

Senate Foreign Relations Committee Subcommittee on Near East, South Asia, Central Asia, and Counterterrorism

U.S. Policy on Yemen: Panel 2

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Statement of Amanda Catanzano, Senior Director, International Programs Policy and Advocacy, International Rescue Committee (IRC)

Chairman Murphy, Ranking Member Young, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for convening this hearing on Yemen's humanitarian crisis. Your focus on Yemen as the first hearing of this subcommittee is not just admirable, it's critical. The crisis - already regarded as the world's worst - threatens to spiral out of control. Yemenis are facing unprecedented challenges in 2021. Conflict is raging; the economy is imploding; starvation is looming. Against this grim backdrop, the humanitarian response is at risk of collapse as warring parties impede the flow of aid and donors turn away from the record needs.

I speak on behalf of the International Rescue Committee (IRC), a humanitarian organization with over 400 staff, mainly Yemenis, on the ground in the country. We provide lifesaving aid and services to Yemenis across eight governorates - in areas under the de facto control of Ansar Allah in the North and of the Internationally Recognized Government (IRG) in the South. Generous US government funding has helped support our work in Yemen since 2012.

The IRC is one of the largest non-governmental health actors in Yemen, where only half of health facilities are functional and even fewer provide maternal or child healthcare services. Last year, the IRC supported 84 health clinics - providing health services for over 600,000 Yemenis. We helped over 14,000 women deliver their babies safely, treated nearly 30,000 children under 5 for malnutrition, and helped thousands of pregnant and lactating mothers learn healthy feeding practices to prevent malnutrition. We also support mobile health teams to reach Yemenis in remote areas and displacement camps. Beyond health care, we provide education, clean water, emergency cash, job training, and support for women and children who have been the victims of violence.

We hope today's discussion will focus not just on Yemen's cycle of crisis, but on the concrete humanitarian, economic and political actions necessary to break it. After six years, Yemenis are desperate to have the US and the international community on their side, rather than as actors in a conflict that could take a half a million Yemeni lives or more.

**2021 could be Yemen's worst year yet**

When the IRC began working in Yemen in 2012, the country already faced steep humanitarian and development challenges. It was the poorest Arab country, with half of its population living in poverty. It ranked 153rd on the Human Development Index and 147th in life expectancy.<sup>1</sup> But the levels of misery have grown exponentially since the conflict escalated in 2015. Since 2017, the UN has consistently labeled Yemen the world's worst humanitarian crisis. The bottom continues to drop out because the relentlessness of this conflict and the cruelty with which it is conducted have eroded Yemenis' resilience and coping strategies. As such, Yemenis are worse off in 2021 by almost all measures than at any point in the conflict.

Today, Yemen has the world's largest population in need of aid at over 20 million. But the conflict has not produced a major refugee crisis. The closures of air and sea ports and land border crossings have prevented Yemenis from finding safety abroad. But the war has displaced four million Yemenis internally - the fourth highest number of internally displaced people (IDPs) globally.<sup>2</sup> Yemenis are trapped in a country where their most basic needs cannot be met, where warring parties are destroying lives at every turn - from the missiles

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan D. Moyer, David K. Bohl, Taylor Hanna, Brendan R. Mapes, Mickey Rafa, "Assessing the impact of war on development in Yemen," UNDP and Frederick S. Pardee Center for International Futures, April 2019, <https://yemen.un.org/sites/default/files/2019-09/Assessing%20the%20Impact%20of%20War%20on%20Development%20in%20Yemen.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> "Yemen Humanitarian Needs Overview 2021," UN OCHA, February 2021, p. 14, [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Yemen\\_HNO\\_2021\\_Final.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Yemen_HNO_2021_Final.pdf).

and artillery shells that decimate the infrastructure civilians depend on to purposeful currency manipulation that prices families out of basic goods to constraints on the imports of food, fuel and medicines that jeopardize the humanitarian response.

Today half of all Yemenis cannot access clean water, two-thirds lack access to health care, and half of Yemenis are going hungry.<sup>3</sup> In fact, more Yemenis have died and continue to suffer from these indirect impacts of war than from the violence itself. UNDP estimates that if the war lasts until 2022 there will be nearly half a million deaths. Two-thirds of these deaths would be due to the indirect impacts of the conflict.<sup>4</sup>

As the conflict enters its seventh year the situation continues to unravel; famine alarms are ringing louder than ever as 16 million Yemenis, over 50% of the population, are already going hungry. 50,000 may be experiencing famine-like conditions with five million more on the brink.<sup>5</sup> Half of all children under the age of 5 are acutely malnourished - the highest levels ever recorded - and 400,000 children are at risk of dying without treatment.<sup>6</sup>

COVID-19 has been devastating in Yemen - both in terms of its direct health impacts but arguably more from its impacts on the economy. And a second wave is descending on the country with case counts jumping by nearly 400% in March and a frighteningly high case fatality rate that indicates the real case numbers are likely much higher.<sup>7</sup> But the pandemic that is at the forefront of Americans' minds barely registers for our clients given the severity of all the other crises facing them. They repeatedly tell us they are more concerned about hunger than COVID-19.

My colleagues report that families that were barely making it through the crisis are now no longer able to do so. After six years of conflict and economic crisis, many Yemenis have exhausted their savings and sold off all valuable assets like property or livestock. Families are making decisions no family should have to; some are pulling their children out of school and sending them to work or to beg in the streets or marrying off daughters to drive down household expenses. The rate of forced and early marriage of girls has more than doubled since the war started with as many as two-thirds of Yemeni girls married while they are still children.<sup>8</sup>

### **Pushed to brink by conflict, economic collapse, and constraints on access**

We have no right to be shocked by these numbers or the warning of famine yet again in Yemen. To describe this unraveling as a tragedy would miss the point. Yemen's cycle of crisis is not an accident. It is the predictable outcome of political failure and a war that has put civilians - and the systems that sustain them - in the crosshairs. A hunger crisis is what happens when nearly 1,000 markets, farms and food storage locations are bombed.<sup>9</sup> When health facilities are unable to function and treat illnesses like malnutrition - because they have been bombed, or lack fuel for power, or basic supplies to care for patients. When the international community cuts aid in half and five million fewer Yemenis are able to access life-saving aid each month.<sup>10</sup>

Yemen has topped IRC's annual Watchlist for three years running - not just as the world's worst crisis but as the one at greatest risk of further deterioration. Because while the crisis is protracted it is by no means static. It continues to plumb new depths due to intensifying violence, economic warfare, and continued constraints on humanitarian access - all conducted without regard for civilian welfare and carried out with impunity. Yemenis are forced to confront each new shock with fewer resources and resilience.

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<sup>3</sup> Yemen Humanitarian Needs Overview 2021," p. 8.

<sup>4</sup> "Assessing the impact of war on development in Yemen."

<sup>5</sup> "Yemen: Integrated Food Insecurity Phase Classification Snapshot October 2020 - June 2021," IPC Info, December 3, 2020, [http://www.ipcinfo.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/ipcinfo/docs/IPC\\_Yemen\\_Acute\\_Food\\_Insecurity\\_2020Oct2021June\\_Snapshot.pdf](http://www.ipcinfo.org/fileadmin/user_upload/ipcinfo/docs/IPC_Yemen_Acute_Food_Insecurity_2020Oct2021June_Snapshot.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> "Yemen: 'Toxic mix' imperils lives of under-fives with acute malnutrition," UN News, February 12, 2021, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/02/1084572>.

<sup>7</sup> WHO Coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard, World Health Organization, accessed April 17, 2021, <https://covid19.who.int/region/emro/country/ye>.

<sup>8</sup> "From Yemen, A cry for help," UNFPA, December 1, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/yemen-cry-help>.

<sup>9</sup> IRC analysis from "Six Years of the Saudi-led Air War in Yemen," Yemen Data Project, 25 March 2021, <https://us16.campaign-archive.com/?u=1912a1b11cab332fa977d3a6a&id=dfa2bd5a04>.

<sup>10</sup> "Under Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mark Lowcock, Briefing to the Security Council on humanitarian situation in Yemen," UN OCHA, April 15, 2021, <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/under-secretary-general-humanitarian-affairs-and-emergency-relief-coordinator-mark-38>.

**First, conflict is escalating - forcing Yemenis to contend not just with the war's destructive legacy but its continued daily horrors.**

Yemenis are suffering from the effects of six years of a cruelly conducted war that has eroded resilience and coping strategies and made recovery nearly impossible. Since 2015, there have been ten air raids every day, on average. In attacks where the target could be identified, nearly half hit civilian infrastructure. Over the course of the war, an airstrike has hit a school roughly every six days; a water or electricity site every two weeks. Markets have been attacked every ten days; farms every three days despite a hunger crisis.<sup>11</sup>

Over 130,000 people have been killed as a direct result of the violence.<sup>12</sup> Last year, an airstrike hit a residential site on average every three days<sup>13</sup> - making the home the most likely place where a Yemeni civilian is injured or killed.<sup>14</sup> Women and children are at even higher risk when conflict reaches residential areas. As a result, one in four deaths is a child.<sup>15</sup>

These are shocking indictments of the warring parties, who have spurned international humanitarian law with impunity. A 2020 report from the Group of Eminent Experts on Yemen found that war crimes have likely been committed by all sides to the conflict and yet there have been no meaningful attempts at accountability.<sup>16</sup>

Yemenis live in fear of the next escalation. After a relative lull since late 2018, conflict activity is spiking. The number of front lines exploded from 33 to 49 in 2020.<sup>17</sup> Airstrikes by the Saudi-led Coalition rose by 82% in 2020 compared to 2019 - the first increase in three years.<sup>18</sup> Over the past year, fighting has escalated in Marib governorate, where millions of Yemenis had fled in search of safety. Marib's population today is estimated to be up to ten times higher than the pre-war population.<sup>19</sup> This safe haven is now in the crosshairs. For the past year, Marib has been bombed and shelled more than any other Yemeni governorate. In the first quarter of 2021, Marib saw the war's second-highest deaths in a single governorate - only surpassed by Hodeidah in late 2018.<sup>20</sup> Conflict also increased in both Hodeidah and Taiz while Saudi-led Coalition airstrikes nationwide nearly doubled last month.<sup>21</sup>

But this is more than a two-sided fight between Houthi and anti-Houthi forces. This conflict is also a fragmented set of local power struggles. Across the South, IRC's ability to deliver life-saving programming has been disrupted by rounds of conflict between fighters loyal to the IRG and those aligned with the Southern Transitional Council (STC). The two sides signed a power-sharing deal known as the Riyadh Agreement in 2019 but implementation largely stalled. Nonetheless, tensions persist and southern Yemen gets more fragmented with additional armed groups emerging trying to seize political power and economic resources in some parts of southern Yemen. Our staff in Aden report that they simply do not know who is responsible for governance and security of people in southern Yemen.

The uncertainty and insecurity creates conditions that are ripe for other groups to exploit. In the southern governorate of Abyan, there have been dozens of carjackings in recent weeks, including of NGO vehicles. At least some of those thefts are carried out by, or on behalf of, Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. IRC made the difficult decision to halt programs in Abyan for the past two months despite rising need. The STC's success in

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<sup>11</sup> "Six Years of the Saudi-led Air War in Yemen," Yemen Data Project.

<sup>12</sup> IRC analysis of data from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) dashboard.

<sup>13</sup> IRC analysis of data from the "Yemen Air War 2020 Data Overview" by the Yemen Data Project. See <https://us16.campaign-archive.com/?u=1912a1b11cab332fa977d3a6a&id=ecf5725e8d>.

<sup>14</sup> "2020 Annual Report," Civilian Impact Monitoring Project, p. 8, <https://civilianimpactmonitoring.org/onewebmedia/2020%20CIMP%20Annual%20Report.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, p. 2.

<sup>16</sup> "Situation of human rights in Yemen, including violations and abuses since September 2014," Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen, September 28, 2020, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=26315&LangID=E>.

<sup>17</sup> "Humanitarian Needs Overview Yemen 2021," p. 6.

<sup>18</sup> "Yemen Data Project Air Raids Summary January 2021," Yemen Data Project, January 2021, <https://us16.campaign-archive.com/?u=1912a1b11cab332fa977d3a6a&id=ecf5725e8d>.

<sup>19</sup> Peter Salisbury, "Behind the Front Lines in Yemen's Marib," International Crisis Group, 17 April 2020, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/yemen/behind-front-lines-yemens-marib>.

<sup>20</sup> IRC analysis of data from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) dashboard.

<sup>21</sup> "Yemen Data Project Air Raids Summary April 2021," Yemen Data Project, April 2021, <https://us16.campaign-archive.com/?u=1912a1b11cab332fa977d3a6a&id=cc43eb8b26>.

pushing its way to the negotiating table in Riyadh through the use of force also risks teaching other groups that the best way to see their interests represented in future political talks is by further destabilizing the south.

**Second, the economy is collapsing - both as a result of the violence and economic warfare carried out without regard for civilians.**

The Yemeni economy is not just a victim of this brutal conflict but increasingly a driver of it, as parties compete for control of key resources and institutions at the expense of ordinary Yemenis. For example, the Central Bank of Yemen is divided into rival branches in Sanaa and Aden in 2016. The causes of Yemen's economic crisis are complex and interconnected, but the effect on the humanitarian catastrophe in Yemen is clear. Between them, the de facto authorities in Sanaa and the IRG in Aden have failed to pay salaries for many civil servants, depriving millions of Yemenis of their incomes with a ripple effect on the collapse of basic public services. As a result, remittances became a lifeline for many of the 80% of Yemenis living in poverty, worth an estimated fifth of Yemen's GDP in 2019.<sup>22</sup> Last year, the pandemic led to a sharp 80% drop in remittances, as Yemenis living outside the country have lost their jobs and become unable to send money back to their families.<sup>23</sup>

Meanwhile, a combination of mismanagement and economic posturing has left the split Central Bank unable to stabilize the Yemeni currency; the Rial's value has fallen by 75% in the South and by two-thirds in the North since the war began.<sup>24</sup> The Central Bank's inability to fund essential imports has had an equally devastating impact in the import-dependent country. Prices have soared and purchasing power plummeted - the price of rice has quadrupled since the start of the war.<sup>25</sup> Three in five Yemenis surveyed by the IRC could not afford basic items, leading two-thirds of them to reduce food consumption. Moreover, COVID-19's disruptions to the global supply chains widened cracks in the country's already fragile economy.

Asrar, one of IRC's clients, has told IRC staff she cannot afford food for herself and her seven children. "We can't buy anything these days with the price increases." She added, "If we buy flour, then we won't be able to buy sugar and oil. We can't afford to buy everything." Another client, Mohammed, says rising prices contributed to his family reducing food consumption and his five-year-old daughter becoming malnourished. "We were not even able to visit the hospital or buy medicine because it is so expensive."

Yet commercial imports to northern Yemen through Hodeidah and Saleef ports remain slowed and disrupted by inspection regimes and administrative delays, even as these ports are located near an estimated 70% of people in need of humanitarian aid.<sup>26</sup> While food imports have arrived in steady quantities in recent months, fuel has been in dangerously short supply. In recent years, disputes over import revenues have added additional obstacles to the already duplicative import inspection regime, in which both UN and Saudi clearance are required.

A new phase of economic warfare has occurred since June, when, according to the UN Panel of Experts, Ansar Allah withdrew more than \$1.9 billion in customs revenues from the Hodeidah Central Bank in violation of the Stockholm Agreement. In response, the IRG's economic committee, responsible for issuing permits for fuel tankers to berth and discharge vital petroleum derivatives, has aimed to slow or stop the import of fuel to northern Yemen. In the first quarter of 2021, fuel imports through these two ports only met 7% of the country's national requirements.<sup>27</sup> After more than two months without a single fuel ship docking in the North, four ships

<sup>22</sup> "Personal remittances, received (% of GDP)," World Bank, 2019, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.DT.GD.ZS>

<sup>23</sup> "Humanitarian Needs Overview Yemen 2021," p. 6.

<sup>24</sup> "Under Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mark Lowcock, Briefing to the Security Council on humanitarian situation in Yemen," UN OCHA, February 18, 2021, <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/under-secretary-general-humanitarian-affairs-and-emergency-relief-coordinator-mark-36>.

<sup>25</sup> The Yemen Economy Tracking Initiative produced by ACAPS finds that the price of rice rose from 260 YER in March 2015 to 1,020 YER in December 2020, <https://yemen.yeti.acaps.org/>.

<sup>26</sup> "Yemen: Commodity Tracker" UN OCHA, 4 September 2018, [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/August%202018%20OCHA\\_Yemen\\_Commodity%20Tracker%20Final.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/August%202018%20OCHA_Yemen_Commodity%20Tracker%20Final.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> A total of 119,163 metric tons of fuel were discharged in January (80,854 tons), February (0 tons), and March 2021 (38,309 tons), according to the [March 2021 operational snapshot](#) produced by the UN Verification and Inspection Mechanism for Yemen. Monthly national fuel requirements are 544,000 metric tons, according to [UN OCHA](#).

were finally allowed to dock last month. Three more were reportedly cleared last week.<sup>28</sup> But hundreds of thousands of metric tons of desperately needed fuel still sit on ships just offshore of Yemen's port of Hodeidah - held hostage as the warring parties bicker.

Fuel shortages undermine health services as hospitals cannot keep their generators running, disrupt clean water supplies because pumps and water trucks cannot run, and increase the overall cost of humanitarian assistance as fuel can only be procured through more expensive informal markets. NGO staff in Ansar Allah-controlled areas are reporting a 50% price increase in water trucking since December.

### **Third, and finally, humanitarian aid and access are treated as bargaining chips.**

The destruction of health, water, and other infrastructure combined with the unraveling of public services and skyrocketing prices mean that two in three Yemenis are in need of life-saving aid. Yet all parties to the conflict have complicated and slowed our efforts to deliver principled, needs-based assistance to Yemenis.

While there were some improvements, humanitarian actors like the IRC continue to face a byzantine set of bureaucratic constraints and administrative delays, in both the North and the South. These types of constraints accounted for over 90% of all humanitarian access incidents last year. As a result, around 9 million Yemenis were affected by delayed or interrupted aid at some point last year. Right now, as many as 3.5 million people are currently being affected by delayed approval of projects.<sup>29</sup>

Unclear and arbitrary processes and capacity constraints at the few accessible air and sea ports slow the import and offloading of critical - often perishable - humanitarian supplies like food and medicines. The main point of entry for humanitarian cargo is Aden port, which requires NGOs to manage lengthy customs clearance processes. Meanwhile, one of the only two ways to import humanitarian cargo to northern Yemen is by driving a 300-mile road from Aden to Sanaa through 50 checkpoints and informal customs set up by Ansar Allah after obtaining another permit from Ansar Allah in addition to IRG. Sanaa airport has been closed to commercial traffic for nearly five years and only humanitarian flights are operating, including humanitarian cargo, though again, only after lengthy and complicated import approvals. The airport's closure also means that thousands of Yemenis are unable to seek healthcare outside of the country each year - likely resulting in the premature and unnecessary deaths of tens of thousands since 2016.

It can also take months to obtain visas for aid workers, line ministry approvals needed to launch humanitarian programs, and the permits required to travel to program locations and conduct assessments. Even when supplies clear and staff receive approvals, challenges remain.

### **A window of opportunity to break the cycle of crisis**

For too long, the needs and protection of Yemeni civilians rated low - if at all - on the priority lists of not just the warring parties, but their international backers - including the US. Yemen policy was about counter-terrorism, Yemen policy was about Gulf security. It was rarely, if ever, about Yemenis. The US approved over \$64 billion in military sales to Saudi Arabia between 2015 and 2020<sup>30</sup> - 20 times the amount of humanitarian aid the US provided to Yemen during that time frame.<sup>31</sup>

As such, we are grateful for the sustained Congressional pressure that has helped drive US policy away from a failed war strategy. On the humanitarian front, it is still possible to change the trajectory of the crisis, to prevent the worst outcomes like famine. Recent policy decisions by the Biden Administration - like reversing the terrorist designation of Ansar Allah and the end of the US suspension of aid to northern Yemen - have helped

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<sup>28</sup> "Under Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mark Lowcock, Briefing to the Security Council on humanitarian situation in Yemen," UN OCHA, April 15, 2021, <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/under-secretary-general-humanitarian-affairs-and-emergency-relief-coordinator-mark-38>.

<sup>29</sup> "Yemen: Annual Humanitarian Access Overview, 2020," UN OCHA, March 14, 2021, <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/yemen-annual-humanitarian-access-overview-2020>.

<sup>30</sup> Bruce Riedel, "It's time to stop US arms sales to Saudi Arabia," February 4, 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2021/02/04/its-time-to-stop-us-arms-sales-to-saudi-arabia/>

<sup>31</sup> "United States announces additional humanitarian assistance for the people of Yemen," USAID, March 1, 2021, <https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/press-releases/mar-1-2021-united-states-announces-additional-humanitarian-assistance-people-yemen>.

create this window of opportunity. These were meaningful first steps to enable a robust humanitarian response for all those in need - but must be followed by funding and humanitarian diplomacy to enable aid organizations to scale up.

Our humanity compels us to stave off famine and meet immediate needs. But as the conflict enters its seventh year, our logic must compel us to lift our line of sight above the symptoms of this crisis and shift towards addressing the crisis at the source.

We welcome the Biden administration's pivot toward invigorated diplomacy - including ending support for offensive operations, pausing arm sales, and appointing a new special envoy. These are vital first steps toward putting Yemen and Yemenis at the center of US policy and help position the US as a more neutral actor and convenor of a multilateral process to end the war. But the cyclical humanitarian nightmare demands more new and bold political thinking and action.

Yemenis cannot wait for a political solution to receive relief. The urgency of humanitarian need - including looming famine - demands that the international community move forward on two tracks - delinking the immediate efforts needed to ease suffering from the wider political process. Now is the time to do both the urgent work to save lives and the important work to end the cruel conflict driving the need - without making one contingent on the other.

**First, rally more humanitarian funding to fill the dangerous funding gap.** Right now, the UN's appeal for the largest crisis in the world is only 25% funded.<sup>32</sup> Recent history has proved that the right investments, delivered to the right agencies on the front line can make a difference in Yemen. In 2018, when famine conditions were declared, generous and timely contributions from donors enabled the UN and NGOs to significantly scale up the humanitarian response. Donors funded nearly 90% of the humanitarian response plan and humanitarians nearly doubled the number of Yemenis reached that year<sup>33</sup> and cured a higher percentage of children with severe acute malnutrition than any comparable response.<sup>34</sup> These steps saved lives.

Warding off famine in 2021 demands funding at least equal to that delivered in 2018 and 2019. The US should support the Swiss and Swedish (this year's donor conference co-hosts) proposal for a follow-on conference in three months' time. Some donors have expressed frustration at the lack of political progress, but punishing ordinary Yemenis for the intransigence of the warring parties is as foolish as it is cruel. The Administration's move to lift the suspension in the North of the country gives them more moral authority to push other donors - and we encourage the US to leverage it. But pledges on paper will not save lives; only half of this year's pledges have been paid. The US should rapidly disperse funds to frontline humanitarians who are on the ground and ready to scale up operations and pressure other donors to do the same.

**Second, protect and expand humanitarian access across Yemen.** Humanitarian aid must be able to reach those who need it. NGOs need coordinated, sustained, high-level engagement between UN and donor countries with Ansar Allah in the North and with the IRG and STC in the South to remove persistent bureaucratic and administrative barriers. The scale and reach of the humanitarian response would grow significantly if the US and its partners pushed all Yemeni authorities to streamline the processes and timelines for moving humanitarian goods and staff into and around the country and for securing project permissions and travel permits. Working with the UN and in consultation with humanitarian actors - to ensure consistent, principled messaging - the US should galvanize donors to establish senior-level humanitarian dialogues with officials in the North and the South, building on previously agreed benchmarks and measures. The need to distribute COVID-19 vaccines brings new urgency to this effort.

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<sup>32</sup> "Under Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mark Lowcock, Briefing to the Security Council on humanitarian situation in Yemen," UN OCHA, April 15, 2021, <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/under-secretary-general-humanitarian-affairs-and-emergency-relief-coordinator-mark-38>.

<sup>33</sup> The number of people reached with aid each month rose from 7.5 million in 2018 to 13.7 million people in 2019. Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan 2021, UN OCHA, March 2021, [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Final\\_Yemen\\_HRP\\_2021.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Final_Yemen_HRP_2021.pdf).

<sup>34</sup> "2019 Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan," UN OCHA, February 2019, p. 8, [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2019\\_Yemen\\_HRP\\_V21.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2019_Yemen_HRP_V21.pdf).

**Third, facilitate the flow of commercial and humanitarian imports into and throughout the import-dependent country.** Even with more humanitarian funding and access, the magnitude of the needs will outweigh the humanitarian response until food, fuel and other staples are accessible and affordable for more Yemenis. The US should push for all air and sea ports to be reopened to humanitarian and commercial traffic; and for inspection and clearance processes for vital imports to be streamlined or eliminated. Moreover, the opening of Sanaa airport will finally allow thousands of chronically ill Yemenis to access lifesaving care abroad. The IRG should immediately allow fuel ships to berth at Hodeidah. At the same time, civil servant salary payments should restart without delay. Getting these payments into Yemeni pockets would have the dual benefit of generating income for millions and rebuilding capacity of state service delivery. These steps are not political bargaining chips; they are urgent humanitarian matters. Every day that they are delayed costs Yemeni lives. Sequencing or conditioning these steps shows callous disregard for Yemeni lives and wellbeing.

**Fourth, push for an immediate nationwide ceasefire.** A ceasefire is urgently needed to protect civilians and enable aid to flow, including food and emergency cash distributions to ward off famine and the distribution of COVID-19 vaccinations. The US should use all diplomatic levers to secure a ceasefire, including pressing other states with influence over the warring parties to similarly halt arms sales.

**Fifth, press for a new framework for a political process.** Ceasefires are fragile and temporary at best. This conflict is ravaging civilians purposefully and a sustained political settlement is the only pathway out of the humanitarian crisis. But diplomacy has been stuck in the past - built on a framework that does not reflect current realities on the ground. The warring parties remain caught in a cycle of arguing over sequencing and who must do what first while trying to change the facts on the ground militarily to better their negotiating position. While the Security Council's statement last week was welcome, Yemenis need and deserve a concrete roadmap to turn these ideas into action and ensure the proposals on the table don't languish at the expense of ordinary Yemenis. The US - together with the UK as the UN Security Council "penholder" on the file - should move the Security Council past politics to concentrate on the people caught in the crisis. Council action, including a new resolution that is centered on the needs of Yemenis, is more politically inclusive and representative of Yemeni society, and sets out the responsibilities of all the parties, would offer the badly needed break from the past.

Council action should address the thorniest issues including the economic disputes - such as revenue sharing and Central Bank arrangements - that are increasingly driving the conflict and humanitarian misery. These issues are largely left out of the existing Security Council Resolution (or worse, exploited by parties) and what little is codified in the Stockholm Agreement has been ignored and a source of the stalemate.

As we do in challenging environments all over the world, humanitarians like my IRC colleagues have stayed and delivered in Yemen in the midst of a complex and deteriorating crisis. But there is no humanitarian solution for Yemen or Yemenis. Humanitarians cannot replace a functioning economy or a state capable of delivering basic services; we cannot keep pace with the destruction this brutal conflict leaves in its wake. Yemenis will continue to suffer and die needlessly unless and until the violence is halted, the economy stabilized, and a meaningful political process is launched.

The US has the opportunity to build on its unilateral efforts to push forward multilateral steps to finally address the underlying drivers of the crisis. We owe it to the Yemeni people to pursue it vigorously. After all, the darkest aspect of modern warfare is the absence of diplomacy.

I offer my sincere thanks to the Subcommittee for its commitment to Yemen and Yemenis and for giving me the opportunity to share the challenges facing my IRC colleagues and our clients. I look forward to answering your questions.