

TEARFUND APPEAL

Yemen, a country where 80% of the population need humanitarian assistance due to conflict ([our website describes her as embattled and on her knees](#)), **needs some advocates**.

Earlier this month the [UK Government announced that they are resuming arms sales to Saudi Arabia](#). Our humanitarian team expects that this will worsen the already dire situation in Yemen (and there is documented evidence that the Saudi led coalition has used these weapons to attack Yemeni civilians in the past, thus breaching international humanitarian law).

Suspending arms sales is a vital step in ending the world's worst humanitarian crisis and so if you can, please write to your MP. We'd love you to send them an email or a letter explaining the issue (briefing paper attached) and asking them to write to the Foreign Secretary and Secretary of State for International Trade about it. We have a template letter attached too, but obviously it will have more impact if you personalise it and make it sound more like a letter from you, than one from our humanitarian team!

Please forward this onto others who you think would be willing to write a letter, or maybe do it as a housegroup or justice group activity. And do send us any replies you get from your MP, as they will help in the lobbying at Government level that is also going on by various organisations including Tearfund.

Thanks for speaking up with us, and don't hesitate to email us if you have a question.

TEARFUND BRIEFING BELOW



Yemen: In the crux of multiple crises July 2020

1. We urge the UK to

- Revoke its decision to allow new arms trade licenses to be granted for trade with the Saudi led coalition and to suspend all military support and arms sales at risk of being used in attacks that target civilians in Yemen
- Make public the analysis leading to the conclusion that the evidence of Saudi-led coalition airstrikes in Yemen that breached humanitarian laws are 'isolated incidents'¹
- Use its pen holder position on Yemen at the UN Security Council to support a political solution in Yemen and ensure the peace negotiations are inclusive of marginalised groups, especially women
- Urge Yemeni authorities to increase transparency in reporting cases of COVID-19
- Advocate for unimpeded access for humanitarian workers to carry out relief work securely
- Increase its funding to the UN Yemen Humanitarian Response plan 2020² which is currently under funded by \$1 billion

2. Over 5 years of conflict

The situation in Yemen has for years been termed the world's worst humanitarian crisis, with 80% of the population of 24 million in need of humanitarian assistance³. Even before the current conflict, Yemen faced underdevelopment, unemployment, corruption and a high reliance on imported food. As Yemen enters the sixth year of conflict, the direness of the situation continues, compounded by persistent obstructions to the provision of humanitarian assistance, obliteration of critical civilian infrastructure and the near complete collapse of the economy.

3. COVID-19

UK Aid funded research by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine estimates that one million Yemenis may have been infected by COVID-19 already, and projects a worst-case scenario of up to 85,000 deaths⁴. In 2016, the WHO was already reporting that over half of Yemen's health facilities were closed or only partially functioning due to the conflict, many having been destroyed.⁵ Furthermore, civil servants (including health workers) salaries have gone underpaid, and in many cases unpaid for years⁶. This has left Yemen's health system severely ill equipped to respond to the outbreak of COVID-19. Yemen has one of the lowest testing rates in the world,⁷ at 31 tests per million and the virus is thought to

¹ Rt Hon Liz Truss MP (Department for International Trade), *Trade Update: Written statement - HCWS339* (7 July 2020) <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2020-07-07/HCWS339/>

² UN OCHA, *Extension Humanitarian Response Plan: Yemen* (June 2020) https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Extension%20Yemen%20HRP%202020_Final%20%281%29.pdf

³ UN OCHA, *Yemen Humanitarian Update* (June 2020) <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Yemen%20Humanitarian%20Update%20Issue%206%20%28June%202020%29%20%5BEN%5D.pdf>

⁴ GOV.UK, *UK calls for drastic action in Yemen as coronavirus infections reach one million* (18 June 2020) <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-calls-for-drastic-action-in-yemen-as-coronavirus-infections-reach-one-million>

⁵ WHO, *Survey reveals extent of damage to Yemen's health system* (6 November 2016) <http://www.emro.who.int/media/news/survey-reveals-extent-of-damage-to-yemens-health-system.html>

⁶ Joint World Bank/UN/UNDP/UNOPS/UNICEF Discussion Note, *Proposed Approach for Facilitating the Payment of Civil Servants in Yemen*, (November 2018), <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/ar/398941544526732329/pdf/WP-P166506-PUBLIC-EXECUTIVE-SUMMARY-Yemen-Salaries-Dec-12.pdf>

⁷ Amy Lieberman, *UN appeal to address Yemen 'catastrophe' falls \$1B short*, DEVEX (2 June 2020) <https://www.devex.com/news/un-appeal-to-address-yemen-catastrophe-falls-1b-short-97387>

be aggressively spreading across the country, despite the low number of officially reported cases. Mortality rates for COVID-19 in Yemen are five times the global average, with about 25% of Yemenis confirmed to have contracted COVID-19 reported to have died.⁸

4. Ceasefire has been broken by conflict parties

In March 2020 the UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, called for ceasefires in conflicts around the world to ensure countries can focus on responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although parties to the conflict in Yemen initially agreed to a ceasefire, this has been broken several times. Attacks on civilians have continued, with the latest (at the time of writing) being an air raid attack on homes that killed seven civilians including women and children in al-Jawf province on 15 July, the third such attack since June 2020⁹.

5. Humanitarian funding shortfall

At the High-Level Pledging Event for Yemen held in June 2020, donors pledged only US\$1.35 billion of the \$2.41 billion the UN forecast as required to cover essential humanitarian activities between June and December 2020, leaving a gap of more than \$1 billion.

6. Arms trade

While the UK has called for an end to this man-made crisis, and is the fourth largest donor of humanitarian aid in Yemen, it continues to supply weapons that are used in the conflict.

The UN Group of Eminent Experts (GEE) on Yemen published a report in September 2019¹⁰ in which they **said** that nations, including **the UK, the US and France, may be complicit in war crimes in Yemen through arms sales to the Saudi-led coalition.** The report found 'The parties to the conflict in Yemen are responsible for an array of human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law. Some of these violations are likely to amount to war crimes.'

UK Government responses to parliamentary questions¹¹ have shown that UK-made arms sold to Saudi Arabia have been used in Yemen¹² and that UN agencies and officials, European Parliament and NGOs have raised concerns about the breach of International humanitarian law (IHL) in the conflict in Yemen¹³. In February 2019, the House of Lords Select Committee on International Relations published findings that the UK's weapons sales to Saudi are unlawful¹⁴.

A court process investigating UK arms exports to Saudi Arabia is under way. The most recent ruling, by the **UK court of appeal in 2019, found that the government's export licensing process did not comply with the law.** The government's appeal is due at the Supreme Court in November 2020¹⁵.

⁸ UN OCHA, *Yemen Humanitarian Update* (June 2020)

<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Yemen%20Humanitarian%20Update%20Issue%206%20%28June%202020%29%20%5BEN%5D.pdf>

⁹ Al Jazeera, *Air strikes kill civilians in Yemen's al-Jawf province* (15 July 2020)

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/07/air-strikes-kill-civilians-yemen-al-jawf-province-200715132709918.html>

¹⁰ OHCHR, *Situation of human rights in Yemen, including violations and abuses since September 2014* (September 2019)

https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/GEE-Yemen/A_HRC_42_CRP_1.PDF

¹¹ CAAT, *UK arms sales to Saudi Arabia* (July 2019)

<https://www.caat.org.uk/campaigns/stop-arming-saudi/arms-sales>

¹² House of Commons Hansard, *Yemen* (19 December 2016)

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2016-12-19/debates/B8EBA03B-5FFC-44CF-8989-883F62F675D4/Yemen>

¹³ Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *Written Evidence from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (UKY 13)*, Submission to the Committees on Arms Export Controls inquiry on the use of UK manufactured arms in Yemen, (March 2016)

<http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/committees-on-arms-export-controls/use-of-uk-manufactured-arms-in-yemen/written/31698.html>

¹⁴ The Guardian, *UK's Saudi weapons sales unlawful, Lords committee finds* (February 2019),

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/feb/16/uks-saudi-weapons-sales-unlawful-lords-committee-finds>

¹⁵ CAAT, *Saudi Arabia - legal challenge*, (July 2020) <https://www.caat.org.uk/resources/countries/saudi-arabia/legal-2016>

The UK's announcement in July 2020 that it plans to resume arms sales to Saudi Arabia¹⁶ could be in breach of the global Arms Trade Treaty, which it has ratified. This contains provisions to halt arms transfers where there is an overriding risk they could be used for violations of international human rights or humanitarian law.

In recent years, Germany, Norway, Finland, Belgium, Netherlands, Denmark, Austria, and Italy have ended or restricted arms sales to Saudi Arabia and/ or the UAE due to their conduct in the conflict in Yemen.

7. Tearfund's humanitarian work in Yemen

Tearfund's work in Yemen focuses on food security, WASH, cholera prevention and health and nutrition, and is delivered through local partner organisations. We also carry out training on addressing sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) and trauma. In response to COVID-19, Tearfund is working through our partners to distribute food and hygiene kits to vulnerable people including IDPs, people with disabilities, women and children, and marginalised groups such as the Muhamasheen.

¹⁶Rt Hon Liz Truss MP (Department for International Trade), *Trade Update: Written statement - HCWS339* (7 July 2020) <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2020-07-07/HCWS339/>