Concept note
Last update: 19 Feb 2021

“Yemen is now in imminent danger of the worst famine the world has seen for decades. In the absence of immediate action, millions of lives may be lost. … [We] risk a tragedy not just in the immediate loss of life but with consequences that will reverberate indefinitely into the future.”
– António Guterres, United Nations Secretary-General

“Right now, millions of Yemenis are looking to the world for help. The good news is the world knows exactly what is needed to prevent catastrophe: pay for the aid operation, ensure access for aid workers, support the economy and – most of all – end the war. The only question is: what will the world choose to do?”
– Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator

Background
The humanitarian crisis in Yemen remains the worst in the world, with more than 20 million people in need of assistance and protection. Years of conflict, economic decline and institutional collapse have created enormous needs in all sectors. The risk of large-scale famine has never been more acute. Assessments confirm that more than 16 million people will go hungry this year. Nearly 50,000 people are already living in famine-like conditions, and 5 million more are just one step away. At the same time, Yemen continues to grapple with the effects of cholera, COVID-19, forced displacement, protection risks and other serious challenges.

In 2021, the world must move swiftly to prevent large-scale famine and catastrophe. The fastest and most efficient way to help is to provide rapid, substantial funding for the humanitarian response coordinated by the United Nations. Nearly 200 aid agencies are working together through the Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan to provide life-saving assistance to more than 10 million people across the country every month.
These programmes are saving millions of lives. Two years ago, a massive scale-up of the aid operation – thanks to generous international support – prevented a large-scale famine, rolled back the world’s biggest cholera outbreak and helped families fleeing violence, among other achievements. At its peak in early 2020, aid agencies were helping nearly 14 million people every month. But significant cuts in donor funding forced aid agencies to scale back many programmes in the following months. The results are clear: more hunger, more disease and more death.

The UN response plan this year will need about $4 billion. The need for funding is urgent but has not been the only challenge. Aid agencies operating in Yemen have consistently faced serious obstacles, including severe access constraints in the north. Agencies and donors worked together last year to address these restrictions. In Senior Officials’ meetings, co-chaired by the European Commission and Sweden, a common approach was formed, and these efforts yielded important progress. Much more is needed, and accountability will remain at the top of the agenda this year. Donors and agencies will continue to work together to ensure that principled aid delivery can continue at the scale required across Yemen.

Pledging generously to the humanitarian response in Yemen will demonstrate the international community is not turning its back on the world’s largest humanitarian crisis.

Event
The Governments of Sweden and Switzerland and the United Nations are convening a virtual High-Level Pledging Event for the Humanitarian Crisis in Yemen.

The event will take place on Monday 1 March 2021, through a managed virtual platform. The working languages for this High-Level Event will be Arabic and English. Interpretation will be available in both languages.

More information regarding the format and technical requirements of the virtual meeting will be shared in due course with registered participants.

Co-hosts
- H.E. Mr. Ignazio Cassis, Vice President and Head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, Switzerland
- H.E. Ms. Ann Linde, Minister for Foreign Affairs, and H.E. Mr. Per Olsson Fridh, Minister for International Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Affairs, Sweden
- H.E. Mr. António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations
- Mr. Mark Lowcock, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator

Objectives
- Raise awareness of the severe and deteriorating humanitarian crisis in Yemen - particularly the imminent risk of large-scale famine. Advocate urgent action by the international community to prevent famine and address other acute humanitarian needs.
- Mobilize resources for the humanitarian response in Yemen, highlighting support to the UN-coordinated response as the most effective, efficient and strategic investment to provide life-saving humanitarian assistance and protection across the country.
- Highlight the capacity and commitment of humanitarian partners to deliver assistance across the country and draw attention to past successes, as well as the impact of funding cuts.
- Promote respect for international humanitarian law and human rights, and advocate for protection of civilians and humanitarian personnel. Demonstrate the international community’s unwavering commitment to full, safe and unhindered humanitarian access and requirement that assistance be delivered strictly in line with humanitarian principles.
- Reinforce progress towards and continue to advocate a political solution for Yemen.
Participation

- The event will be convened from 09:00 – 13:00 New York time by virtual teleconference.
- All Member States and partners need to register by 20 February.
- Member States are asked to participate at ministerial level. The co-hosts will provide detailed guidance on how to connect to the meeting upon registration.
- Member States and Partners are strongly encouraged to commit financial support to Yemen ahead of the event. Any contributions and pledges made as of 1 January 2021 or announced for 2021 will be counted towards the overall event announcement.

Agenda and format

The event will consist of three sessions:

- **Opening statements**: The co-hosts (Sweden, Switzerland and the United Nations) will open the event with brief statements. The Secretary-General of the United Nations, His Excellency Mr. António Guterres will participate in the opening session.
- **Statements and announcements**: Statements and announcement of support by participating delegates should be limited to three minutes maximum. The chairs will give the floor for Minister-level delegates followed by other participants.
- **Closing session**: Closing remarks will be made by Mr. Mark Lowcock, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator on behalf of the co-hosts.

Press Conference

The press event will be moderated by Ms. Melissa Fleming, UN Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications with the participation of H.E. Mr. Ignazio Cassis, Vice President and Head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, Switzerland, H.E. Mr. Per Olsson Fridh, Minister for International Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Affairs, Sweden, and Mr. Mark Lowcock, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator.

Member States and Partners are welcome to observe the press conference through UN WebTV (webtv.un.org) that will take place after the closing session of the pledging event.

Side Event

The Governments of Sweden and Switzerland will host a virtual high-level side event titled “The Silent Emergency: What can we do to improve Maternal and Child Nutrition in Yemen”. It will take place immediately prior to the pledging event, between 07:15 and 08:30 New York time on Monday, 1 March 2021. Further details will be shared shortly.