction and stop all forms of trafficking and smuggling that provide the financial lifeblood for vicious trans-national cartels."

"All of us must work together to dismantle drug production and defeat drug addiction," he underscored, recalling the US' call-to-action last month on the world drug problem: "Reduce drug demand, cut off the supply of illicit drugs, expand treatment and strengthen international cooperation."

"If we take these steps together, we can save the lives of countless people in all corners of the world," said Mr. Trump. "The United States looks forward to working with you to strengthening our communities, protect our families and deliver a drug-free future for all of our children."