

# Million across Yemen 'just a step away from famine', with food available but inaccessible

While nearly 10 million people across Yemen remain “just a step away from famine”, the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator has spoken of his deep concern that a large food storage depot on the outskirts of the crucial port city of Hudaydah, has been out of bounds since last September.

“Enough grain to feed 3.7 million people for a month has sat unused and possibly spoiling in silos at the mills for more than four months”, said Mark Lowcock, in a statement on the depot, known as the Red Sea Mills. “No-one gains anything from this, but millions of starving people suffer”.

The [World Food Programme](#) (WFP) alone, has 51,000 metric tons of wheat stored there, a quarter of its in-country wheat stock and enough to feed 3.7 million people for a month. WFP has been unable to access the Mills since September 2018 because of fighting.

These events are to be deplored –*UN Humanitarian Coordinator*

Last month two silos in the Government-controlled area were hit by mortar fire, probably destroying enough grain to feed hundreds of thousands of people for a month.

“These events are to be deplored” stressed Mr. Lowcock.

Access to the mills grows progressively more urgent as the longer they remain inaccessible, and the risk of grain spoilage is growing each day.

Citing security concerns, forces affiliated with the Houthi rebels, formally-known as Ansar Allah, have, to date, not allowed the UN to cross front lines to access the mills.

According to Mr. Lowcock, discussions continue with all parties. “I appreciate the genuine efforts that have been made on all sides to find a solution”, he said, “but it remains elusive”. He implored all parties “to finalize an agreement and facilitate access to the mills in the coming days”.

Meanwhile, the UN and its humanitarian partners are scaling up to reach 12 million people with emergency food assistance – a 50 per cent increase over 2018.

In December, the World Food Programme (WFP) reached a record 10 million people.

“We can save huge numbers of people, most of them in areas controlled by Ansar Allah” concluded Mr. Lowcock, “But we need more help to do that from the authorities who control these areas”.

Earlier this week, the Security Council stressed the “[vital importance](#)” of making progress towards a political agreement to end the conflict and “relieve the humanitarian suffering of the Yemeni people”.

### **‘Challenges remain’ implementing first steps of Stockholm peace deal**

Meanwhile, in talks brokered by UN aimed at delivering the Hudaydah Agreement, which grew out of historic consultations between Government and Houthi leaders in Stockholm at the end of last year, challenges remain, the UN told correspondents in New York on Thursday.

The Redeployment Coordination Committee (RCC) met again, ending a session on Wednesday, which involves both sides, chaired by General Michael Lollesgaard, who is heading a team of UN observers and monitors, trying to negotiate the withdrawal of fighters from the Houthi-held port city, stabilize the fragile ceasefire, and open new humanitarian corridors.

“Nevertheless, challenges remain, not least the complex nature of the current frontlines,” said UN Spokesperson, Stephane Dujarric, adding that “to help overcome these issues, the RCC Chair tabled a proposal that proved acceptable, in principle, to both parties to move forward on the implementation of the Hudaydah Agreement. A preliminary compromise was agreed, pending further consultation by the parties with their respective leaders.”

He added that “both parties have given a firm commitment to observe and enhance the ceasefire in the interim”.