

Speech: Addressing Threat of Famine in Yemen

Thank you very much indeed Mr President. I apologize also to Mark that a previous engagement delayed my coming into the Chamber, but thank you very much Mark for another sobering briefing.

It is very good that the UN can report swiftly to the Council in line with Resolution 2417, whenever the risk of conflict-induced famine and widespread food insecurity in armed conflict contexts occurs. In that Resolution 2417, this Council expressed its intention to give its full attention to such information the Secretary-General provides. As we all know on the Council, Yemen has been one of those issues that the Council follows very deeply and is gravely concerned about. I am pleased to see the Ambassador has joined us today.

The numbers you have cited Mark are truly horrifying. The scale is of very grave concern and the fact that the crisis does not seem to be getting better is also something that the Council needs to take a deep interest in.

The figures, I won't repeat them, but the fact that they are in the millions ought to be very salutary for us to think about. And the acute malnourishment of nearly 2 million children under the age of five in particular is a warning call. I understand that nearly 400,000 of those children suffer from severe acute malnutrition and that's a life threatening condition and it requires urgent treatment.

The highest number of severe acute malnutrition cases is in Hodeidah governorate – some 100,000 cases. After airstrikes in late July resulted in the damage of the main sanitation facility and water supply, suspected cholera cases almost doubled and that of course increases the risk of a new wave of cholera. Only the humanitarian response is containing an outbreak like last year's and a further disruption of humanitarian operations could have, as Mark said, catastrophic consequences.

Mark – you asked for increased funding and more support to humanitarian operations. Those efforts from the UAE and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are welcome. For the UK, we are determined to play our part. On World Food Day on 16 October, the United Kingdom announced a package of over \$125 million, which we hope will help UNICEF tackle malnutrition in Yemen.

But funding alone will not be enough to address the growing risk of famine. We need urgent action by all parties on the economy, imports and access, and protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure.

Mr President, I wanted to highlight four issues in particular.

Firstly, about the economy: We share the concern about the rapid depreciation of the Yemeni Riyal. Soaring prices putting several basic commodities out of

reach for many Yemenis and the central bank struggling to pay public-sector salaries. We look to the Government of Yemen and the Central Bank to take urgent action to stabilise the Riyal – for example by issuing promised letters of credit to Yemeni commercial food importers. Until that happens, we also suggest that the Government of Yemen pause implementation of Decree 75, which is preventing staple goods such as wheat, cooking oil and rice getting into the country at a time when they are most needed.

Secondly, unhindered access for commercial and humanitarian food and fuel into and throughout Yemen is essential if famine is to be avoided. The conflict is cutting off important transport routes, including the main route between Hodeidah and Sanaa and alternatives become more congested and more vulnerable. For their part, the Houthis must stop interfering with the humanitarian response so that food, fuel and medicines reach those most in need throughout the North.

Thirdly, it is essential that military operations be conducted in accordance with international humanitarian law. This includes protection of civilians and it includes protection of civilian infrastructure. We have consistently made this clear in the Council, but I repeat it again today. Not only is it important that military operations proceed with regard to the principles of proportionality, precaution and distinction, it is also the case that further damage to food infrastructure, such as mills and wheat silos threaten already fragile food supplies.

Fourthly and lastly, as we have made clear – only a political settlement will enable the worsening humanitarian crisis to be properly addressed and will bring long-term stability to Yemen. We call on all parties to engage constructively and in good faith with UN Special Envoy's efforts to bring about a political settlement. We look forward to hearing from Martin Griffiths again in this Council. We last heard from the Special Envoy on 11 September following disappointing news from Geneva. We support his efforts which have continued since then, and we look forward to further update in the coming weeks on progress towards reaching agreement between the parties on confidence-building measures and a broader framework agreement.

On the four points that Mark has made – some of which I have covered now – I think they deserve very urgent consideration by the Council.

Thank you.