

# **Submission to All Party Parliamentary Group for Yemen (1 Oct 2015)**

## **Report by Yemen Safe Passage Group**

'Yemen Safe Passage' is an initiative of a non-aligned group of senior ex-diplomats, academics, development professional and others with many years' experience of living and working in Yemen.

UN OCHA is currently assessing Level 4 Food Insecurity (Level 5 is Famine) in 10 out of 22 Yemen governorates, affecting some 7 million or a quarter of the population of Yemen. There are particular concerns for high levels of child malnutrition in and around Hodeidah, Taiz and Sa'ada. Given poor information flows, the situation may prove to be much worse, a hidden famine in the making.

A prime cause is severe delays to the delivery of food, fuel, medicine and other economic necessities following the military action between the Saudi-led Coalition and Houthi/Saleh alliance. With no indication that a ceasefire or political solution is imminent, and the recent failures of any ceasefires being sustained long enough to allow sufficient aid to flow, the humanitarian crisis looks set to deepen.

Many feel the Saudi Coalition strategy is using starvation as a military strategy. This would lay them vulnerable to full scrutiny for war crimes and would run contrary to Saudi Arabia's recent accession as a chair of the UN Commission on Human Rights. Alternatively there may be an element that constraints imposed on aid are an unplanned consequence of military action. Either way, a change to the Coalition modus operandi is required to avoid famine and economic disaster, and allow the Government of Yemen and Saudi Coalition an opportunity to step back and recover some moral and diplomatic high ground in a messy conflict with high civilian casualties.

This could be achieved if the Saudi leadership is approached by a trusted partner in a non-confrontational manner. It requires an offer of practical assistance, with public condemnation and investigations left for others. As a military partner of Saudi Arabia, there is an opportunity for the UK to act as an 'honest broker' to assist Saudi Arabia and its allies regain control of the humanitarian situation by lifting the embargo on deliveries through key ports, and strongly supporting the newly created Verification and Identification Mission (UNVIM) recently announced by the UN.

UNVIM is intended to ensure that aid deliveries by sea do not include shipments of arms, but it has yet to be fully implemented. It will support getting aid through Yemen's ports, but does not yet address the need for delivery from ports to distant inland distribution hubs run by the aid agencies. This internal distribution is complex and far from easy. It has been subjected to threats and attacks by both sides and progress will need both parties' agreement.

In order to improve the levels of essential supplies to Yemen's population we propose that the UK:

- a) Makes a bilateral approach to Saudi Arabia and UAE at senior diplomatic level offering assistance with the blockages to humanitarian and commercial deliveries
- b) Supports a speedy empowerment of UNVIM (or like body) through financial contribution and the offer of senior experienced leadership
- c) Pushes for an extension of UNVIM's mission to cover i) delivery on land from port of entry to distribution points (an UNVIM+), and ii) the inclusion of a monitoring and reporting role, including on relevant lead indicators of famine, on the safe passage of key supplies (an UNVIMM)
- d) Considers offering to provide a decisive leadership role to UNVIM as a trusted ally of the Saudi Coalition and historical friend of Yemen, and supports that leadership offer with a small mission to provide an integrated service for protecting aid convoys within Coalition military planning.