



CALL FOR SUPPORT FOR THE PEOPLE OF YEMEN

Lying at the crossroads of Africa, the Middle East and Asia, Yemen, along with Mesopotamia and the Nile Valley, represents one of the core ancient civilizations around which the modern Middle East has been built. To the Ancient Greeks and Romans, it was *Arabia Felix*, Fortunate Arabia. Today, however, the country is mired in conflict which has left much of its economy and infrastructure destroyed and facing a full scale famine.

Yemen has become the worst place on earth to be a child.

Half of Yemen's 2.3 million displaced persons are children. More than 90,000 Yemeni children are estimated to have died from starvation, around 350,000 children under 5 years old are suffering from severe acute malnutrition, fifty five in a hundred children die before their 5th birthday, two million children are out of school and at risk of exploitation and abuse, and one in two are suffering from stunted growth (an irreversible condition) as a result of food shortages. They will never fulfil their potential, either physically or cognitively, will be at higher risk of developing non communicable chronic illnesses and will in all likelihood be excluded from economic productivity and condemned to foreshortened lives in poverty. Additionally, since the beginning of Yemen's current war, now well into its sixth year, diseases that were largely eradicated from the rest of the world have re-emerged, sweeping through a country that is ill-equipped to deal with them. Every 10 minutes a child in Yemen dies from a preventable cause. Millions of Yemeni children are robbed of their basic rights to safety, health, and education, and face suffering on an unimaginable scale. Most have not known childhood, let alone happiness.

Hunger, starvation, and famine are a stain on humanity. It is not a question of fate, but of political will or lack thereof. We have the tools, the watch lists to anticipate crises, but have we the resolve, internationally, to tackle root causes? While people associate collective starvation with a shortage of food, the real cause is indifference.

Whilst it is true that about two-thirds of the 815 million chronically hungry people around the world live in conflict or war torn areas, the deepening human misery in the world comes not only from war and conflicts. It also comes from the world's growing indifference to the suffering of people faced with hunger and displacement. Indifference as deadly as missiles, bullets and fatal diseases.

Worsening this already dreadful state of affairs, taking into consideration the fact that half of Yemen's health facilities are dysfunctional, and water and sanitation systems in many parts of the country have collapsed, the WHO estimates that half of Yemen's population of 30 million could be infected with COVID-19 and more than 40,000 could die.

In a forthcoming study, Doctor Evelin Lindner – a medical doctor, psychologist and scholar – suggests that the pandemic presents an opportunity in the midst of suffering. The study's title is reminiscent of the Report of the Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Issues which asked the question (as the Cold War was coming to a close): Can we win the human race and create a warm peace in place of a cold war? The report argued that the human race is a question of our mutually assured destruction versus our mutually assured survival, and can only be won by placing human welfare, human dignity and human security at the centre of interdisciplinary, transboundary and networked policymaking efforts. "Progress in the humanitarian field," the report emphasised, is progress in "a field in which ideological differences, North-South problems and East-West rivalries"¹ can be transcended.

We are in dire need for intense soul-searching, and for waging a war against indifference. We need to stop and ask: How can we move from "making sense" of the crises of our world to "taking action", from knowledge to empowerment, and from politics to policies? When will we find a pathway for action against inequality, injustice, famine, poverty, war and other man-made disasters? How can we remove, or at least reduce, the barriers that are preventing millions of people on earth from living in dignity and peace in their homelands? At the present time, we are far from reaching any consensus on these questions. We are still in the throes of disillusionment, panic and anger. So, what next? The first and most important step we should take is a giant step towards compassion.

Compassion does not mean weakness. Rather, as Gandhi once put it: "compassion is a muscle that gets stronger with use ". We strongly believe that compassion is

¹ The Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Issues. *Winning the Human Race? The Report of the Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Issues*. London and New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd. 1998. P. 199.

a moral force that can stand as a counterweight to hatred, revenge and violence. Compassion contains all the elements needed to reverse the downward spiral of collective suffering and injustice.

From Midi in the Northwest to Hof in the Southeast, Coronavirus is spreading fast and wild in war-ravaged Yemen.

In addition to the aggravating factors of a destroyed infrastructure and collapsed health system, millions in Yemen cannot afford food, water, medicines, and other basic essentials, even when these are available. The country's malnourished population has among the world's lowest immunity levels to disease. If health care systems in Spain, Italy and the US can be overwhelmed by the onslaught of the virus, Yemen's prospects are extremely grim. Many hospitals and clinics are dysfunctional, and those that are up and running lack doctors, medical staff and basic equipment.

Yemen is in desperate need of help in the form of medical equipment, protective gear for health workers and widespread COVID-19 testing. According to the IRC, Yemen coronavirus testing rates are among the lowest in the world - 31 tests per million, compared to 41,771 tests per million in Italy.

Without a rapid intervention programme that supports the urgent need for combating the spread of COVID-19 in Yemen, the consequences will be disastrous. The ruthless spread of the virus will make what is already the world's worst humanitarian crisis a catastrophe.

In addition to the COVID-19 response, aid agencies in Yemen are still delivering the world's largest relief operation, supporting more than 10 million people each month. Out of 41 major UN programmes in Yemen, however, more than 30 will close in the next few weeks if additional funds are not secure.

We call on all international donors and development agencies to stand by the people (yes they are people too) of Yemen. Without medical equipment and supplies Yemen will not be able to confront this deadly pandemic.

For most Yemenis, life was already hard before the war, but the last getting on for six years has brought utter misery and despair for millions. Many have lost their source of daily income, and many civil servants in the Northern provinces have not received their salaries for four years. It is up to us, especially in the face of this deadly disease to provide hope where there is none and to support our brothers in humanity, the Yemeni people, in their time of direst need.

Furthermore, we call for cessation of hostilities across Yemen in order to address the mounting humanitarian needs.

Signed:

His Royal Highness Prince El Hassan bin Talal of Jordan

Vaira Vike-Freiberga, Co-Chair, President of Latvia 1999-2007

Ismail Serageldin, Co-Chair, Vice President of the World Bank 1992-2000

Kerry Kennedy, President Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights

Marianna V. Vardinoyannis, Goodwill Ambassador of UNESCO

Shaukat Aziz, Prime Minister of Pakistan 2004-2007

Farida Allaghi, former Ambassador of Libya to EU

Kjell Magne Bondevik, Prime Minister of Norway 1997-2000; 2001-2005

Marek Belka, Prime Minister of Poland 2004-2005, President of the National Bank of Poland 2010-2016, former Director of the IMF's European Department

Ouided Bouchmaoui, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate 2015

Emil Constantinescu, President of Romania 1996-2000

Maha El-Khalil Chalabi, UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador, General Secretary International Association to Save Tyre

Mirko Cvetkovic, Prime Minister of Serbia 2008-2012

Jan Fisher, Prime Minister of the Czech Republic 2009-2010

Ameenah Gurib Fakim, President of Mauritius 2015-2018

Chiril Gaburici, Prime Minister of Moldova 2015, Minister of Economy 2018-2019

Noeleen Heyzer, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations 2017-2015

Mladen Ivanic, President of Bosnia and Herzegovina 2014-2018

Ivo Josipovic, President of Croatia 2010-2015

Jadranka Kosor, Prime Minister of Croatia 2009-2011

Aleksandr Kwasniewski, President of Poland 1995-2005

Zlatko Lagumdzija, Prime Minister of Bosnia and Herzegovina 2001-2002

Yves Leterme, Prime Minister of Belgium 2008, 2009-2011

Petru Lucinschi, President of Moldova 1997-2001

Amre Moussa, Secretary General of the Arab League 2001-2011, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Egypt 1991-2001

Moussa Mara, Prime Minister of Mali 2014-2015

Giorgi Margvelashvili, President of Georgia 2013-2018

Stjepan Mesic, President of Croatia 2000-2010

Rexhep Meidani, President of Albania 1997-2002

Peter Medgyessy, Prime Minister of Hungary 2002-2004

Bujar Nishani, President of Albania 2012-2017

Djoomart Otorbayev, Prime Minister of Kyrgyzstan 2014-2015

Rosen Plevneliev, President of Bulgaria 2012-2017

Oscar Ribas Reig, Prime Minister of Andorra 1982-1984; 1990-1994

Rosalia Arteago Serrano, President of Ecuador 1997

Petar Stoyanov, President of Bulgaria 1997-2002

Eka Tkhelashvili, deputy Prime Minister of Georgia 2010-2012

Filip Vujanovic, President of Montenegro 2003-2018

Kateryna Yushchenko, First Lady of Ukraine 2005-2010

Viktor Yushchenko, President of Ukraine 2005-2010

Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero, Prime Minister of Spain 2004-2011

Valdis Zatlers, President of Latvia 2007-2011

Rovshan Muradov, Secretary General NGIC