

Yemen Safe Passage Group

Rt Hon Theresa May MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AA

20 March 2017

Dear Prime Minister,

UK policy in Yemen: Time for Change

We are writing to you about the deepening tragedy in Yemen because of the exceptional influence the United Kingdom can bring to bear on events in the country. We believe that the UK, as current President of the United Nations Security Council, has a special obligation to try to ensure the implementation of practical measures to relieve the suffering and put in place measures which would help resolve the conflict.

We believe it is still possible to avert widespread famine, but only if the international community acts quickly and decisively. The UK, with its historic ties, its pivotal role in the Friends of Yemen, and its good relations with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, is well placed to provide leadership.

Yemen is undergoing the largest of the four major famines currently facing the world. The tragedy is entirely the result of the conflict. As the former Secretary of State for International Development Rt Hon Andrew Mitchell MP said after his recent visit “Yemenis are not just starving, they are being starved”. Yemen has long been dependent on food imports, with over 90% of grain shipped from outside, but these vital imports face widespread disruption and delay. The Food and Agriculture Organisation stated last month that wheat stocks will be completely depleted by the end of March. Most Yemenis, estimated at two-thirds, and the majority of those now at risk, are living in the less accessible Houthi-controlled areas.

Since early February, the World Food Programme has had four large cranes ready for installation at the port of Hodeidah, to replace those put out of action by military action and to ensure that food can be imported effectively, but the Saudi-led Coalition has prevented them from being landed. Their installation is an immediate priority.

Social welfare payments have ceased, and since mid-2016 only some public servants are receiving a salary, while state pensions have also been frozen. Around a third of Yemen’s population were dependent on these sources of income. The Central Bank of Yemen has now depleted its reserves and virtually ceased to function.

The conduct of the war on both sides has generated almost universal criticism. Of urgent and immediate concern are indications that Coalition forces may attempt to capture the port city of Hodeidah. This would lead to enormous civilian loss of life, the port and its associated industries would be put out of action, with the most severe implications for grain imports and humanitarian relief. The international community must make it clear to the Coalition that this must be avoided at all costs.

We urge the UK Government to seize the initiative and draft a new UN Security Council resolution that goes beyond the limitations of UNSCR 2216 of April 2015. One important consequence would be to strengthen the hand of the UN Special Envoy.

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We recommend that such a new resolution should:

- a) Explicitly recognize that all major parties to the conflict must be part of the solution, and that for genuine sustainable peace each must recognise the deep-rooted concerns of the other. UNSCR 2216 needs to be superseded by something more realistic, and must reflect the facts on the ground in a way that will help get all parties to the negotiating table. Much has changed since the original resolution which focused on the legitimacy of one party to the conflict.
- b) Repeat the calls for an immediate ceasefire and a return to the negotiating table.
- c) Emphasise the practical value of involving women in peace negotiations, including leaders now in self-imposed exile. Many senior Yemeni women have been at the forefront of the demand for peace and the reconstruction of a broken country.
- d) Call, in the very strongest terms, for the safe passage of humanitarian goods and of imports essential for economic activity, including food, fuel and medicine. Specifically and immediately, the four cranes need to be allowed into Hodeidah Port, the destroyed cranes need to be cleared and the operation of the new cranes safeguarded, if necessary, by international supervision. A wider role for United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), who manage the successful UN Verification and Inspection Mission, should be immediately approved if the parties to the conflict cannot agree between themselves a special arrangement for Hodeidah as a Safe Port outside the conflict zone.
- e) Support the immediate implementation of the scheme already developed by the International Finance Corporation to provide a working structure and transparent oversight to essential currency transactions and in support of the Yemeni Riyal. This is a priority - to ensure that social welfare and public sector salaries are paid, to facilitate the unfettered commercial import of grain on time, at the best port for inland distribution and in the quantities needed, and to counter inflation and its impact on food prices.
- f) Recognise the importance of independent witnesses on the ground, including the international media who have been denied access by both sides to the conflict, and the urgent need for reliable data collection relating to food insecurity and infant malnutrition, so that relief can be well-targeted. Binding assurances are needed from both sides on the protection of humanitarian workers.
- g) Urge the re-opening of diplomatic missions in Sana'a, even on a limited scale. This will provide the opportunity to directly inform and influence the Houthi alliance, and facilitate peace building by ensuring face to face meetings with both sides.

Humanitarian aid is needed more than ever but will not resolve the crisis nor end the food insecurity faced by 18 million people. Political will is required from all parties to the conflict and from those able to bring political influence to bear. The United Kingdom is well placed to do the latter.

We hope you will strongly consider the recommendations that we make in this letter. We would be very pleased to meet you or your advisers to discuss this further.

Yours sincerely,

Yemen Safe Passage Group (full list of signatories below)

Full list of signatories

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Professor Tony Allan (Emeritus Professor, King's College London, Author on Yemen and Middle East Water Security, Stockholm Prize Winner 2008)

Stephen Akester (Director Macalister Elliott Fisheries Consultancy, Senior World Bank and EU Consultant in Yemen)

Emily Allardyce (Director of the British Yemeni Arabic Institute, Senior Adviser to Yemen Ministry of Education)

Dr David Bryer CMG (Former Director of Oxfam GB, Former Yemen and Middle East Director)

Professor Nora Ann Colton, (Deputy Vice Chancellor, University of East London, Author on political economy of Yemen)

Joana Cook (King's College London, Author on the Women's Political Participation, Engagement in Security and Public Safety in Yemen)

Paddy Coulter (Fellow of Green Templeton College, University of Oxford, Former Progressio and Oxfam Director for Yemen)

Chris Dammers (Former Middle East Field Director, Oxfam, Former Coordinator, Progressio Yemen)

Stephen Day CMG (Former Head of FCO Middle East Department and Diplomat in Yemen)

Captain Roy Facey (Senior Adviser to the Yemen Ports Corporations in the Gulf of Aden and Red Sea 1995 - 2014)

James Firebrace (Former Director General of Consumers International, Former Senior Adviser to Yemen LNG, Author on Water, Conflict and Economy in Yemen)

Dr Richard Franceys (Cranfield University and Consultant in Yemen and Author on Urban Water Management)

Robert Grose (Former Coordinator of Progressio Yemen, Director at HLSP/Mott MacDonald)

Frances Guy (Former British Ambassador to Yemen 2001-2004, Head of Middle East at Christian Aid)

Dr Christopher Handley (Senior Consultant, Author of Water Stress in Taiz, Yemen)

Victor Henderson (Former British Ambassador to Yemen 1997-2001)

Captain Phil Holihead RN (Head of Western Indian Ocean Counter - Piracy UN IMO 2010-2015, Former Defence Attaché Yemen 2006 -2009)

Dr Elisabeth Kendall (Senior Research Fellow in Arabic and Islamic Studies, Oxford University, Writer on militant jihadist/political movements in Yemen)

Helen Lackner (Editor of Why Yemen Matters 2014, Social Development Consultant in PRDY and Yemen since 1977, Editor of British Yemeni Society Journal)

Dr Gerhard Lichtenthaler (Author of Political Ecology and the Role of Water, Environment, Society and Economy in Northern Yemen)

Dr Miranda Morris (St Andrews University, Ethnographer and Linguist, Specialist on Yemen and Southern Arabia)

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Professor Martha Mundy (Professor Emerita of Anthropology, London School of Economics and Political Science, Author on Yemeni Society and Agriculture)

Ragih Muflihi (CEO, Yemeni Community Association in Sandwell Limited)

Dr Cynthia Myntti (Development Consultant, Former Programme Officer for Ford Foundation Office for the Middle East and North Africa)

Thanos Petouris (SOAS University, London, Writer particularly on the Southern Question in Yemen)

Taher Ali Qassim MBE (Formerly Swedish Save the Children Yemen, Former Chair of the Yemen Communities Coordinating Council UK)

Dr Jane Springham (Public Health Specialist, Former Coordinator of Rural Health Training in Yemen)

Dr Frank van Steenberg (Director Meta-Meta Consultancy, Coordinator of the Water Channel, Writer on Food Security in Yemen and Horn of Africa,)

Sherine El Taraboulsi-McCarthy (Research Fellow with Humanitarian Policy Group at ODI, Writer on State Formation and Conflict in Yemen)

Colonel Iain Smailes (Former Defence Attaché, Yemen 2013-15)

Jonathan Tottman (British Police CT Attaché to Yemen 2011 - 2012; Rule of Law Attaché EU Delegation Sana'a 2012 – 2015, former Detective Superintendent)

Dr Gabriele von Bruck (SOAS University, London, Writer on Islam and Yemeni elites)

Dr Christopher Ward (Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter, Author of The Water Crisis in Yemen)

Dr Shelagh Weir (Author of A Tribal Order: Politics and Law in the Mountains of Yemen, Curator for the Middle East at the British Museum)

Dr Robert Wilson OBE (Former Diplomat in Yemen, Writer and Researcher on Yemeni History, Chairman of British-Yemeni Society)

Cc: Rt Hon Priti Patel MP, Secretary of State for International Development.

Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.

Rt Hon Sir Michael Fallon KCB MP, Secretary of State for Defence.

Rt Hon Keith Vaz MP, Chair, All Party Parliamentary Group on Yemen.

Antonio Guterres GCL GCC, Secretary General of the United Nations.

Rt Hon Stephen O'Brien, Undersecretary General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, United Nations.

Jamie McGoldrick, Humanitarian Coordinator for Yemen, United Nations.

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About the Yemen Safe Passage Group

The Yemen Safe Passage Group was formed in mid-2015 as an informal grouping of senior professionals, all acting in their personal capacity, who have worked in Yemen for substantial periods and who share a concern about the well-being of its people.

The group brings together a wide range of expertise – international politics and diplomacy, security, trade and the economy, port operations, infrastructure and development challenges, and humanitarian operations – coupled with an understanding as to how this expertise might realistically be applied to the Yemen situation.

The group has now grown to over 40 individuals comprising three sections: former British diplomats and defence personnel, including three former ambassadors; prominent British academics working on Yemen, including four professors; and senior development and community workers.