

**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

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**REMARKS TO THE YEMEN PLEDGING CONFERENCE**

**2 June 2020**

**[as delivered]**

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, *assalamu alaikum*.

I thank the Government of Saudi Arabia for co-hosting this pledging event, and for your continued commitment to the humanitarian aid to the people of Yemen.

And I thank the many governments and representatives demonstrating their solidarity with the Yemeni people, who have suffered so much, and who now face the additional threat of COVID-19.

More than five years of conflict have left Yemenis hanging on by a thread, their economy in tatters, their institutions facing near-collapse. Four people out of every five, 24 million people in all, need lifesaving aid in what remains the world's largest humanitarian crisis.

Two million Yemeni children are suffering from acute malnutrition, which could stunt their growth and affect them throughout their lives.

Since the start of the year, some 80,000 more people were forced from their homes, bringing the total displaced to almost 4 million. Cholera continues to threaten lives with 110,000 people contracting it so far this year. The recent floods have raised the risk of malaria and dengue fever.

On 10 April, the first confirmed case of COVID-19 was reported in Yemen. The pandemic poses a terrifying threat to some of the most vulnerable people in the world, weakened by years of conflict, and with a health system that is already on the brink of collapse.

Since then, reported cases are in the hundreds and are highly likely to be undercounted, since testing rates are some of the lowest in the world. There is every reason to believe that community transmission is already underway across the country.

Excellencies,

We are in a race against time.

Reports indicate that in Aden, mortality rates from COVID-19 are among the highest in the world.

That is just one sign of what lies ahead, if we do not act now.

Just half of Yemen's health facilities are operational.

There are shortages of testing devices, oxygen, ambulances and basic protective equipment.

Many healthcare workers are among those who have contracted the virus. Even hospitals that are operational and equipped may not have a reliable electricity supply.

Public health measures are particularly challenging in a country where trust in the authorities is weak, and fifty percent of the population do not have access to clean water to wash their hands.

Tackling COVID-19 on top of the existing humanitarian emergency requires urgent action. The pandemic is making it even more difficult and dangerous for humanitarian workers to reach Yemenis with lifesaving aid.

We must preserve the major humanitarian aid operation that is already underway – the world’s largest – while developing new public health programmes to fight the virus and strengthen healthcare systems.

We have already made a start, supporting rapid response teams across the country, procuring essential supplies, and working with frontline health workers and communities to get information out to millions of people. But we need to do much more.

This requires increased funding.

So far this year, that has not been forthcoming.

We have never had so little money for aid operations in Yemen this late in the year. Aid agencies estimate they will need up to \$2.41 billion to cover essential aid from June until December, including programmes to counter COVID-19.

Unless we secure significant funding, more than 30 out of 41 major United Nations programmes in Yemen will close in the next few weeks.

I thank those donors who pledged funding ahead of today’s event, and I urge all of you to pledge generously today – and to transfer pledged resources quickly.

There is no time to lose.

Today’s pledges will help our United Nations humanitarian agencies and their partners on the ground to continue providing a lifeline to millions of Yemenis.

They are also an essential part of any global plan to end the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

Because it is clear that COVID-19 anywhere poses a threat everywhere.

Excellencies,

This is the first virtual pledging conference for Yemen, but the fourth year in succession that we have called for urgent funding for this emergency.

Ending the war is the only way to address the health, humanitarian and human development crises in Yemen. Civilian casualties have risen each month this year, and more than 500 people have been killed or injured since January.

That is why I issued a specific call for a ceasefire in Yemen in March, as the COVID-19 pandemic began to spread around the world.

I repeat my call on all parties to work with my Special Envoy and agree on the United Nations proposal to achieve a nationwide ceasefire, make progress on economic and humanitarian measures to alleviate suffering and build confidence, and resume an inclusive Yemeni-led political process.

Yemenis desperately need peace.

Today is a day to demonstrate solidarity with some of the poorest and most vulnerable people in the world.

Thank you. *Shukran*.