

# Yemen's leaders must act now to prevent coronavirus catastrophe

On 27 April, Abdulaziz Alqadhi, a local furniture store owner from Al Mansourah in Aden, became Yemen's first officially recorded coronavirus fatality. A day later, his brother Ahmed fell victim to Covid-19 too. In the weeks since many Yemenis have lost loved ones to this deadly virus. Across Yemen, the spread of the infection is likely to be far higher than official data suggests. Sadly, this is just the beginning.

Yemen is of course not alone in its exposure to this global pandemic, but in Yemen Covid-19 is menacing a country already devastated by five years of war, hunger and disease. Over the coming months, many more Yemenis will die from coronavirus – be it from the virus itself or its impact on the already fragile economy and health sector. How Yemen's leaders respond to this threat will determine how many more Yemenis lose their lives.

There is an opportunity for positive action. But it is deeply concerning that some of Yemen's leaders have shirked their responsibilities and sought to use the crisis to serve their own narrow agendas. We have heard reports of the Houthis blaming migrants for the outbreak and stopping cases of coronavirus being recorded. We must see through this smoke screen.

Across the country, needless restrictions on the international humanitarian response are preventing aid from getting to those that need it most. The UN, the WHO and international NGOs are doing all they can to save Yemeni lives. We have provided £810 million in UK aid to provide food, water and sanitation since the conflict began. But these humanitarian organisations can only do what Yemen's leaders allow them to. In Houthi-controlled areas, these restrictions are so severe that they are preventing the delivery of aid to millions of people in need, meaning some donors have had no choice but to suspend their funding at the time when Yemen needs aid most. I call on Yemen's leaders to immediately facilitate humanitarian access and operations to help us win the fight against coronavirus.

Ultimately, the biggest impediment to the fight against the coronavirus remains Yemen's horrific conflict. In this respect, the recent Houthi aggression towards Marib and the conflict in the south are especially concerning. The Southern Transitional Council's self-rule declaration and latest campaign of violence only complicate UN efforts to tackle the coronavirus outbreak and reverse progress towards ending this war.

On 25 March, UN Secretary-General Guterres – backed by the UK and all permanent members of the UN Security Council – called for a nationwide ceasefire in Yemen. This statement was welcomed unconditionally by all parties and, on 9 April, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia took the decision to announce a unilateral ceasefire in Yemen and to limit its military activities to purely defensive operations. In spite of the determined efforts by the UN Special Envoy, Martin Griffiths, the Yemeni parties have not yet agreed to

the UN's proposals for a nationwide ceasefire, humanitarian and economic measures, and a political process that can end this grim conflict.

The UN's proposals are Yemen's best hope of peace and of limiting the destruction of the Covid pandemic. The decision to do so now rests in the hands of Yemen's leaders. I encourage them to take the courageous steps needed to accelerate their engagement with the UN on Griffiths' proposals and to agree urgently a nationwide ceasefire to spare Yemeni lives from coronavirus. Political games, aggressive statements and provocative social media have no place.

Yemen was already one of the world's most desperate humanitarian disasters. Under the shadow of coronavirus, it now faces a tragedy of unimaginable scale. For the sake of all Yemenis, Yemen's leaders must now park their differences and agree a political solution to fight coronavirus in Yemen and provide a pathway out of this wretched conflict. This needs to include urgent steps to: facilitate humanitarian access; free political prisoners – including detained British national Luke Symons; reach agreement on a nationwide ceasefire; and build humanitarian and economic confidence. These responsible actions are within their power.

It is the time to act. Actions, not words, are how the Yemeni people – and indeed the world – will judge their leaders. Millions of lives depend on it.

### **Further information**

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## **[UK provides new home for 478 children seeking asylum](#)**

The UK government announced today that it has successfully completed the transfer of 478 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) under section 67 of the Immigration Act 2016. Amongst some of the most vulnerable children in Europe seeking asylum, this important work has given them an opportunity to start a new life in the UK.

Today's announcement has demonstrated that the UK continues to build on its long and proud history of offering protection to those who need it.

In 2016, the government committed to transfer 480 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children displaced in Europe. The UK granted protection to over 7,320 children in the year ending March 2020 and more than 44,900 children since 2010 through a range of legal pathways, including asylum and through our world leading refugee resettlement schemes. The government has worked closely with local authorities to place children into appropriate care.

Transfers began following the French authorities' clearance of the Calais

camp in 2016, and there remain two outstanding transfers delayed as a result of coronavirus. They will be safely completed at the earliest opportunity.

Minister for Immigration Compliance, Chris Philp, said:

We have made clear that protecting vulnerable children is a key priority for this government and the progress we have made – with generous support from local authorities – underlines our commitment to that.

The UK provides a number of legal routes for those seeking protection and we will continue to offer a range of support for those who often need it most.

In 2019, the UK received more asylum applications from unaccompanied children than any country in the EU and accounted for approximately 20% of all UASC claims made in the UK and the 27 EU Member States. The UK offered protection – in the form of asylum, humanitarian protection, alternative forms of leave and resettlement – to 20,339 people in the year ending March 2020, 17% higher than the previous year.

UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Representative to the UK, Rossella Pagliuchi-Lor, said:

The section 67 scheme has been a lifeline for 480 extremely vulnerable unaccompanied and separated children, who were identified with the support of UNHCR and partners.

Programmes such as this assist over-burdened host states, and prevent children from making dangerous journeys in search of safety.

UNHCR will keep supporting pathways to protection in the UK like transfers of asylum-seekers under the Dublin III regulation, bringing refugee family members here under family reunion visas, and through the UK's new global resettlement program.

Under the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS), the government is now close to hitting its target of resettling 20,000 vulnerable refugees affected by the Syrian civil war, with 19,768 vulnerable refugees – many of whom children – resettled since September 2015.

Due to coronavirus related restrictions on movements both overseas and in the UK, it is not currently possible to undertake any refugee resettlement activity, but this commitment will be met as soon as possible once conditions allow.

Last year the UK received more unaccompanied asylum-seeking children than any EU country accounting for 20% of all cases reported in the EU and UK. As a

result, local authorities are looking after more than 5,000 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and we are working to support them with this, particularly as a result of pressures brought on by coronavirus.

The UK continues to work with our European neighbours and plays a leading role on the world stage in providing international protection to the most vulnerable.

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## [Harm-benefit analysis review: minister's reply to the ASC's recommendations](#)

Following the publication of the ASC's report on harm-benefit analysis, Baroness Williams has written to Professor David Main to accept the recommendations directed to the Animals in Science Regulation Unit for implementation and to provide details of the Home Office response to the recommendations.

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## [Arrest and detention of journalists and demonstrators in Belarus: UK statement](#)

World news story

Delivered by Helen Teasdale, First Secretary at the UK Delegation to the OSCE, at the virtual OSCE Permanent Council on 21 May 2020.



The United Kingdom is concerned about the recent arrest and detention in Belarus of over 100 people, including independent journalists, social media actors, human rights defenders and peaceful environmental demonstrators. The UK shares the concerns expressed by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media that the detainees include journalists, who have been subject to imprisonment and administrative fines when they were reportedly merely observing and covering public gatherings.

As the co-host with Canada of last year's Global Conference for Media Freedom, which Belarus attended, the United Kingdom wishes to underline the importance of freedom of the media and freedom of expression more broadly as an essential quality of a functioning democracy. People must be allowed to debate issues freely, to question their governments and to make decisions, informed by a strong and robust media.

The United Kingdom is monitoring the situation closely and supports the Representative on Freedom of the Media's call for the release of all those detained journalists, social media actors and all peaceful demonstrators, who were exercising their right to freedom of expression. The United Kingdom urges Belarus to uphold their OSCE commitments, including those from the Copenhagen Meeting of 1990, reaffirmed in the 1999 Istanbul Summit Declaration, on human rights and fundamental freedoms, including to ensure freedom of the media as a basic condition for pluralistic and democratic societies.

We would welcome an update from the Delegation of Belarus on the number of detainees who have been released.

Published 21 May 2020

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## **[Detention of Yuri Dmitriev in the Russian Federation: UK statement](#)**

The United Kingdom remains deeply concerned by the ongoing detention of Mr Yuri Dmitriev, prominent historian and Head of Memorial's Karelia branch. We call for his release from pre-trial detention as an immediate first step.

The persecution of Mr Dmitriev began in December 2016, when he was detained in relation to his possession of nine photographs of his daughter. Acquitted in April 2018 of deeply questionable charges of child pornography, Mr Dmitriev was regrettably again remanded into custody in June 2018.

On 7 May, the Karelia Supreme Court upheld a lower Court's decision to prolong the detention of Yuri Dmitriev until 25 June 2020.

As has been previously stated at the Permanent Council, the case against Mr Dmitriev was widely seen as a politically-motivated prosecution, linked to his work as a historian and representative of Memorial, who has dedicated his life to investigating crimes committed during the Stalinist era. He has worked tirelessly over three decades to document mass graves in the Karelia region of North-West Russia and identify the individual victims within them. His arrest, in December 2016 came two months after the International Memorial Society was included on the register of “foreign agents” by the Russian authorities, and one month after Russian state media accused Memorial of helping – quote – “those who aim to destroy the Russian state”. – unquote

No-one should be targeted as a result of their work to document and establish the truth about historical human rights violations.

We remind the Russian Federation of their OSCE commitments on Human Rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law. In particular, we highlight the extensive OSCE commitments made in Copenhagen in 1990, including the presumption of innocence and the right to a fair trial; the reaffirmation of those commitments in the 1991 Moscow Document; and the Ljubljana Decision of 2005 on Upholding Human Rights and the Rule of Law in Criminal Justice Systems.

We also remind the Russian Federation of their commitments, freely entered into, in Helsinki in 1975 and in Copenhagen in 1990, to ensure “the right of the individual to know and act upon his rights and duties in this field” and “the right of everyone, individually or in association with others, to seek, receive and impart freely views and information on human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the rights to disseminate and publish such views and information”.

The Russian Federation has a responsibility to protect human rights defenders and to ensure that all individuals in the Russian Federation are able to know and act upon their rights. We reiterate our call for the immediate release of Yuri Dmitriev.