Mr President, Distinguished Representatives,

This is my tenth statement on Yemen to this chamber since I took up my post in June 2015, only a few months after the crisis in Yemen had escalated. I have visited the country three times during my tenure – Aden twice, Ibb, Sana’a, by mountainous road to Hudaydah city and port, Amran and my attempt to get to Taizz aborted after being caught up in gunfire. Wherever, whatever side of this horrific fight and above all of those of neither side caught up in this maelstrom of fear, death and destruction, I have been deeply moved by the terrible human suffering everywhere in Yemen.

It grieves me that in these last two years, and despite my and my team’s best efforts, I have been unable to report any significant improvement in the deplorable, avoidable completely man-made catastrophe that is ravaging the country. On the contrary, the Yemeni people’s suffering has relentlessly intensified. Today, millions of people in Yemen are facing a triple tragedy: the spectre of famine, the world’s largest ever single-year cholera outbreak, and the daily deprivation and injustice of a brutal conflict that the world is allowing to drag on and on. All totally preventable, avoidable and treatable. This human tragedy is deliberate and wanton – it is political tragedy, but with will and with courage, which are both in short supply, it is stoppable.

Mr. President,

The impact of this conflict on the basic needs and dignity of ordinary Yemenis every day is clear. We have been over the harrowing figures time and again in this chamber – 17 million Yemenis do not know if or where they will get their next meal; nearly 7 million are facing the threat of famine; and nearly 16 million lack access to water or sanitation. With numbers of this scale, there is a pernicious risk that we become mired in a “statistical fog”, or that we begin to take an overly technical view of this crisis, almost as if it were a natural phenomenon. It is not. We must remember that these figures represent human faces and enormous suffering – parents unable to feed their families, children succumbing to malnutrition or disease, and countless other tragedies.
They represent the heart-breaking story of a six-year-old girl (her only remaining dignity is that I have been asked not to give her name), whose family spent six months sleeping in a hole in the ground at night in order to avoid air strikes near their home. This little girl was already suffering from malnutrition, and her condition became severe while hiding with her family. After several rounds of treatment, she was recovering – only to contract and die of acute watery diarrhoea shortly after her release from hospital. For the sake of this innocent child and countless others, the appalling statistics from this crisis must not obscure a central fact: Yemen’s catastrophe is completely man-made. It is a direct result of the deliberate policies, tactics and actions of the parties and their powerful proxies to the conflict, and it is completely preventable.

Before the escalation of conflict, Yemen was making progress against its long-standing challenges, not least the kleptocracy under which it was ruled and its people exploited for so long. In 2014, fewer people were going hungry than three years earlier. Nutrition was improving, with fewer children stunted or underweight. School enrolment was rising. All of this has now been sharply reversed. And with this reversal has come the near total collapse of public institutions that would otherwise help Yemenis to cope. Today, only 45 per cent of health facilities are fully functioning. Sanitation systems have mostly ground to a halt. Some 1.2 million public employees, including 30,000 health workers and 193,000 teachers, have been paid erratically or not at all since October last year, thereby accelerating the decline in essential services and depriving about a quarter of the population – civil servants and their families – of a reliable income. We see the consequences of this collapse in people’s rising needs across all sectors – and perhaps most dramatically in the current cholera outbreak, which has spread rapidly across Yemen in the wake of degraded sanitation systems and shattered health facilities.

Mr President,

The conduct of the war continues to be really vicious and brutal, with frequent complete disregard for international humanitarian law or principles or just the basic norms of human behaviour. Even wars have rules, and even wars have their limits – or at least they should have. Earlier this month, reported air strikes in Sa’ada killed 12 civilians and injured 10 more. The death toll included six children killed in their family home. Investigations continue, though we know already that only the Saudi-led Coalition has the means to carry out aerial attacks. In Taizz, indiscriminate shelling into populated areas continues as a grotesque feature of the conflict, mostly by forces affiliated with the Houthis or former President Saleh.

Over the last two years, these incidents have reportedly killed or injured dozens of civilians, including children, and damaged civilian infrastructure. In the absence of accountability mechanisms or a concerted push by Member States for a political settlement, the violence is
intensifying. In 2017, the number of air strikes per month is three times higher – yes, three times higher – than last year, and monthly reports of armed clashes are up by more than 50 per cent.

So all that has been said and the outrage expressed here around this Security Council table has only produced a dramatically worse situation, perpetuated by the stubborn, brutal parties and their proxies to this cynical inhuman, man-made catastrophe.

Parties to the conflict also continue to restrict the flow of essential commercial and humanitarian supplies and staff. Yemen imports over 90 per cent of its staple food and nearly all medicine and fuel, which is urgently needed to pump clean drinking water and run hospital generators. The UN Verification and Inspection Mechanism (UNVIM) was established in May 2016 to facilitate critical commercial imports. Yet the Government of Yemen and the Coalition at times bypass UNVIM by unilaterally denying or excessively delaying entry to vessels carrying essential cargo. Member States must do more determinedly to champion this mechanism; it is simply wrong to insist these cargos go to Aden, not Hudaydah. The cruel, baseless closure of Sana’a airport to civilian traffic by the Government of Yemen is another restriction, blocking thousands of Yemenis from travelling abroad for medical care. Commercial flights served Sana’a in the first year of the conflict, and I do not see why they should not immediately resume, at the very least for humanitarian cases. It was said recently that the Yemeni government could see no reason why Sana’a airport should open as there were flights to Aden and road access to Sanaa.

Mr President,

I flew on the first UNHAS flight to Aden, I’ve been talking to the truck drivers on that route. This is not a real solution to the quantities and the urgency that get even close to the scale of the humanitarian emergency we are trying to overcome despite these nasty, cynical manoeuvrings, supported by parties and proxies to the conflict and where there is complete lockdown control of the airspace. Let us be clear: most of the needs are in the north of Yemen, not the south - fact; Sana’a and Hudeidah best serve the north - fact.

So I also call on all parties and their proxies to the conflict to ensure that humanitarian staff can quickly enter Yemen, and to avoid any bureaucratic or administrative requirements that unduly hinder the rapid delivery of assistance or delay the deployment of aid workers.

Once in Yemen, critical commercial or humanitarian supplies and staff must be able to move to their destination nearest to the human needs of the most vulnerable without interference. Too often, de facto authorities in Sana’a or local officials in areas under their control block, delay or otherwise interfere with humanitarian action. These restrictions are especially prevalent in frontline areas, preventing or delaying partners from reaching the most vulnerable. Local officials in
areas controlled by Sana’a de facto authorities at times also seek to influence the selection of beneficiaries. We have also seen repeated incidents of aid diversion in areas under the control of Sana’a de facto authorities, especially in Taizz governorate. At a time when Yemen is facing the real, near threat of famine, local authorities in areas controlled by Sana’a de facto authorities have also hindered humanitarian assessment missions that are needed in order to establish the necessary evidence base for humanitarian assistance.

Despite my repeated calls to the de facto authorities in Sana’a to facilitate imports of armoured vehicles and other equipment critical to humanitarian action, progress remains painfully slow. Many of these incidents are eventually resolved through discussions with de facto authorities, but the time lost represents an unacceptable burden for people who desperately need help and directly causes avoidable deaths.

Mr President,

Humanitarian partners continue to reach the most vulnerable people through a well-led, principled, coordinated response, despite extraordinary challenges. More than 120 partners have assisted 5.9 million people this year in every governorate of Yemen through UN-coordinated humanitarian action. The cholera response has established 222 cholera treatment centres and 926 oral rehydration points across the country. Despite these achievements, partners are struggling with funding shortages. The Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan has received only 39 per cent of its revised requirements of $2.3 billion for 2017 – 39 per cent and yet we are nearly two-thirds of the way through the year. We urgently need Member States and other partners to provide full funding to the Humanitarian Response Plan now, please, there is not time to lose.

Even if all the fighting and restrictions were stopped in the next hour, we would still need at least that amount. Let us be clear, the $2.3 billion – this not an inflated negotiating number, it is a careful, collective best estimate of the cost of meeting the needs of Yemenis which the parties and their proxies either don’t want or don’t care for them to get.

Humanitarian action alone cannot and should not replace the commercial or public sectors in Yemen, nor can it resolve the underlying crisis. An end to the violence, a cessation in hostilities and a sustainable political agreement are the building-blocks of Yemen’s peaceful future. But while these are being sought, humanitarians must be able to carry out their work and provide aid and support to the millions of Yemeni people in desperate need. The international community must take meaningful action. I renew my call for your support, not only with additional funding, but to address the following points:
1. **Ensure that all ports, land, sea and air, are open to civilian – including commercial traffic.** This includes supporting UNVIM, lifting restrictions on commercial imports, immediately re-opening Sana’a airport and allowing delivery of desperately needed mobile cranes to Hudaydah port, which handles some 70 per cent of imports into Yemen and is the closest port of entry to the majority of people who need humanitarian assistance. Do not be swayed or deterred by those saying Aden (or other ports) is good enough.

2. **Influence parties to the conflict to respect international humanitarian and human rights law.** This entails all Member States using all possible means of leverage and influence to ensure that the parties and their proxies protect civilians and infrastructure, respecting the fundamental rules of distinction, proportionality and precaution. It also includes facilitating entry of life-saving supplies into Yemen and their rapid distribution without interference. Let us be clear – of course evidence is being gathered to hold the hideous breaches of IHL to account one day.

3. **Pay civil servant salaries.** Recent funding in support of essential services is a temporary measure that will shore up some services in priority locations. But only full payment of civil servant salaries across the country – a basic obligation of the State – will halt institutional collapse. This collapse is in no one’s interest and exacerbates death, disease and human damage.

4. **Strengthen accountability.** More broadly, there must be accountability for the appalling conduct of this entire war and let’s not get hung up on the semantics of who is a party, who is a proxy and who denies being involved. All the perpetrators and their facilitators of this hideous Yemen war know who they are – and the evidence of their conduct is being gathered, preserved and prepared for holding each and all to account to seek to avert the abominable confidence that the sense of impunity is motivating them to perpetuate this horror on the Yemeni people. We welcome all steps towards improving this accountability. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has rightly called for the creation of an international independent body to investigate alleged violations of international humanitarian and human rights law. I urge the Human Rights Council to act on this call.

5. **Demand an immediate cessation of hostilities, a return to negotiations and a political settlement.** Parties to the conflict have brought ruin and deprivation to millions of Yemenis for more than two years. There is no military solution to this conflict, and the international community must push for a political settlement based on peaceful negotiations and, yes, compromises. Not to admit that is to deliberately condemn many
more Yemeni people – girls, boys, women, and men – to death, damage, fear and hopelessness in this deliberate man-made human catastrophe. On this day, of all days, World Humanitarian Day, I say to you straight: how much shame can we all, and you in the Security Council in particular, keep accepting on our failing to rein in the parties and the proxies to this heinous war and to start meeting the needs and the legitimate hopes that each Yemeni person should be allowed to have and which we would demand as the very minimum for each and every one of us.