Under Secretary-General Stephen O’Brien

Remarks to the press on Yemen

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As Delivered

Good afternoon everyone.

Yesterday my Director of Operations, John Ging, read my statement to the Security Council on the looming humanitarian catastrophe that continues to unfold in Yemen.

The collapse of basic services and extreme shortages of food and fuel have had a devastating impact across the whole country. More than 21 million people – that’s 80 per cent of the population - now need humanitarian assistance.

Health facilities report that over 2,800 people have been killed and 13,000 injured since the violence escalated in March. At least 1,400 civilians have lost their lives, and these numbers are likely to be significant underestimates.

The parties to this conflict show an utter disregard for human life, repeatedly attacking civilian infrastructure including hospitals, schools, power stations and water installations. A million people have been forced from their homes; some have been targeted even as they fled.

Earlier this month, displaced people who had fled Harad were targeted in airstrikes that killed four civilians and injured 41. Civilians have been killed and injured in indiscriminate shelling in Aden, Al-Dhale and Taiz.

One Yemeni woman told my colleagues that without a political solution, there will soon be nothing left of the country. Another said she was trying to keep her family going in stone-age conditions.

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The mission of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is to mobilize and coordinate effective and principled humanitarian action in partnership with national and international actors.
More than 20 million people lack access to safe water and sanitation. Dengue fever and malaria have been reported in the south and in areas bordering Saudi Arabia. At the same time, the health system is facing imminent collapse with the closure of at least 160 health facilities due to insecurity and lack of fuel or other critical supplies.

Food insecurity affects half the population. Ten of Yemen’s 22 Governorates are classified as being in food emergency; that’s one step below famine.

Despite all this, local and international NGOs and UN and other agencies have reached some 4.4 million people with humanitarian aid since the escalation of the conflict.

Emergency food assistance has been delivered to 1.9 million people; fuel has been delivered to pump water in 11 governorates, and 700,000 people benefit from daily water trucking services. Medical supplies have been delivered for almost half a million people.

As large as these figures are, they represent a fraction of the people in need. Humanitarians are scaling up our operations, but access into and within Yemen is a major challenge. Delays at Yemeni ports are compounded by fuel shortages that mean goods cannot be transported onward. Humanitarian convoys are regularly stopped at checkpoints or roadblocks, delayed by parties to the conflict, or postponed because of active conflict.

We have repeatedly called for the resumption of commercial imports at pre-crisis levels to avoid even more serious hunger and shortages. I repeated my call in my statement to the Council yesterday. Commercial imports are currently at an estimated 15 per cent of pre-crisis levels; clearly this is insufficient in a country that imported 90 per cent of its goods before the current crisis.

Finally, I will echo the Special Envoy’s call for an urgent ceasefire, to end the suffering of millions of people. We continue to advocate for humanitarian pauses, during which civilians can reach areas of safety and lifesaving assistance can be delivered to people in need.

Thank you.