

**United Nations Human Rights Council**

**MetMUNC XLIX**

**Topic: Yemen Crisis**

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Yemen, one of Arab's poorest countries, is facing the largest humanitarian crisis in the world. More than 24 million people, which is approximately 80% of the population, are in need of humanitarian assistance.<sup>1</sup> The crisis in Yemen began in 2011 when President Ali Abdullah Saleh, who led the country as an authoritarian president for three decades, was overthrown by a Revolution and was forced to hand over power to his deputy, Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi. Mr. Hadi struggled to lead the country as President, and was not able to deal with problems such as attacks by jihadists, a separatist movement in the south, the continuing loyalty of security personnel to Saleh, corruption, unemployment, and food insecurity. The Houthis, which consist of the minority Zaidi Shia Muslims, took advantage of the new president's weakness and took control of the northern heartland of Saada province and its neighbouring areas. In addition, the International Monetary Fund had extended a \$550 million loan to Yemen in hopes of economic reforms. Following this, Hadi's government lifted fuel subsidies in July 2014, and the Houthis organized mass protests demanding lower fuel prices and a new government. The Houthis had previously rebelled against Saleh's government six times between 2004 and 2010. The chaos combined with the lack of Hadi's leadership caused many Yemenis, including the majority

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/emergencies/yemen-crisis>

Sunnis, to support the Houthis. Military units loyal to Saleh joined with the Houthis, which contributed to their success. Up until 2017, Saleh had been supporting the Houthis in their effort, but when he tried to shift his support to the Saudi led coalition, he was killed by Houthi rebels. Other militias mobilized against the Houthi-Saleh forces, aligning with those in the military who had remained loyal to the Hadi government. By 2015, the Houthis had taken over the capital city of Sanaa, and their attempt to take over the entire country caused President Hadi to flee to Saudi Arabia in March of 2015. There was suspicion that the Houthis had been able to rise up and rebel because they were backed by the Shia majority country Iran. In



A Saudi-led multinational coalition intervened in the conflict in Yemen in March 2015

response to this, Saudi Arabia and eight other Sunni Arab countries began a military intervention and an air campaign to defeat the Houthis and restore Mr. Hadi's presidency.

The two forces have continued to fight against each other in a civil war for the last four years. The air strikes led by Saudi Arabia have caused thousands of civilians to die and more than 3.3 million Yemenis have been uprooted as a result of this conflict.<sup>2</sup> According to the Yemen Data Project, more than 17,500 civilians have been killed and injured since 2015.<sup>3</sup> The implications of the civil war have caused millions others to die of starvation, cholera outbreaks, and lack of medical assistance. Yemen was a poor nation even prior to the conflict, and the conditions have

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.rescue.org/country/yemen#what-caused-the-current-crisis-in-yemen>

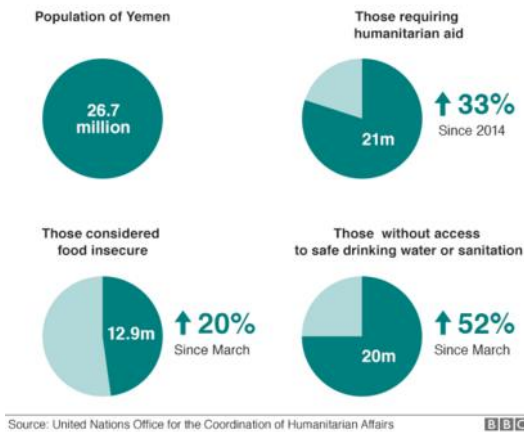
<sup>3</sup> <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/2395690/yemen-war-famine-death-toll-saudi-arabia-houthi-rebels-iran/>

dramatically worsened. Continued fighting prevents shipments of food and fuel from entering the country which has caused depletion of antibiotics and critical medical supplies. Hospitals do not have fuel to operate generators during power cuts, and ambulances have run out of gasoline. More than 85,000 infants under the age of five have died from starvation or disease since 2015 and are in dire need of assistance. <sup>4</sup> Children are being hit the worst with the famine which causes them to be malnourished and underweight.



Children in Yemen are dying of starvation

With schools and other buildings being disrupted by the war, they are being robbed of their education. The Yemen civil

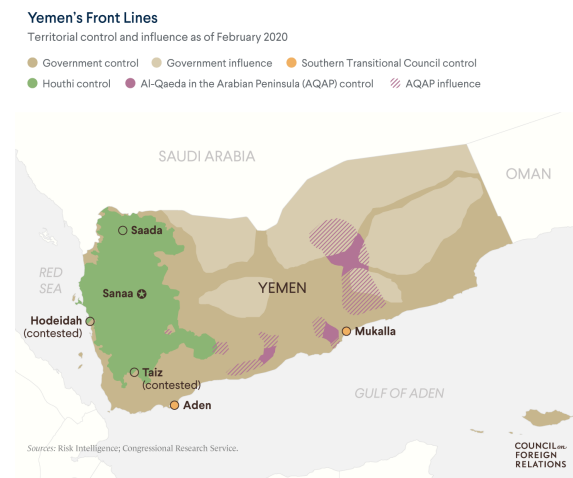


### Scale of humanitarian crisis in Yemen

war has been called a proxy war between the competing powers in the Middle East as the Saudi led coalition fights against the Iran backed Houthi rebels. Iran and the Houthis share common geopolitical interests: Iran wants to remove Saudi and U.S. dominance in the region, and the Houthis oppose Hadi's Saudi- and U.S.-backed government. Saudi

troops landed in the southern port city of Aden in August 2015 and helped drive the Houthis out the south over the next few months Their success has been limited because the Houthis still remain in control of Sanaa and north-western Yemen. They have also taken over the city of Taiz

from where they launch missile and drone attacks on Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia has placed a tight blockade around Yemen to stop Iran from supplying Houthi rebels with weapons, but the restrictions caused a further increase in the prices of food and fuel. Furthermore, the ongoing chaos has allowed militants from al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) to establish a foothold in Yemen and carry out deadly attacks.



Map of Yemen showing the territories of competing forces

In April 2015, AQAP captured the coastal city of Mukalla and expanded its control westward to Aden. The threat of al-Qaeda has made Western countries involved in the war as well. The U.S., U.K., and France, have been giving logistical and intelligence support to the Saudi-led coalition. The U.S. has been conducting counterterrorism operations through airstrikes to target AQAP. In April 2016, the United States deployed a small team of forces to advise and assist Saudi-led troops to retake territory from AQAP.

The efforts that have been undertaken so far have had little to no success to stop the crisis. The International Rescue Committee (IRC) has been working on providing assistance to Yemenis since 2012. They have been supplying drugs and medical supplies and training hospital staff in cholera treatment. They have also been working to improve water and sanitation systems and provide educational opportunities to children. UN-backed peace negotiations have made some progress, but have failed to bring an end to the conflict. There were discussions in Stockholm in December 2018 about a cease-fire in the port city of Hodeidah, the exchange of more than fifteen

thousand prisoners, and the creation of a joint committee to de-escalate violence. However, attempts to implement the agreement have been ineffective. The hope for a resolution has diminished after UAE backed out of Saudi's coalition, and then led attacks against the coalition to seize the city of Aden. The situation deteriorated further when the Houthis claimed responsibility for a missile attack on Saudi Arabian oil facilities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has only caused further problems in Yemen. Yemen is now facing an emergency within an emergency. Only half of health facilities are functioning, and many that remain operational lack basic equipment like masks and gloves, let alone oxygen and other essential supplies to treat the coronavirus. As of June 16, Yemen had recorded 208 coronavirus-related deaths, and an outbreak would be hard to contain in Yemen because of the damage done to the health infrastructure.<sup>5</sup> Currently, as part of its response to the coronavirus pandemic, UNICEF has shipped 18,000 COVID-19 tests and more than 33,000 N95 respirators, 33,000 face shields, and 18,000 gowns to Yemen.<sup>6</sup> UNICEF is also training health workers in infection prevention and control.

The goal of this committee is to find effective ways to help Yemen combat this crisis. The committee should find practical solutions to broker peace between the opposing sides, protect civilians from violence, supply Yemen with food and other essential supplies, and to equip them with the means to combat this pandemic.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/2395690/yemen-war-famine-death-toll-saudi-arabia-houthi-rebels-iran/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/emergencies/yemen-crisis>

**Questions to consider:**

1. To what extent has your country been involved in the Yemen Civil War?
2. What side has your country been inclined to support in the war?
3. In what way can your country help Yemen combat the pandemic?
4. What role can your country play in providing relief to civilians?
5. How can your country play a role in achieving peace in Yemen, while catering to the needs of each side involved?

**Helpful Links:**

- <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29319423>
- <https://www.unicef.org/emergencies/yemen-crisis>
- <https://www.cfr.org/background/yemen-crisis>
- <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/2395690/yemen-war-famine-death-toll-saudi-arabia-hout-hi-rebels-iran/>
- <https://www.scmp.com/news/world/middle-east/article/2174339/85000-children-have-died-starvation-or-disease-yemen-conflict>
- <https://www.rescue.org/country/yemen#what-caused-the-current-crisis-in-yemen>