

# International Development Committee

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From Sarah Champion MP, Chair

Rt Hon Anne-Marie Trevelyan MP  
Secretary of State for International Development  
Department for International Development

30 March 2020

## **The Humanitarian Crisis in Yemen**

Dear Anne-Marie,

As you know, Yemen remains as the world's worst humanitarian crisis. This is acknowledged by the UN and the vast majority of humanitarian actors and commentators, notably the International Rescue Committee with Yemen topping its crisis watchlist for a second year running. This is a humanitarian catastrophe, rooted in complex regional and geo-political rivalries and conflict. As you also know, the UK is both the UN Security penholder and a major donor in relation to this crisis. I am writing on behalf of the Committee to seek further particulars on what the UK is doing to show leadership, build consensus and achieve progress around the vital twin objectives of: pressing for a process aimed at achieving ceasefires and then a lasting peace; and ensuring access for humanitarian aid, north and south, for the most vulnerable and observance of the basic principles of International Humanitarian Law by all combatants (with accountability mechanisms where breaches occur).

Current circumstances prevent shipments of food and fuel from entering the country and, more recently, humanitarian access has been heavily restricted by both sides but most particularly the Houthis. I am particularly concerned that the United States appear to be preparing to withdraw humanitarian support from Yemen over these restrictions.

In October, the predecessor Committee heard from the then Minister for the Middle East and North Africa about investigations into civilian deaths caused by coalition bombings. With regard to Saudi Arabia, the Minister acknowledged that nation states with whom the UK engages should be held to high standards of accountability. Minister Murrison undertook to provide the Committee with the details of Saudi Arabia's Joint Incident Assessment Team findings.

The coronavirus outbreak is particularly disconcerting for countries such as Yemen, where the health system is already operating at under 50% capacity.

Confirmed cases are yet to be seen. However, I note Saudi Arabia's recent shipment of medical supplies, including some protective gear for dealing with cases of coronavirus infection and it is extremely concerning that the World Health Organisation has warned that the country will not be able to cope with the virus. The most significant impacts so far have been: the very welcome, if fragile, ceasefire agreement; and a ban on air travel which has seen humanitarian aid organisations scale back to essential staff only. Now there is a real concern that the forthcoming rainy season will bring a substantial rise in the incidence of cholera, adding to an estimated 56,000 cases already this year.

The United Kingdom has considerable influence in Yemen, not only as the penholder at the United Nations Security Council and major donor, but as a key ally of Saudi Arabia. The previous Foreign Secretary clearly held UK leadership of multilateral efforts to mitigate and resolve the crisis in Yemen. We urge you and the current Foreign Secretary to do the same and go further; as the UK seeks to review and renew its position in the world, such signals will be very important.

The Committee would be grateful if you could provide an update on the concerns set out below:

1. What is the UK doing to support the continued provision of humanitarian assistance and to try improve the access of humanitarian organisations, and the aid they provide, throughout the country based on need? What is the UK's position on US threats to suspend aid provision in Yemen due to access restrictions?
2. In particular, what steps is the UK taking to support sustainable food procurement, and reconstruct food production infrastructure, in Yemen?
3. What steps is the UK taking to improve economic resilience, and particularly to empower women and girls in this regard? Will the UK seek to involve civil society organisations – including those led by women – in the future peace negotiations?
4. What steps is the Government taking to promote a political solution to the crisis in Yemen bilaterally and within the United Nations Security Council? Did the Foreign Secretary's recent trip to the region result in any new initiatives in this regard? Is the UK pressing for a new UNSC Resolution on Yemen?
5. What support is the UK providing to UN Special Envoy, Martin Griffiths?
6. What plans do you, and/or the Foreign Secretary have to visit Yemen (once current restrictions are lifted)?
7. In October 2019, Minister Murrison undertook to provide "what we have" in relation to the work and findings of the Saudi Joint Investigation Assessment Team into allegations of d war crimes committed in Yemen, principally civilian

casualties arising from coalition air strikes? His letter to the Committee referred to conclusions of UK Government analysis or review of statements released by the Saudi authorities on, then, 162 investigations. Please provide the Committee with English language copies of the statements referred to.

- What is the UK Government's position on pressing for the publication of JIAT reports in full?
- Minister Murrison referred to recent improvements in the JIAT process and of room for more; what further progress would the UK Government wish to see and what steps has it taken to encourage Saudi Arabia in that direction?

8. What recent steps has the UK taken towards the objective of ensuring that all those committing violations of International Humanitarian Law in Yemen on all sides – particularly the use of restricted munitions and infliction of civilian casualties – are held to account?

9. What discussions have been held with Saudi Arabia regarding the UK's arms sales and the necessary measures to guarantee such materiel is not used in Yemen in operations resulting in civilian casualties?

10. What immediate action is DFID taking to mitigate the impact of any potential coronavirus outbreak in Yemen, and what steps is the Department taking to ensure humanitarian partners have the support to cope with any further spike in cholera cases?

I would be very grateful if you would respond to this letter by Monday 20 April. The Committee intends to publish this letter and, consequently, your response.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'S', on a light blue background.

**Sarah Champion MP**  
**Chair of the Committee**