



Hudaydah Port, Yemen: Humanitarian joint statement, 25 April 2017

As humanitarian organisations operating in Yemen, we are gravely concerned by reports of a possible attack by the Saudi-led coalition on the critical port of Hudaydah. Such an attack risks tipping a country starved by two years of war into near certain famine, risking the lives of millions. The crisis in Yemen cannot be addressed with a military solution. Rather than fuelling more conflict, we urge the US and the UK, as key supporters of the Saudi-led coalition, to use their influence to urge all parties to the conflict to re-double their efforts to forge a political solution and take immediate steps to address the humanitarian crisis.

The port of Hudaydah is the major lifeline for a country on the verge of starvation. Yemen is almost totally reliant on imported food, medicine and fuel, and up to 80% of all imports have historically entered the country at Hudaydah. Any attack on the port would severely disrupt the ability to import goods via this critical route, including much of the humanitarian aid and most of the commercial imports that are so urgently needed. Even optimistic estimates indicate that a military operation with minimal damage to infrastructure would put the port out of action for at least six weeks. For a country down to potentially its last few weeks of wheat supplies in some areas, such disruption could be catastrophic. History tells us that military operations are rarely quick or 'clean'. It took Hadi government forces nearly two months to recapture the port of Mokha – a city a tenth of the size of Hudaydah - which remains heavily militarised some three months later. In reality, an assault on Hudaydah would likely displace half a million people, increase civilian casualties and impede the delivery of food, medicine and fuel to a population in acute need.

There is no current viable alternative to Hudaydah port. Yemen's main commercial importers of food have stated they don't know how they would deliver food if Yemen's Red Sea ports are lost. An attack on Hudaydah would likely also block nearby Al-Saleef port which is primarily designed to receive grain imports. The ports of Aden and Mukala, do not have the required capacity or infrastructure to meet Yemen's food import needs. The delays and increased costs of diverting imports to these ports could mean the difference between life and death for seven million Yemenis who are already on the verge of starvation. Overland routes from Saudi Arabia or Oman take at least two to three days and are not feasible as humanitarian corridors: they are at best untested, and at worst, congested, expensive, and dangerous routes as aid convoys would have to cross the frontlines of the conflict.

Humanitarian actors face daily operational barriers as the warring parties on both sides deliberately block critical supply routes. But the answer to these challenges is political negotiations, not jeopardising the operation of an irreplaceable humanitarian supply route and trade hub when so many civilian lives are already at risk. The Saudi-led coalition should be lifting the de facto blockade and sending the four World Food Programme cranes sitting in Dubai, not bombs, if they are serious about improving the flow of goods through Hudaydah port. The international community must act urgently to prevent this attack and explore all options to stop children and families being starved to death in Yemen. It is an outrage that the last meaningful action taken by the UN Security Council on one of the world's largest humanitarian crises was a year ago. Yemen must no longer be a forgotten conflict, and it cannot be allowed to become a forgotten famine.

Signed,

Action Against Hunger
Médecins du Monde
Norwegian Refugee Council
Saferworld
Save the Children
Tearfund
War Child