

Half the population of Yemen at risk of famine: UN emergency relief chief

Around 14 million people in Yemen, or half the total population of the country, are facing “pre-famine conditions,” said the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, in a briefing to the Security Council on Tuesday.

[Mark Lowcock](#), who is also Emergency Relief Coordinator, said that the UN assessment, which revises September’s estimate of 11 million at risk, is based on recent survey work and analysis, and categorizes “pre-famine conditions,” as meaning those who are entirely reliant on external aid for survival.

Famines, said Mr. Lowcock, are a rarity in the modern world, and whilst this is a positive sign of progress, it is also what makes the Yemen situation so shocking.

Although it is difficult to confirm how many are dying from starvation, or starvation-related disease, the relief chief said that health workers are pointing to a rising number of deaths linked to food-related factors, with one aid agency estimating at the end of 2017 that 130 children were dying every day from extreme hunger and disease: nearly 50,000 during the course of a year.

However, many deaths are hidden: “Only half of health facilities are functioning, and many Yemenis are too poor to access the ones that are open. Unable to reach care, people often die at home. Very few families report these deaths; their stories go unrecorded.”

Mr. Lowcock said the situation in Yemen is now far more serious than in 2017, when warnings of famine led to a dramatic scaling up of the UN coordinated relief effort, because of the large number of people at risk.

Beyond those at risk of famine, the emergency food assistance on which many millions have been reliant for years is only enough to survive, Mr. Lowcock said, adding that their immune systems were literally collapsing, making them – especially children and the elderly – more likely to succumb to malnutrition, cholera and other diseases.

The Special Envoy reported little progress on two key issues exacerbating the crisis: fighting around the town of Hudaydah, which is choking aid and commercial operations, and the collapse of the economy.

On the first point, intense fighting, shelling and air strikes have continued to hit Hudaydah in recent days, leading to more than half a million having to leave their homes. Over 5,000 separate violations of international humanitarian law by all parties to the conflict have been recorded since May, including mass civilian casualties.

Humanitarian aid is being severely hampered by delays in issuing visas, restrictions on imports of equipment and cargo and other obstructions, and Mr. Lowcock warned that the relief effort will simply be overwhelmed if the fighting does not cease.

The economic situation is dire, with gross domestic product cut by half since 2015, over 600,000 jobs lost, and more than 80 per cent of the population living below the poverty line. Mr. Lowcock called for an urgent and substantial injection of foreign exchange, and for payments to pensioners and key public sector workers to resume.

Mr Lowcock called for urgent action in five areas: a cessation of hostilities in and around all the infrastructure and facilities on which the aid operation and commercial importers rely, protection of the supply of food and essential goods across the country, a larger and faster injection of foreign exchange into the economy, increased funding and support for the humanitarian operation, and finally for all belligerents to engage fully with the UN to end the conflict.

Dramatic funding shortages a 'severe catastrophe' for people of Gaza: UN Humanitarian Coordinator

The UN Humanitarian Coordinator for the occupied Palestinian territory, Jamie McGoldrick, has been describing how ordinary Gazans are scraping by on just four hours of electricity per day due to fuel shortages, putting many in "a terrible situation" as the winter months approach.

In an interview with UN News, he recounted that on a visit to a local children's hospital, he witnessed power shut down during an emergency operation, leaving patients and doctors in the dark for nearly a full minute before a generator powered on.

"In that time the doctors had to hand pump the oxygen into the lungs of children on life support machines," he recalled. "And that's not one day. That's everyday like that."

Funding for the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine ([UNRWA](#)) was cut by the United States at the beginning of this year, which despite a major fundraising drive, has resulted in a critical shortage of services for the local population.

UNRWA reports that three-quarters of the 1.9 million people living in the enclave of the Gaza Strip, controlled since 2006 by militant group Hamas, are

Palestine refugees. The steady decline in socio-economic conditions from decades of conflict and displacement, has seen unemployment rates soar to 53 percent, one of the highest in the world, with 80 percent of the population dependent on foreign aid.

'While the money stays the same or goes down, the needs go up'—UN's McGoldrick

"We're not able to save the lives of people we should... while the money stays the same or goes down, the needs go up," he stressed.

Mr. McGoldrick said humanitarians are having trouble keeping up with this "severe catastrophe."

The expert added that the future of the crises does not look promising, due to the unstable funding climate and a geopolitical reality that "could even be worse" next year.

Pointing toward solutions, Mr. McGoldrick implored politicians from different Palestinian factions and parties, as well as Israel, to come up with answers, as it is "the only option" for the people of Gaza to regain independence, otherwise, there is "no hope," he said.

Feeding families remains complex task in war-torn Syria – UN relief agency

Nearly a million Syrians have headed home amid improving security, only to find houses destroyed and livelihoods lost said the United Nations emergency food relief agency on Tuesday, leaving many civilians still reliant on aid.

[According](#) to the [World Food Programme](#) (WFP), while Syrian food prices have fallen due to easier transportation links, erratic weather patterns have severely damaged cereal production, resulting in the lowest wheat crop in almost three decades.

"It is likely that everyone in Syria will, in some way, be affected by the abysmal wheat crop – people would either have less wheat or pay more for it," WFP spokesperson Hervé Verhoosel told journalists at a news briefing in Geneva on Tuesday.

"Continued food assistance at scale is vital," he continued, noting also that Syrians returning home "need active markets, jobs and support."

It is likely that everyone in Syria will, in some way, be affected

by the abysmal wheat crop – *WFP spokesperson*

In response, WFP is supporting food production and income generation projects in areas that are secure and have functioning markets, as well as prioritizing longer-term recovery. However, its efforts are constrained by a severe lack of resources.

Between now and March next year, the UN agency needs about \$136 million for Syria operations, explained Mr. Verhoosel, necessitating “reliable and predictable funding, to plan and maintain the vital lifeline of food assistance on which millions of vulnerable Syrians depend.”

Across Syria, over 13 million people continue to depend on humanitarian assistance, of which more than 6 million are food-insecure IDPs.

WFP chief in Syria ‘to gain better understanding of situation on the ground’

Meanwhile, the UN agency’s Executive Director, David Beasley is in Syria, visiting the previously besieged enclaves of eastern Ghouta and Rural Damascus.

There, he visited a school meals site where WFP is delivering date bars for schoolchildren, a food distribution point, and residents of Zamalka who benefit from WFP’s food assistance.

“The purpose of the visit,” said Mr. Verhoosel, “is to gain a better understanding of the situation on the ground, especially given the wheat crop,” he added.

On Wednesday, Mr. Beasley will travel to Lebanon, which is hosting nearly a million Syrian refugees, 700,000 of whom are dependent on WFP food assistance.

‘Reasons to hope’ for sustainable peace in Central African Republic – UN Mission chief

The top United Nations official in the Central African Republic (CAR), said on Tuesday he is “hopeful that the necessary foundations to build sustainable peace” have been established and that long-lasting stability will depend on the will of its people, and support from the international community.

[Parfait Onanga-Anyanga](#), who also heads the UN stabilization mission in the country, [MINUSCA](#), told the UN Security Council that, since the mission was established, “much progress” has been made to “extinguish the flames of the devastating inter-communal conflict.”

Civil conflict between Christian and the Muslims communities in CAR broke out in 2013 and, after a short respite in 2015, intensified again the following year, throwing the country into a new spiral of violence.

MINUSCA was deployed in 2014 with a mandate to protect civilians, support the political transition, assist with the delivery of humanitarian assistance and promote the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) process.

“The Mission is preventing atrocities daily and continues to preserve the State’s territorial integrity,” the head of MINUSCA said.

Among other “reasons to hope” that the Special Representative cited are the overall improvement in the security situation, the democratic elections held in 2015 and 2016, and the restoration of constitutional order across the country, as civilian authorities have been redeployed nationwide.

In addition, six non-state armed groups have agreed to participate in the DDR process which is to start by the end of the year.

“Our work is of course not finished,” he acknowledged, explaining that “the country is still facing numerous challenges. The drivers of conflict remain and attacks against civilians continue to take place, causing mass displacements of people.”

The UN office which coordinates humanitarian affairs (OCHA), estimates that close to 615,000 people are currently displaced in CAR and up to [2.5 million people](#) are in need of life-saving aid.

“Half of the country needs humanitarian assistance, and the delivery of this assistance is becoming more and more difficult, especially because of violent attacks against peacekeepers and aid workers,” regretted Special Representative Onanga-Anyanga.

[According to](#) the UN Humanitarian Coordinator, Najat Rochdi, 2018 has been particularly deadly for aid workers: so far, this year alone, the number of attacks against aid workers and against humanitarian convoys or goods, nears 200. Since January, at least, six aid workers lost their lives. This general insecurity has led to temporary suspensions of life-saving activities in various localities.

“The path towards peace and reconciliation will not be an easy one,” declared Mr. Onanga-Anyanga. “Together with the Central Africans, we must now help move the country from a phase of containment, to one of transformation, where the dividends of peace can be felt by all communities and all citizens,” he told the Security Council, calling for the international community to “work with the Government of the Central African Republic to ensure that this peace process is people-centered and does not fail”.

“While the current situation remains unpredictable and precarious, I believe that progress achieved in various areas and the foundations laid are essential ingredients,” he concluded, listing various conditions needed for sustainable peace to be achieved, including the buy-in of the people of CAR, an adequate security backdrop, and sustained international support.

[UN expert calls for international investigation into ‘evident murder’ of Jamal Khashoggi](#)

The UN independent expert on freedom of opinion and expression, has said he’s “very disappointed” that Member States have so far failed to back calls for an independent international investigation into the “evident murder” of dissident Saudi journalist, Jamal Khashoggi.

In an exclusive interview with UN News on Monday, Special Rapporteur [David Kaye](#), urged all governments to respond at a time when journalists are under attack, whether it’s through the Security Council, Human Rights Council, or by persuading the UN Secretary-General to launch such an investigation.

Regarding the form of the investigation, the Special Rapporteur suggested an independent body made up of five people at the most, who could “evaluate the information that the Turkish authorities have been sharing with the press surreptitiously over the last couple of weeks.”

This, said Mr. Kaye, would provide the international community with a credible report of what happened and, whilst it would not answer every question, it could identify who was responsible: the international community would then have to decide what to do with that information.

If such an investigation does not take place, he added, the facts will constantly be disputed.

The death of Jamal Khashoggi, said Mr. Kaye, is emblematic of a broad kind of attack on freedom of information and journalistic reporting, one that is “encapsulated” by US President Donald Trump describing the press as the “enemy of the people.”

He expressed concern about the “rise in pressure on journalists and just what that suggests about our ability to sustain democratic institutions when we have such pressure on those people who are simply trying to report what they see as facts.”

Mr. Kaye also noted that, in his next report to the UN, he will focus on the

abusive use of commercial technology to spy on journalists, activists and ordinary citizens, which raises questions about the rules for the use of such tools, and whether or not their export should be restricted.

The interview at UN headquarters in New York took place a week before the [International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists](#), on 2 November, when [UNESCO](#), the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, will launch a new campaign, Truth Never Dies to raise awareness of the dangers they face: every four days, a journalist somewhere around the world is killed.