Statement by  
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Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden

High-level Pledging Event for the Humanitarian Crisis in Yemen  
1 March 2021

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

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Mr Secretary-General, Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to begin by thanking all of you for attending this donor conference, virtually this year. I would also like to thank Saudi Arabia for co-hosting last year’s conference. This is the fourth time that Sweden, Switzerland and the UN have co-hosted the high-level pledging event for Yemen. The urgency of the crisis has been reiterated at every pledging event to date. But never has the urgency been greater that it is today. The success of this year’s conference is therefore crucial.

The humanitarian crisis in Yemen is the worst in the world. For years, needs have been huge and suffering immense. But in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic, the country’s economic collapse and the brutal conflict have combined to push Yemen to the cliff’s edge. At the same time, previously consistent and generous donor support to the humanitarian response has dwindled. As a result, life-saving humanitarian programmes have been scaled down.
And now, Yemen is being pushed ever closer to the worst famine the world has seen in decades. Five million Yemenis are just one step away from full-scale catastrophe. Hunger crises, like humanitarian crises in general, impact women disproportionately. Women eat least and eat last. When there is not enough food to go around – when food rations have been reduced – women are the first to go hungry.

As was highlighted just a few moments ago at the side-event hosted by Sweden and Switzerland, a silent emergency is unfolding before our eyes. Two in five Yemeni children under the age of five will be acutely malnourished this year. Not all of them will survive. Those who do, risk being by scarred by irreversible damage to their development. Yemen is now the world’s most dangerous place for children.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, I hope we will once again demonstrate our commitment to the Yemeni people and to our shared humanity. The 2021 UN Humanitarian Response Plan for Yemen requires close to 4 billion US dollars to avert famine and address acute humanitarian needs. Channelling support through the UN is the most effective way to ensure a coordinated and principled humanitarian response.

I am pleased to announce that Sweden’s initial allocation to the HRP in 2021 will amount to some 31 million US dollars. The full amount will be disbursed before the end of this month. This is only an initial allocation and more may
follow later in the year. In addition, Sweden also remains one of the world’s largest donors of core funding, which supports the humanitarian operations of the World Food Programme, UNICEF and other humanitarian agencies operating in Yemen.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A lack of funds is not the only obstacle impeding the humanitarian response in Yemen. As co-chair of the humanitarian Senior Officials Meeting on Yemen, Sweden continues to call on all parties to remove all restrictions and to ensure full, safe and unhindered access for the timely delivery of humanitarian aid to people in need.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The UN-led humanitarian relief efforts are indispensable and need our urgent support. At the same time, the only sustainable solution to the humanitarian crisis is an end to the fighting and a political solution to the conflict. We have recently seen increased attention to the UN-led peace efforts. But on the ground, renewed escalation has led to immense loss of life and further displacement and suffering. The ongoing offensive on Marib, threatening millions of internally displaced Yemenis, and the hostilities in Taiz and Hodeidah, must cease. The parties must commit to a ceasefire and resume talks leading to an inclusive, Yemeni-owned political process, with the full and meaningful participation of women. Here too, strong
international support will be crucial, and Sweden remains ready to help in any way we can.

2020 was a challenging year. Now, in 2021, many of us are hopeful that things will slowly get better. But for the 21 million Yemenis in need of humanitarian assistance to survive, there are no signs of a brighter year ahead. As Yemen is being pushed closer to the brink of starvation, aid levels are dropping and food rations shrinking.

We now have the opportunity to change course. I hope that, in 2022, we will be able to look back and say that we managed once again to come together to avert famine in Yemen. I also hope that we will be able to say that we managed to restore the dignity of the people of Yemen. And I hope that we will be able to say that we began paving the way to an end to this devastating conflict. The people of Yemen have suffered enough.

Thank you.