

19 October 2015

Open Letter to the UN Security Council

Dear Ambassador

We are writing to express our alarm at the deteriorating humanitarian and protection situation in Yemen. Recent statements by Ansar Allah and the General People's Congress (GPC) have outlined their willingness in principle to implement UNSC resolution 2216 (2015) and the peace plan brokered by the UN Special Envoy to Yemen. The UN Security Council should seize this opportunity to press the parties to the conflict to implement an immediate ceasefire and to begin meaningful peace talks without preconditions.

Since UNSC resolution 2216 was passed six months ago, the situation has become substantially worse for civilians. This April, the Security Council reaffirmed, consistent with international humanitarian law, the need for all parties to ensure the safety of civilians. Since then, at least 2,500 civilians have been killed, including more than 500 children. According to the UN Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights almost two-thirds of civilian deaths have been reportedly caused by Saudi-led airstrikes and the remaining by forces allied to Ansar Allah and other armed groups. Civilian infrastructure, including hospitals and schools, continues to be hit, with two-thirds of the damage and destruction of buildings caused by airstrikes. An estimated 21.1 million people (80 percent of the population) now require humanitarian assistance and over 2.3 million are displaced. The UN Special Envoy to Yemen has warned that 6 million people in Yemen are one step away from famine.

UNSC Resolution 2216 urges all parties to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance, but ongoing airstrikes and ground fighting, administrative barriers and the destruction of infrastructure continue to make humanitarian access to large areas of the country very difficult or impossible, such as to Sa'ada governorate in the north and Aden, Dhale'e, Lahj and Taiz governorates in the south.

In light of the scale of suffering, we call on the UN Security Council to demand the following:

Improved humanitarian access - As required by UNSCR 2216, all parties to the conflict must enable rapid, safe and unhindered access to humanitarian assistance for civilians in need. Those obstructing the delivery of aid should be condemned in the strongest possible terms and face appropriate action in line with article 9 of UNSCR 2216.

A permanent ceasefire and lasting political solution - A permanent ceasefire is needed to safeguard millions of civilians in need and to create space for political negotiations without preconditions. The UN Security Council must set out in strong terms that Resolution 2216 must be used as a constructive platform for a peace process. Parties to the conflict should not use it to justify their non participation in peace talks.

An end to the de facto blockade and full access for humanitarian/commercial supplies in conflict areas - The ongoing blockade of commercial civilian supplies continues to have a massive detrimental impact on millions of civilians in all parts of the country. Hundreds and thousands of civilians in Taiz, the third largest city in Yemen, are desperately short of water, food and medical supplies as armed groups tighten their control over the city and block much needed humanitarian aid from getting in. If restrictions on fuel and other goods are having a disproportionate impact on civilians, that would constitute a violation of international humanitarian law.

All land, sea and air routes to Yemen should be re-opened to allow the delivery of fuel, food and medical supplies for civilian use. Restrictions on these essential commercial imports need to be lifted on vessels entering all ports.

Establishment of a credible, independent international monitoring mechanism - In light of reports of ongoing violations of the laws of war by all sides and the recent missed opportunity at the Human Rights Council to pass a forceful resolution, a truly independent and impartial international mechanism should be established to investigate abuses by all sides, including the arbitrary denial of access to humanitarian assistance, with the goal of accountability.

An arms embargo on all those who violate the laws of war – The arms embargo established under Resolution 2216 should be expanded to ensure that no arms or military equipment supplied to any combatant party can be used in Yemen, or in support of military operations in Yemen, as there is a clear risk that these may be used to commit serious violations of international law. UN member states who have signed the Arms Trade Treaty are obliged to refrain from the sale and transfer of arms to any party to the conflict. The Yemen Sanctions Committee should verify and monitor this.

Should Resolution 2216 fail to bring about progress in the areas outlined above, Security Council members should push for a new resolution that can better ensure an end to humanitarian suffering and a lasting peace. The new resolution should demand an end to the conflict and de facto blockade on commercial supplies, and expand the arms embargo established under Resolution 2216 to ensure that no arms or military equipment supplied to any combatant party can be used in Yemen, or in support of military operations in Yemen.

Sincerely,

Mike Penrose, CEO, Action Contre La Faim (ACF)
Wolfgang Jamann, CEO, CARE International
Andreas Kamm, Secretary General, Danish Refugee Council (DRC)
David Weiss, President and CEO, Global Communities
Manuel Patrouillard, Managing Director, Handicap International (HI)
Jan Egeland, Secretary General, Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)
Winnie Byanyima, Executive Director, Oxfam International (OI)
Mark Lister, Chief Executive, Progressio
Nancy Wilson, President and CEO, Relief International (RI)
Jasmine Whitbread, CEO, Save the Children International
Rob Williams, CEO, War Child UK

cc: Ban Ki Moon, United Nations Secretary General
Stephen O'Brien, UNOCHA, Under Secretary General and Emergency Relief Coordinator
Johannes van der Klaauw Humanitarian Coordinator for Yemen
Amer Daoudi, Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for Yemen

