

Aid agencies: Rise in fighting threatens to push Yemen into new levels of violence as war enters seventh year

As the conflict enters its seventh year on 26 March, new offensives have ignited in Hodeidah, Taiz, Hajjah and Marib, attacks on civilians are on the rise, and the country is at imminent risk of famine. 21 aid agencies in Yemen are calling for an immediate nationwide ceasefire and for warring parties to return to the negotiating table.

In February alone, 44 civilian women, children and men have been killed and at least 67 injured across the country. Marib, Taiz, Hajjah and Hodeidah have seen particularly intense flare ups, threatening civilians and displaced populations who are already living in incredibly difficult conditions. Access to these populations continues to be a challenge, with aid agencies struggling to reach many of those impacted by the conflict. The new wave of hostilities in Marib have already led to more than 11,000 civilians fleeing since the first week of February, 70% of which are women and children. Should hostilities move further towards the city and surrounding areas, another 385,000 people could be displaced.

Although aid agencies are scaling up their response in all areas they can reach, they are overstretched and underfunded. An assault on the city of Marib would result in fighting in densely populated urban residential neighborhoods, leading to high civilian casualties, with people unable to flee and their access to aid cut off. Aid agencies made similar warnings two years ago when an offensive on Hodeidah threatened the port city, and are calling once again on warring parties to put down their weapons and protect civilians throughout the country.

Across Yemen, the number of conflict frontlines have now increased to almost 50, social unrest and political instability continues across southern Yemen, and fighting in Hodeidah is again threatening the vital port through which 70% of Yemen's food, medicine and supplies is transported. Since the start of 2021, cross-border attacks into Saudi Arabia have also intensified, and a recent round of airstrikes have struck the capital Sana'a.

During a 12-month period defined for most of the world by the Covid-19 pandemic, Yemen has seen a deepening economic crisis, escalating violence, and worsening hunger. A total of 47,500 people are expected to experience famine like conditions this year, with another 16.2 million expected to go hungry and said to be one step away from famine like conditions. While at the same time, humanitarian funding levels for 2021 are only 44% of the actual needs.

As the seventh year of the conflict approaches, it is vital that the UN Security Council and governments do everything in their power to de-escalate the hostilities, stop the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, protect civilians caught up in the fighting, and bring parties back to the negotiating table.

CARE Country Director Aaron Brent said: "Across Yemen warring parties must provide safe passage to all fleeing civilians, and humanitarian organizations must be given unimpeded access to affected areas to deliver critical and life-saving assistance. It is essential that donors also provide enough funding so that people who have left their homes behind are able to access food, water and adequate shelter. And in order to avert famine in Yemen and enable people to buy what they need to survive, we call on the international community to rapidly scale up support to Yemen's economy."

NRC Country Director Kitty Paulus said: "Right now, while the country is on the brink of starvation, Marib is at breaking point and conflict is flaring in Taiz, Hodeidah and other parts of the country. The fighting in Marib is endangering people already living in undignified camps and other inadequate shelters. These

camps should be a safe haven, instead they are caught up in the crossfire. If the fighting reaches the city the humanitarian consequences are unimaginable, and is likely to lead to even more displacement and high civilian casualties. We're calling on warring parties to uphold the laws of war and protect civilians, and on the UN security Council to take urgent action to put pressure on both sides to agree an immediate nationwide ceasefire and work together to prevent a country-wide famine."

Notes to editors-

Sources:

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