

Written Statement of Robert Jenkins, Deputy Assistant Administrator, Bureau for Democracy,  
Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance, USAID  
“U.S. Policy Towards Yemen”  
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Senator Corker, Ranking Member Menendez, Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today, alongside my distinguished colleagues from the Departments of State and Defense. Our Administrator, Mark Green, likes to paraphrase your fellow Senator John McCain, when he asks of our Agency, “The world is on fire. What are we going to do about it?” We at USAID strive to put out those fires. Unfortunately Yemen is now the single largest humanitarian crisis in the world and we are working hard to put out the fires there. Along with our interagency colleagues, other donors and our implementing partners who work tirelessly every day in Sana’a, in Taiz, in Aden, we have sought to address these dire needs, which I will speak to today. We are also looking towards a day when there is a lasting, political solution in Yemen that will allow the fighting to end and enable the country to develop its own path towards self-reliance. Until that day comes, we must do all that we can to alleviate the human suffering we see in Yemen, as both a moral and national security imperative.

The humanitarian crisis we see in Yemen today is exacerbated by the Yemeni Government’s collapse in parts of the country. The current conflict has been ongoing since Houthi attacks against the Yemeni Government began nearly four years ago. This violence between the Houthis, armed by the Iranian regime, and Yemeni Government forces, backed by military support from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, has devolved into a civil war amongst multiple, growing factions, driven in part by regional powers. Political instability, a security vacuum, and fractured governance have allowed extremist groups to expand their areas of influence. Meanwhile, more than 75 percent of the country—or more than 22 million people—need humanitarian assistance. To put that into perspective, that’s more than one and a half times the entire populations of Tennessee and New Jersey, combined.

The ongoing conflict has resulted in an estimated 10,000 civilian deaths and is also the reason why two million people are still unable to return home after fleeing for safety. Fighting has hampered commercial trade, which is devastating in a country that traditionally imports 90 percent of its food and most of its fuel and medicine. Infrastructure has been destroyed, leaving 16 million people without access to clean water or working toilets. Salaries aren’t getting paid. These conditions are unlikely to change unless until there is durable political resolution to the conflict. It is imperative that all parties to the conflict protect civilians and aid workers, who work at great personal risk to assist people in need.

## **Looming Famine in a Man-Made Crisis**

Food insecurity in Yemen has wavered on the edge of famine for more than three years largely due to the war's impact on import trade and financial system. Of the 17.8 million Yemenis who are food insecure, there are more than 460,000 children who are severely malnourished. Food that does make it to market is increasingly expensive, with some items doubling in price as supplies are unpredictable. As over half the population is unemployed, these price increases dramatically affect the amount of basic necessities people can afford, including food and water. As the conflict goes on, the worst-affected households are forced to take sell assets and incur debt; eventually, they could experience famine conditions even without additional disruptions to imports and humanitarian assistance.

Despite these dire conditions, humanitarian actors on the ground are providing food assistance to millions every month, across the country, and this has helped keep Yemen from falling over that edge. For all the hungry Yemenis, who do not know how they will afford bread or who are dependent on food aid, being on the edge is tragic enough.

## **Health Impacts of the Crisis**

Four years of conflict have disrupted more than Yemen's food supply. During a major food crisis like this, preventable disease is often the leading cause of death. In many cases, diseases like cholera also inhibit the ability to treat malnutrition, and must be treated first.

The ongoing conflict has left Yemen's health system heavily reliant on humanitarian aid to maintain routine services. Half of the health facilities are not fully operational and more than 16 million people are unable to access basic health care.

Yemen is currently facing the world's largest cholera outbreak. There are more than one million suspected cases and the outbreak has claimed the lives of nearly 2,300 people. Contaminated drinking water, unsafe hygiene practices, a lack of sanitation services, and a crippled health care system are big contributors to the rise of cholera in Yemen. Although new cases have been declining since October, the rainy season could lead to resurgence. And while there are considerable emergency efforts to contain the current outbreak, until the conflict subsides and longer-term prevention programs can address these underlying conditions that enable cholera to spread, the probability of future outbreaks remains high. These conditions also make fertile ground for the spread of other diseases. Diphtheria—a highly infectious respiratory disease that mainly affects children—has also taken hold and has reached more than 1,400 suspected cases.

## **Erosion of Infrastructure and Financial System**

The conflict has eroded Yemen's infrastructure and financial system, in a country that was already amongst the poorest in the region before the recent crisis. Between 2015 and 2017, Yemen's economy contracted by over 47 percent, according to official Yemeni government

sources. Yemen is facing a major liquidity crisis and the banking system is in turmoil. Oil and gas exports, which were previously a key source of foreign exchange, have largely come to a halt and public expenditure has fallen steeply. Vulnerable Yemenis are forced to resort to increasingly desperate measures, such as child marriage, in order to secure household financial needs. This is aggravated by the Central Bank of Yemen's (CBY) lack of capacity and connectivity with Houthi-controlled Sana'a, which precludes it from performing basic functions and addressing larger monetary policy challenges. For example, the CBY is unable to manage monetary circulation across the country, perform basic banking supervision functions, or conduct transparent foreign exchange operations. As a result, salaries to more than one million government workers, including doctors and sanitation workers, haven't been paid consistently in 20 months, leaving a quarter of the population without a regular income. The government hasn't been able to regularly fund the operating budgets of key ministries, like the Ministry of Health, severely degrading the very fabric of basic services like medical care, sanitation, and education.

The effect on Yemenis' livelihoods and ability to support themselves and their families has been dire. Businesses have laid off over half their workers and agricultural activity - one of the main sources of employment for Yemenis - has been slashed in half. According to the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization, up to 45 percent of households have lost livestock, either selling them off intentionally to cover other basic or due to animal diseases.

The conflict is also throwing the future of Yemen's youth into jeopardy: Up to 2,500 schools can no longer be used because they are destroyed, damaged, host displaced families, or are occupied by the warring parties. These and other challenges have left two million children – over a quarter of Yemen's school-aged children - without access to schooling.

### **United States Response**

In the face of these needs, the United States and our partners are able to reach millions of people with life-saving aid, and the United States continues to mount a robust humanitarian response. Since the start of Fiscal Year 2017, USAID has provided more than \$800 million in humanitarian assistance. Over the last six months, USAID's partner the World Food Programme (WFP) has consistently reached an average of seven million people each month with emergency food assistance. These programs provide in-kind food aid, food vouchers, and nutrition services.

We also helped deliver four U.S.-funded mobile cranes to assist in throughput at Hudaydah port to replace cranes that were damaged from the conflict. The cranes arrived in Hudaydah port on January 15th and after obtaining required customs clearance and insurance, they offloaded their first supplies on February 9th. These cranes can increase port capacity by as much as 40 percent and cut vessel discharge time in half.

In response to the ongoing health crisis in Yemen, USAID is providing medical supplies, and supporting mobile health clinics to bring much-needed emergency medical services to people in

need. We are also providing hygiene kits, safe drinking water, and improved access to sanitation services to fight malnutrition and stave off disease. USAID is supporting 70 cholera treatment centers and 110 oral rehydration centers to ensure that people get the medical attention they need, and has provided nearly 7.4 million water purification tablets—enough to provide safe drinking water to nearly 838,000 people for one month.

For children especially, the toll of conflict can have lasting effects. Our mobile protection teams provide treatment to children throughout the country.

In addition, the US coordinates closely with other donors, including the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) and The European Committee on Humanitarian Operations (ECHO). The US particularly welcomes the recent pledges from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait of more than \$1 billion to fund the humanitarian response in Yemen. Contributions from other countries ensure that more needy Yemenis receive life-saving aid and complement the support provided by the United States.

There is no doubt that our humanitarian programs are saving lives. According to the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET), without the large-scale, international humanitarian assistance currently being provided to partners in Yemen, the food security situation would be significantly worse across Yemen. FEWSNET also predicts a credible threat of famine this year, if imports decrease and markets are further restricted.

Humanitarian assistance is critical in Yemen, but on its own will not prevent the collapse of key social and economic institutions, stem the tide of conflict, or build the resilience of Yemen to future shocks. For this reason, USAID is also expanding its assistance beyond emergency needs to better align with the scale of the crisis and help put the country on a path to recovery and prevent continued dependence on humanitarian aid. We are doing so under the umbrella of a flexible, strategic approach that emphasizes adaptability and learning and in close coordination with USAID's humanitarian offices and with other donors.

To address the financial and longer-term needs, USAID is providing technical assistance to the CBY to help restore basic functionality in its core services. We are also working at the local level to help Yemenis restore their access to income in sustainable ways through livelihood and employment generation activities. Through our partners, we're helping improve basic health services like childhood immunization, primary and health care for mothers and children. We're also rehabilitating water systems, restoring access and re-entry to basic education along with providing school supplies, and providing psychosocial support for children impacted by the crisis that has interrupted their childhood.

Looking forward, if there are openings in the future, we are preparing a series of additional activities that would support stabilization and restoration of essential services in Yemen, as well

as address community level fragility and social cohesion. By addressing these underlying conditions, we can empower Yemenis to build a sustainable future.

### **Ongoing Challenges to Providing Aid**

Despite the efforts by USAID and its partners operating on the ground, we face significant challenges in providing assistance to those in need. To reach these people, our humanitarian partners navigate active conflict zones, checkpoints, bureaucratic impediments, and heavily damaged infrastructure. The biggest challenge we face is access. Because of the security concerns, armed actors, and shifting lines of conflict, relief workers have a very difficult time gaining access to those who need help the most.

Another challenge is the ability for importers to bring in commercial goods, critical to the meet the needs in this country that relies so heavily on commodities from elsewhere. Since Yemen has traditionally imported 90 percent of its food and most of its fuel and medicines, overall and imported the majority through Yemen's largest port, Hudaydah, keeping this port open is critical to both humanitarian response and commercial imports. With millions of people in Yemen on the brink of famine, a closure of the largest port Hudaydah would have dire consequences in an already critical situation. While the port is now open, import levels at all of Yemen's Red Sea ports have yet to recover following November 2017 Coalition-imposed closures, as commercial shipping companies remain concerned about the potential reinstatement of port restrictions and the Houthis continue attacks against Red Sea shipping.. We continue to call on all parties to the conflict to allow unfettered humanitarian access into and throughout Yemen, in order to save lives and reduce suffering.

### **The Path Forward for Yemen**

While the United States remains committed to relieving the suffering of the Yemeni people, humanitarian assistance alone cannot provide a solution to this conflict. This solution will only come through a comprehensive political agreement, and we fully support the work of our colleagues at the State Department, and the UN Special Envoy to Yemen toward that end. Addressing the complex crisis in Yemen requires all of the U.S. Government's tools: humanitarian assistance, and the three D's of development, defense, and diplomacy, so I'm grateful that you've called us all before you today. Thank you for your time, and I look forward to answering your questions.