

Kuwait's generosity boosts Syria's food security

Author:

Wed, 2019-08-28 01:27

DUBAI: Kuwait and the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) of the United Nations have teamed up to help farmers and herders in Syria recover from the setbacks dealt by war. This month, Kuwait contributed \$3 million to benefit about 20,000 highly vulnerable people and their extended families by boosting their food security and nutrition situation. Kuwait is working with FAO to fight hunger and malnutrition and assist disaster-stricken communities in the Near East and North Africa (NENA) region and beyond, in countries such as Yemen, Somalia, South Sudan and Nigeria.

"There is an urgent need to strengthen cooperation between the Gulf, the United Nations and the international community to increase the resilience of the most vulnerable populations and jointly address the challenge of food insecurity in the region," said Abdessalam Ould Ahmed, FAO assistant director-general and NENA regional representative.

"Beyond the structural causes of food insecurity, conflict has remained the single most important driving factor of food insecurity in the Arab region in recent years. Conflict undermines food security in multiple ways: destroying crops, livestock and agricultural infrastructure, disrupting markets and causing displacement and the spread of diseases."

FAO has collaborated with Arab Gulf countries for more than 70 years. Currently, Saudi Arabia is among its top resource partners, and the number one in the Near East.

However, in recent years economic growth in several Arab countries has been adversely affected by conflict. According to FAO, "the protracted crisis in Syria, coupled with the most severe drought in decades, has severely weakened Syria's agricultural production. This has led to more than 6 million people facing hunger and increasingly struggling to feed their families, and to high food prices."

The still precarious political situation in Syria continues to fuel the largest refugee crisis in the world. Despite decreased levels of conflict in many areas, "within the country, 6.2 million people remain displaced, around 1.4 million have returned, and these returnees are in urgent need of resources and support," Ahmed said.

Kuwait's contribution will go towards helping Syrian households headed by women and their extended families with vegetable seeds, irrigation kits and feed for their animals, as well as support to rehabilitate their fodder crop nurseries and training on best agricultural practices. FAO will carry out these activities in Syria's Daraa, As-Sweida, Deir-Ez-Zor and Hama governorates. "Gulf donors have been major providers of funding and resources to UN and FAO activities aimed at supporting the affected populations in many areas: access to food, health, sanitations, livelihood support and others," Ahmed told Arab News.

"Despite the conflict and violence, farmers are still on their land. They are in dire need of inputs, seeds and animal feeds, and they need access to

markets.”

FAO’s primary focus is on building the resilience of farmers and affected communities. In 2018, it managed to reach three million people in Yemen and almost 273,600 Syrians, including cross-border operations. “The Kuwait contribution to the FAO programs in Syria and Yemen has been critical in this regard, and GCC countries can do a lot to support the expansion of the livelihoods programs,” Ahmed said.

INNUMBERS

\$3m – Kuwait’s contribution to FAO

6.2m – people remain displaced in Syria

1.4m – Syrians have returned but in urgent need of resources and support

20m+ – Yemenis are food-insecure in 2019

“The NENA region is home to some of the biggest humanitarian crises in the world, which have been further complicated by conflict, water scarcity and climate change. Addressing this requires a collective effort.”

It is not Syria, however, but Yemen, in the Arabian Peninsula, that is at present the site of the world’s worst humanitarian crisis. More than 20 million Yemenis are food-insecure this year, including nearly 10 million who are on the brink of famine and starvation. Conditions in two thirds of all districts in Yemen are considered “pre-famine.”

Saudi Arabia and the UAE are supporting a project being implemented by FAO in Yemen that has benefited 4,200 local fishermen in Abyan, according to the UAE’s WAM news agency. It is being supported by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the Field Medical Foundation. The project is part of a series of humanitarian and development projects supported by the two countries “through various international organizations which aim to improve the livelihoods of residents of areas damaged by the war started by the Iranian-backed Houthi militias.”

Ahmed spoke of a shared history and culture between the Gulf and many of the countries facing developmental and humanitarian crises. “While Gulf countries have made immense contributions to life saving, there is much to be done to ensure that livelihoods are saved and protected,” he said.

“Agriculture is a critical source of income and provides food and nutrition needs for affected households and their livestock.”

FAO uses the “resilience approach” in tackling hunger and food insecurity in the region through income generation and access to food; building agriculture assets; strengthening social safety nets; ensuring availability of basic services such as health, water and sanitation; and strengthening households’ ability to adapt.

“Any contribution can increase the resilience of households, communities and institutions to effectively prevent – and cope with – crises by providing viable livelihood opportunities in agriculture,” Ahmed said. “Contributing to the enhancing resilience of crisis-affected communities will help achieve the

overall goal of improving food security and alleviating rural poverty in the region.”

Experts have described such contributions as crucial because along with money, time is also of the essence. Once farmers and herders have been displaced from their land, it becomes extremely difficult to go back and restart due to a lack of supplies and labor.

“More importantly, the dislocation causes severe physiological

problems,” said Jeffrey Culpepper, chairman of UAE-based AgriSecura, which provides sustainable solutions for food-security purposes.

“Farmers and herders are deeply attached and tied to the land, usually generations of the same family. It’s an anchor for their existence, so getting them back and settled can’t be understated.” Culpepper said contributions such as those made by Kuwait can make the difference between return or life as a refugee.

“A factory worker can work anywhere but farmers and herders need land,” he said.

“The situation in the region is critical – every time you remove a farmer or herder from the land, that’s one less person producing food and one more needing to be fed from outside sources. “Right now, you have malnutrition rapidly gaining ground in the region, especially among children.”

Once a conflict ends, it can take years to get farmers and herders back on the land on which they traditionally depended for sustenance. “Kuwait’s assistance should jumpstart the recovery,” Culpepper said. “This is 2019 – the time of artificial intelligence and vast wealth in the hands of the 1 percent. Children should not be going hungry.”

Conflict resolution is of course the best solution to the problem, given that disruptions in food production happen quickly in conflict zones. Restoring food production can prove tough and, often remains out of reach, which reinforces the cycle of dependence on foreign food aid and increases malnutrition levels in conflict zones.

“Due to the unrest in Syria, agricultural production and farmers’ income were disrupted, which had detrimental social impact on their families and their communities,” said Dr. Khalil Ammar, principal scientist in hydrogeology and water resources management at the International Center for Biosaline Agriculture in Dubai.

“Unrest affects the livelihoods of millions of people in these countries, particularly the farmers who rely on agricultural production and livestock. In addition, natural disasters such as drought cause sharp declines in cereal and forage production, higher grain prices, environmental degradation, and migration of young people when coupled with conflict.”

Dr. Ammar said more efforts were needed to build resilience and reduce vulnerability through supporting planning for longer-term action and more investment for development.

“Several countries in the region need urgent support to mitigate the food and nutrition security crisis and restore the livelihoods of communities



Gulf donors have been major providers of funding and resource to UN and FAO activities.

Abdessalam Ould Ahmed
FAO Assistant Director-General



dependent on livestock and crops,” he said.



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Syria's Idlib clashes kill at least 60 fighters
Syrian Kurdish YPG has withdrawn from some border positions – Kurdish authority

[UN confirms support for Yemeni government's efforts in the south](#)

Author:

Tue, 2019-08-27 23:55

RIYADH: The UN envoy to Yemen confirmed his support to the internationally recognized legitimate government on Tuesday for its efforts in restoring stability in the south of the country.

Martin Griffiths met with President Abd-Rabbo Mansour Hadi in Riyadh to discuss the government's views on his proposal for the implementation of the Hodeidah agreement.

He praised the government in its "efforts to restore stability in the south and the need to respect Yemen's state institutions."

Griffiths also thanked Hadi for his "constructive leadership on Hodeidah."

Saudi Arabia and the UAE on Monday formed a joint panel to support the cease-fire between Yemen's government and southern separatist forces in Shabwah and Abyan.

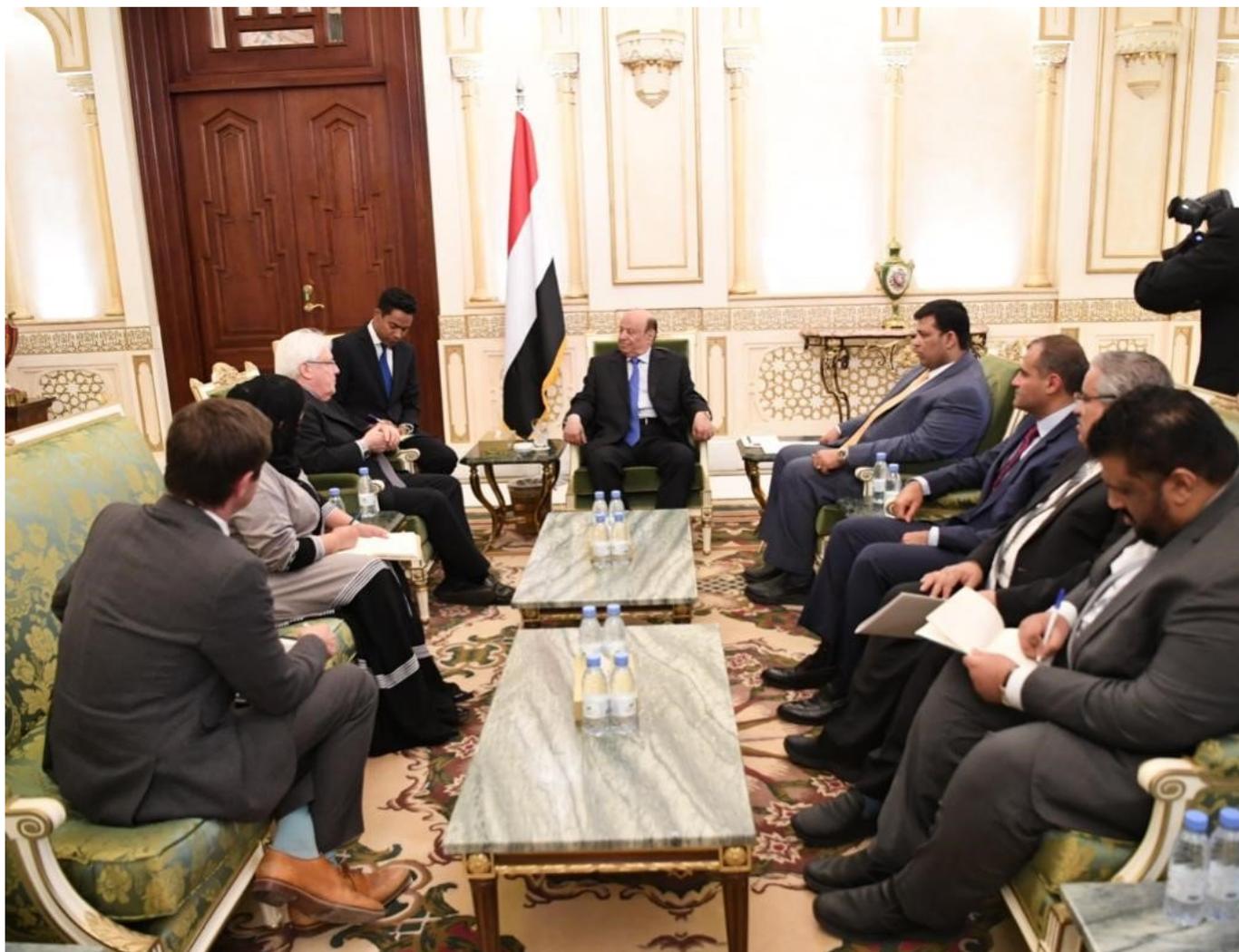
Security Belt forces loyal to the separatist Southern Transitional Council (STC) took control of some institutions in Aden on Aug. 10 following deadly clashes with government troops that killed at least 40 people.

The tensions between the forces complicate the Yemen conflict as they are meant to be on the same side fighting against the Iran-backed Houthis.

UN spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric said that the Yemeni government and the Iranian-backed Houthi militia both sent their views on Griffiths' proposal for an immediate cease-fire and the joint redeployment of troops from the ports of Salif, Ras Issa, Hodeidah and its city.

The UN envoy said the proposal was submitted to both sides in early August for consideration, "in order to generate the momentum required to implement the important and essential steps in the agreement."

Griffiths said the agreement, also known as the Stockholm agreement as it was agreed in Sweden in December, allows the two sides to enter into a broader political process and for the Yemeni government and the Houthi militia to reach a deal.



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Houthis destroy UN food aid after blocking it from delivery in Yemen Saudi Arabia, UAE urge new talks between Yemen's government and southern separatists

[Gazans despair over fuel tensions with Israel](#)

Author:

Wed, 2019-08-28 00:02

GAZA CITY: In the Gaza Strip, concerns are growing that war with Israel may be on the horizon once again.

Tension in the region is higher than normal, following a series of incidents

that has led the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) to ramp up operations, coming, it says, in response to rockets fired by Hamas at the town of Sderot.

Palestinian fears have since increased as Israel has halved the amount of fuel allocated to Gaza's only power plant.

Officials say the decision to cut fuel will have a negative impact on all walks of life in the Gaza Strip, but many people fear it could trigger further escalation and conflict.

Mohammed Hamdi Al-Tuwaisi told Arab News he was concerned at the direction things were heading. "We live in a bitter enough reality in Gaza without war, let alone with wars like five years ago." Al-Tuwaisi lost his job then, when the factory he worked in, for ready-mixed concrete, located east of Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip, was completely destroyed in 2014.

"The majority of people in Gaza are living in disastrous conditions because of poverty and unemployment, and a new war would be intolerable," said Al-Tuwaisi, who supports a family of nine and lives in a modest home in a refugee camp in Rafah.

UN estimates indicate that more than half of the Gaza Strip's 2 million people live on humanitarian aid, with unprecedented levels of poverty and unemployment.

Due to Israel's decision to reduce the amount of fuel for the power plant, Al-Tuwaisi fears that he will lose his job again, this time at a local ice-cream factory in the southern town of Khan Younis.

He currently earns 30 shekels a day (\$8.5), and says that in previous crises where the power plant stopped working, when electricity supplies were reduced, the factory owner had to cut employee numbers by more than half.

Mohammed Thabet, a spokesman for the Electricity Distribution Co. in Gaza, said that the electricity schedule would be negatively affected by the Israeli decision to reduce the amount of fuel supplied to the power plant.

Thabet estimated that the electricity would be limited to about 6 hours a day, should one of three generators working at the plant stop. The electricity needs of the Gaza Strip normally ranges from 450-500 megawatts, increasing during winter.

He warned of disastrous consequences for hospitals, sewage treatment plants, municipalities and other institutions that provide vital services should Israel not reverse its decision. The Israeli government coordinator in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, Kamil Abu Rokon, said fuel delivered to the Gaza power plant through the Kerem Shalom commercial crossing would be reduced until further notice.

In response to the decision, Hamas spokesman Abdel-Latif Al-Qanoua called on mediators to stop the Israeli action, stressing that reducing fuel was a "collective punishment" of two million Palestinians which "would not be tolerated."

A Hamas delegation left for Cairo, which observers say is an attempt to calm the situation and prevent its deterioration, in light of Israeli threats that upcoming general elections scheduled next month would not prevent it from reacting strongly if rocket fire from Gaza continued.

Israeli affairs researcher Momen Mekdad believes that neither Hamas nor Israel are interested in war at the moment, but that this conviction may fade if Israel felt sufficiently provoked, as reflected by recent Israeli bombing in Lebanon, Syria and Iraq.



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UN envoy warns West Bank, Gaza violence threatens region
Israeli forces target Hamas sites in Gaza after Palestinian mortar fire, two killed in separate blast

[Iraqi PM's government facing collapse over Israeli airstrikes: Military and political officials](#)

Author:

Tue, 2019-08-27 23:46

BAGHDAD: Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi's government could be toppled within weeks in the wake of a series of strikes on targets associated with paramilitary groups linked to Iran, sources claim.

Government officials, commanders of armed factions and observers told Arab News on Tuesday that recent bomb attacks have embarrassed the premier and robbed him of domestic and international support.

Iraq has seen 18 bombings and two airstrikes over the past three years, most of which have hit warehouses and headquarters of armed factions that have fought Daesh alongside the Iraqi government and which are mostly linked to Iran.

The latest bombings last week targeted three weapons stores near Baghdad belonging to Kata'ib Hezbollah-Iraq, an anti-US and pro-Iranian Shiite militia in Iraq, while a drone hit one of its headquarters in the border city of Qaim near the Iraqi-Syrian border on Sunday, killing two of its commanders.

Commanders of the Shiite armed factions have accused Israel of carrying out the attacks with US cooperation.

However, the Iraqi government said it did not have enough technical evidence to prove the claims despite acknowledging that the majority of the bombings were deliberate and carried out by external forces.

Last week a number of American officials revealed that Israel was involved in carrying out an attack on a military base north of Baghdad on July 19 which killed three of Kata'ib Hezbollah-Iraq's leaders, leaving Abdul-Mahdi facing criticism for failure to disclose the results of government investigations into previous similar bombings.

Leaders of the pro-Iranian armed factions have threatened to target US forces and American interests in Iraq as "they provide the required cover for the Israeli side and allow its aircraft to violate Iraqi airspace (which is under full US control)."

Hanine Al-Qadoo, a prominent lawmaker and one of the armed factions' leaders, told reporters on Tuesday: "The (Iraqi) government is embarrassed. Revealing the results of the investigations (of the bombings) and its leaders, means that the (Iraqi) government has to take action. It has just two options, fight the Zionist entity and cancel the (bilateral security) strategic agreement with Washington.

"So, Washington will force the government to withhold the results of the investigation because it condemns the international coalition which is responsible for protecting Iraqi airspace according to the agreement."

Iraqi President Barham Salih sought to calm the situation and contain the crisis by holding several meetings with concerned parties, the most recent on Monday in the presence of Abdul-Mahdi, the speaker of Parliament, militia leaders, and Faleh Fayyadh, head of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF).

"The recent attacks on the PMF are partly an attempt to drag them and the national defense system away from its continuing important role in eliminating Daesh remnants and eliminating terrorism once and for all," Salih said in a statement on Monday.

"These attacks are a blatant act of aggression targeting Iraq ... and Iraq will take, through the government and all active channels and international and regional organizations, all measures that will deter the aggressors and defend Iraq, its security and sovereignty."

Iraq said it would file a complaint to the UN Security Council about the "flagrant aggression."

"Attendees recognized Israel's responsibility for some of these attacks, but the government wants more time to complete its investigation to obtain sufficient technical evidence to file a complaint at the UN Security Council," a commander of one of the armed factions who attended Monday's meeting told Arab News.

"The issue is purely technical, and the results of the investigations presented by Abdul-Mahdi to us proved nothing, so the statements did not name Israel. But everyone agreed to convey a clear message to the international coalition forces in Iraq that they bear responsibility for these violations because the Iraqi airspace is under their control.

"We cannot say that they are complicit because dragging the (Iraqi) armed factions into a battle with them now in Iraq is not in their interest. But they certainly fail to protect Iraqi airspace."

Iraq has been a direct battleground between the US and Iran since 2003. Both countries are using all their human and technical resources inside Iraq to put more pressure on each other to get some concessions on Iran's nuclear program.

Controlling the armed factions linked to Iran and preventing their involvement in any armed confrontation with the Americans inside Iraqi territory, is one of the biggest challenges facing the Iraqi government and threatens to undermine its efforts not to align with the parties to the conflict, Iran and America.

US confirmation of Israeli involvement in one of the attacks has given Abdul-Mahdi's rivals "perfect justification" to attack the government and seek to bring it down.

"All feedbacks that we receive about the performance of the government reflect dissatisfaction at home and abroad," one of Salih's senior advisers told Arab News. "The Americans refuse to receive Abdul-Mahdi or deal with him. His allies at home have shaken off around him and are working with the factions and his rivals to start an interrogation campaign at the Parliament for his ministers, which will begin next week to topple them."

Moqtada Al-Sadr, who controls the largest parliamentary bloc and one of the biggest armed factions, on Monday demanded a further investigation under

international supervision before taking any decision.

Salih's adviser said: "The pressures are very large, and the situation is inflamed and does not bear more procrastination and silence. This issue must be handled wisely before the situation in Iraq explodes."



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Iraq's leaders condemn deadly drone attack blamed on Israel
Finding homes in ruin, destitute Iraqis return to camps

[Istanbul's new opposition mayor cuts funding to some pro-government groups](#)

Author:

Tue, 2019-08-27 23:45

ANKARA: Istanbul's new opposition municipality cancelled the transfer of more than 350 million lira to some pro-government foundations, Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu said on Tuesday, in one of his first moves against Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan since his election.

Imamoglu, of the main opposition Republican People's Party, won a decisive victory in a June 24 re-run vote, ending a 25-year rule by Erdogan's AK Party

(AKP) and its predecessors in the country's largest city and commercial hub. Throughout his election campaign, Imamoglu vowed to uncover what he said was the wasteful transfer of millions of lira to pro-government foundations by previous administrations.

"As of now, we have completed the cancellation of a total of 357 million lira (\$62 million) of resources that were given or transferred to foundations," he told reporters on Tuesday, adding that this figure included 56 million lira of "food support" and a 165 million lira of building.

"It's incredible. On what are you spending the people's money?" he said. "This is only the beginning."

The municipality also annulled its protocol agreements with five foundations receiving transfers.

One of the five was the Turkey Youth and Education Service Foundation (TURGEV), which Erdogan founded when he was mayor of Istanbul in the 1990s. Its board includes Erdogan's daughter, his communication director's wife, and a former AKP mayor.

Other foundations that had protocol agreements annulled and fund transfers cancelled include the Turkish Youth Foundation (TUGVA), the Ensar Foundation, the Aziz Mahmut Hidayi foundation, and the Daru'l Funun Theology foundation. The move comes after Turkish authorities last week replaced Kurdish mayors in three southeastern cities with state officials and detained more than 400 people for suspected militant links, sparking sharp criticism from the opposition.

Erdogan has said his government would take similar measures in other parts of the country if needed. But Imamoglu said such remarks were "saddening" and meaningless.

"Istanbul is in safe hands. Istanbul is being managed by a mayor who received close to 50% of the votes of Istanbulites," Imamoglu said.



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Istanbul's new mayor Ekrem Imamoglu faces tough road ahead after landslide win 20 years after deadly quake, Istanbul ill-prepared for 'Big One'