

Aid agencies warn of 'irreversible damage' in Syria 10-years after crisis began

Thu, 2021-03-11 00:50

LONDON: Ten years since the start of the Syria conflict, a coalition of international aid organizations has warned of the "suffering and increased, irreversible, damage" if growing humanitarian needs are not met.

A joint statement issued to Arab News called on world powers to use "all their influence to stop the crisis."

"A decade since the outset of the conflict, living conditions for many Syrians are worse than ever," the coalition of 35 aid agencies, including Save the Children, MercyCorps, and the Norwegian Refugee Council, said.

"There continues to be violence and indiscriminate attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure."

More than 80 percent of people in Syria are living in poverty and food insecurity levels are at a record high. More than 12.4 million people are food insecure and a further 1.8 million are at risk.

A further 12.2 million Syrians lack regular access to clean water and 2.4 million children are currently out of school.

"The protracted displacement crisis as a result of the Syrian conflict is the worst since the Second World War," the statement said.

The rare joint appeal "should be a stark warning to the world," Charles Lawley, head of communications and advocacy at Syria Relief, one of the statement's signatories, told Arab News.

"If next week's commemorations of 10 years since the start of the Syrian crisis is just a history lesson, then there is no point in even mentioning it. Our organizations are joining together because we want this grim milestone to highlight the present and growing needs here in Syria and the neighboring countries and what action needs to be taken to meet them.

"We also call on governments with influence over the warring parties to use their pressure to seek an end to this brutal conflict and spare millions more Syrians from the violence."

The appeal comes at a time of intense scrutiny over the future of the UK's role in resolving the Syria war.

Earlier this month, leaked information from the British Home Office revealed that the government is planning to cut its aid budget to Syria by as much as 67 percent.

Anna McMorrin, shadow minister for international development in the UK's opposition Labour party, told Arab News: "This is a time for leadership not retreat. Any attempt by the UK Government to cut vital lifesaving aid would further signal Britain's shameful retreat from the world stage at a time when we need the international community to act together."

She said the UK government should redouble efforts to end hostilities and help the millions still caught up in the conflict, "particularly in the northeast and northwest where the regime and rogue forces act with impunity."

The war in Syria started in 2011 when President Bashar Al-Assad launched a brutal crackdown on protests against his rule.

The clashes escalated into all out conflict between Assad's forces and rebel groups ranging from the Free Syrian Army to extremist factions linked to Al-Qaeda.

Assad, who was already backed by Iran and its Lebanese proxy Hezbollah, gained the upper hand in the war after Russia stepped up its military involvement in his support in 2015.

The war has killed nearly half a million people and displaced half the country's population.



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War-weary Syrian children foresee prolonged displacement: StudyBiden called off second Syria strike to avoid civilian casualties

Yemen's army brings partial end to Houthi siege of Taiz

Thu, 2021-03-11 00:39

AL-MUKALLA: Yemen's army on Wednesday announced it had partially broken a six-year siege of the southern city of Taiz by the Iran-backed Houthis.

Spokesman Col. Abdul Basit Al-Baher told Arab News that troops had seized control of several mountain locations on the western edges of the city and reopened a road to western areas on the Red Sea.

For the first time in years, soldiers from the Taiz axis met other government troops from the Giants Brigades (military unit fighting for the government) in a liberated area in Al-Wazyia after breaking the last Houthi line of defense that had long-separated them.

"This is an important development since it not only breaks the siege but unifies the fronts against our common enemy," Al-Baher said, adding that troops were currently consolidating gains in Al-Wazyia as other forces pushed toward Al-Bareh.

If the advances continued at the same speed, government troops would be able to open another strategic road linking the city with Hodeidah and other Red Sea coastal areas, Al-Baher said.

Since early last week, Yemeni troops in Taiz have broken months of military stalemate in the city by launching a new offensive to push back the Houthis from the city's fringes and break the rebels' siege.

The army took over control of Jabal Habashy district and several strategic locations on the eastern and western edges of Taiz after killing and wounding dozens of Houthis.

State TV media showed images of soldiers retrieving tanks, armored personnel carriers, and rocket launchers abandoned by the defeated Houthis.

Al-Baher said a group of Houthi fighters, along with their leader, surrendered to the army as many others fled the battlefields.

Yemeni army commanders attributed Houthi setbacks in Taiz to long attrition by army troops and the rebels' mobilization of their highly trained military units in the central province of Marib.

The official news agency said Yemen's President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi, during a telephone conversation with Taiz Gov. Nabil Shamsan, ordered his troops in Taiz to press ahead with their military offensive until the Houthi siege had been ended.

After failing to seize control of the city's downtown during early military expansion across Yemen in 2015, the Houthis surrounded the densely populated city, blocking vital food and medical supply lines. The militia group has repeatedly shelled residential areas in Taiz, killing and wounding hundreds of civilians over the last six years.

Yemen's Defense Ministry said that army troops and allied tribesmen scored limited military gains on different fronts in the province of Marib.

The army seized control of a mountain in Al-Kasara, west of Marib, after killing, wounding, and capturing dozens of Houthis.

In other contested areas in Marib such as Murad, Serwah, and Helan, government troops took defensive positions, focusing on pushing back Houthis as warplanes from the Arab coalition targeted Houthi military reinforcements and locations.

Hadi called Yemini defense minister, Mohammed Al-Maqdashi, to congratulate government troops on their gains and repeated his order to the army to foil "Iran's scheme and its tools" in Yemen.



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Policeman killed, 7 wounded in Houthi drone attack in Yemen's TaizAden blast kills two soldiers as fighting rages in Taiz, Marib

[Guterres hails endorsement of interim unity government in Libya](#)

Author:

Thu, 2021-03-11 00:12

NEW YORK: UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Wednesday welcomed the endorsement by Libya's House of Representatives of the interim Government of National Unity as "an important step towards restoring unity, stability, security and prosperity" in the country.

He commended members of the House and the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum for their work in advancing the political process in Libya, and also praised the country's 5+5 Joint Military Commission and local authorities in Sirte for their efforts in securing the parliament's approval.

Guterres encouraged the new unity government to cooperate with the House of Representatives "to address the urgent needs of the Libyan people without delay, advance preparations for national elections on Dec. 24, 2021, and continue to work toward the full implementation of the ceasefire agreement of Oct. 23, 2020."

He also reiterated the support of the UN for the Libyan people in all their efforts to improve the peace and stability of their nation.



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Saudi Arabia welcomes Libya parliament's approval of unity government
Libya's parliament approves Cabinet after decade of chaos

[Sinwar re-elected as Hamas chief in Gaza](#)

Thu, 2021-03-11 02:16

GAZA: Yehya Al-Sinwar has been re-elected to head Hamas in the Gaza Strip for a second term, officials said on Wednesday, reflecting his control over both political and military wings of the group that rules the Palestinian enclave.

Sinwar, Hamas leader in Gaza since 2017, was freed in a 2011 prisoner swap with Israel after spending more than 20 years behind bars.

While he supports Hamas' opposition to coexistence with Israel, Sinwar has maintained a relatively stable standoff across the Gaza border.

He has also sought improved ties with Egypt, which maintains restrictions along its frontier with Gaza, a small Mediterranean coastal territory.

"Sinwar's victory shows the man maintains a strong grip on things inside the movement, especially within its vital components such as the military wing,"

said Gaza political analyst Adnan Abu Amer. “The win will enable Sinwar to pursue his policies, whether inside Gaza or with regional countries and the handling of the conflict with Israel.”

Sinwar’s main challenger in the election, which is only open to Hamas members including those in Israeli prisons, was Nizar Awadallah, a long-time official and co-negotiator of the 2011 swap deal.



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Hamas restricts travel of Palestinians in Gaza ‘Secretive’ Hamas elections spark internal party row

[Yemen urges probe into fatal Sanaa migrant detention fire](#)

Tue, 2021-03-09 22:54

AL-MUKALLA: Yemen’s government and human rights activists have called for the formation of an international inquiry to examine the death of dozens of African migrants inside a detention camp in Houthi-controlled Sanaa on Sunday.

The Yemeni government has accused the Houthis of recruiting detained migrants to fight in the civil war. The migrants were said to have burned to death in a fire after protesting against mistreatment and poor conditions inside a detention facility.

"We strongly condemn the horrific crime committed in migrant detentions run by the terrorist Houthi militia in the seized capital, Sanaa, which led to the death and injury of hundreds of them, who were buried in a mass grave – a Houthi attempts to cover up the crime," Yemen's Information Minister Muammer Al-Aryani said.

He added: "We call for a transparent and independent international investigation to reveal details of the crime and hold the perpetrators to account, pressure Houthis to stop recruiting and exploiting refugees in combat, release all detainees in respect of Yemen's obligations and ensure freedom of movement or voluntary return."

The fire on Sunday occurred in a detention center in Sanaa, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) said.

"The total number of migrants who died in the fire at the Immigration, Passports and Naturalization Authority Immigration Holding Facility remains unconfirmed, as official records have yet to be released. More than 170 people have been treated for injuries, with many in critical condition," the IOM said in a statement seen by Arab News.

Local Yemeni media reports and government officials said that "several hundreds" were killed or wounded in the blaze and that Houthi rebels had suppressed information about the incident in order to avoid an international backlash.

Majed Fadhail, deputy minister of human rights, told Arab News that "up to 500 migrants" were killed or injured in the fire. Quoting local medical sources, the Yemeni news agency Yemen Press Network (Yazaan) reported that the number of deaths numbered 50, and that about 130 migrants, including dozens of critical cases, were injured.

The UN migration agency said that the cause of the fire was unclear. But an anonymous local source told Arab News that hundreds of migrants had staged a riot inside the overcrowded detention center to protest against mistreatment, long detention periods and poor conditions.

Migrants blocked doors with blankets and mattresses to prevent detention guards from entering rooms to suppress the riot," the source said, adding that a guard threw an incendiary device inside the detention that ignited the blaze.

On Tuesday, the IOM warned that tightened security measures by Houthis had obstructed their teams from reaching the injured migrants, and demanded the rebels to allow medical access and release the remaining migrants.

"We are facing challenges accessing the injured due to an increased security presence in the hospitals. Humanitarian and health workers must be given

access to support the treatment of those affected by the fire and others who have been receiving long-term care from IOM and partners,” said Carmela Godeau, IOM regional director for the Middle East and North Africa.

Yemen’s Foreign Minister Ahmed Awadh bin Mubarak sent his condolences to the Ethiopian government over the death of Ethiopian citizens in the fire, and vowed to provide them with medical care and hold the perpetrators accountable.

“We affirm we’ll make every effort with the relevant international organizations to reach the survivors, provide them with the necessary care, uncover the circumstances of this traumatic incident – for which Houthis are responsible – and hold those in charge accountable,” he said on Twitter.



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Saudi-led Arab coalition intercepts Houthi drone launched towards Khamis Mushait Officials say at least 30 African migrants drown near Yemen