

Celine Kronstedt  
Cedarburg High School  
Cedarburg, WI, USA  
Yemen, Conflict

## **Yemen: Fighting for an Impoverished Country's Stability**

Violence in the Republic of Yemen has had a catastrophic effect on the livelihoods of citizens. The conflict, a Saudi-Arabian led intervention, came to fruition in September of 2014. Their motion was to unseat the Ansar Allah movement (Houthis), and to restore authority to the former Yemeni president Abdu Rabbu Mansour Hadi <sup>[7]</sup>. Due to the demands of the war and political unrest, the economy has taken a plunge, and has led to unfortunate circumstances for families. Armed conflict prevents food, resources, and fuel from being imported into the country; vehicles run out of gasoline and critical medical supplies are constantly depleting. Actions are currently being taken by humanitarian actors and international partners to prevent further damage as well as help provide better lives for those who are suffering. However, it is important to recognize that efforts will not easily fulfill the primary necessities of the country. Yemen's recovery process is going to be difficult due to underlying poverty and food insecurity issues which are compounded and enhanced by the Saudi Arabian conflict.

Yemen's population has approximately 29.83 million people <sup>[1]</sup>. Nearly 60-70% of the population lives in rural areas where access to medical care as well as items that cater to basic needs are scarce, while the 30-40% of people that live in urban areas are not much better off. The government is defined as an independent, sovereign, Arab, and Islamic state. Yemen relies on the cultivation of land for economic growth, as it was once known for its abundance in produce. To illustrate, nearly two-thirds of workers obtain their means of support through farming and agricultural practices. 34% of land is agricultural and one third of it is pasture and range. 3% of that land is tillable, and less than half of that--which equates to roughly 1.5 million hectares of land--is actually cultivated. Another third of the agricultural land is used for the production of qat, which is a major factor in the agricultural Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Although agriculture plays a very important role in the economy, the dominant export product is crude oil, and proven reserves contain around 9 billion barrels full of it <sup>[2,6]</sup>! Compared to that of more developed states, countries like Yemen have miniscule farms and a lot of workers involved in the practice of agriculture. 62% of farms in Yemen cover less than 2 hectares of land <sup>[5]</sup>, while a farm in America, on average covers approximately 179.68 hectares. Climate fluctuates depending on region and altitude, and additionally, mountain ranges are spread along the coast and deserts are situated further north near Saudi Arabia. The average family settles at 7.4 members per household. Resources used to build dwellings are different depending on the location's indigenous resources <sup>[3]</sup>. In terms of cuisine, meat is prepared in specific ways which align with Islamic doctrines <sup>[4]</sup>.

High poverty rates in Yemen make living conditions unbearably difficult. Additionally, economic downturns create excessive food prices, enabling famine-like conditions which unfortunately, are only increasing. Generally, workers take up professions in agriculture, trade, and some are self-employed; the average annual income per capita is 553,803.25 rials <sup>[1]</sup>. (This equates to 13.09 USD) Armed-conflict has created many problems: 19.7 million people lack access to basic health services. Unrelenting war creates great insecurity within schools, and the limited access to education heightens the inability to stop the cycle. As a result of the severe poverty, the Natural Increase Rate (NIR) is very high, which refers to the difference between how many live births and deaths occurring in one year, which is then divided by the mid-year population. The poor NIR results in water scarcity, and establishes a high vulnerability for climate change. Less developed countries similar to Yemen have little access to technology and basic innovations which doesn't help matters.

The civil-war began when Houthi rebels took over the capital, and most populated city of Yemen, Sana'a. The demands of the Houthi insurgents included a lower price on fuel as well as a new set of laws and government. The movement has expressed their rebellion toward economic underdevelopment, and political marginalization. Yemen has a history of long-standing economic issues, and security complications which include attacks by Jihadists <sup>[8]</sup> -- violent Sunni extremists whose goal is to demolish the disincentives of a non-Muslim society. Military campaigns were launched by Saudi-Arabia in March of 2015, as a response to the advancement of the Houthis. Over 233,000 people have been murdered in the duration of the war, and an estimate of about 131,000 have died due to famine, lack of infrastructure, and limited health services in multiple districts of the country <sup>[7]</sup>. Conditions having to do with the food security crisis are drastically worsening, and 20.1 million people required food assistance at the beginning of 2020. The impact the war has had on citizens is calamitous. Abusive local security forces, lack of basic necessities, and weak state of government are only a few of the devastating occurrences Yemen must endure <sup>[9]</sup>. Those living in the rural areas have been experiencing ever worsening situations, and often die from starvation or disease; the Houthi attack bigger cities and in doing so, infrastructure is destroyed in process, and oftentimes citizens are harmed.

As a result of the war, women are disadvantaged, and this has only been exacerbated due to the current crisis. Yemen currently ranks 168th out of 170 countries globally for women's equality; women and younger girls face increasing violence daily. The stress of running an entire household and the common incidence of gender-based hate crimes are incredibly tolling on mental health. Men are a part of the vast majority who are directly harmed in violent, armed-conflict. An estimated 2 million children are internally displaced and many are recruited into fighting, as well as forced into labor <sup>[10]</sup>. Many hospitals are damaged through bombings and it prevents the elderly and civilians who may be immunocompromised to access the medical care they need <sup>[14]</sup>. The Muhamasheen are an ethnic group in Yemen who are discriminated against and are given few economic opportunities, and now with daily armed conflict, this has become even more arduous. The most pressing matter to do with the environment right now are the

disastrous effects of water scarcity <sup>[13]</sup>. Without the ability to access water, a large number of jobs will be lost and the economy will plummet.

The civil-war in Yemen has become one of the most violent and devastating conflicts in our modern age today. Though it may be shadowed away due to new conflicts continuing to arise in our world that seem to be of much more importance, the war is still going on, and Yemen is in dire need of help. Currently, 80% of the population requires assistance for emergency relief and humanitarian actors <sup>[11]</sup>. Humanitarian actors play an extremely important role in helping individuals survive and do their best to make it through the incredibly devastating war. If Yemen were currently without assistance, it would be likely that over half of the population would die, as cholera outbreaks are fatal in Yemen, by cause of unhealthy living conditions, not to mention the scarce availability of healthcare. In order to provide help to Yemen, it is essential that the problem is attacked at its source, the conflict itself.

The United Nations and many other partners have been providing their best efforts through comprehensive diplomatic strategy in order to prevent matters at hand from becoming worse, however, when they attempted to broker a ceasefire between the two parties, little palpable progress was actually made. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator of the United Nations, re-emphasizes that “the five key priority areas to mitigate the humanitarian crisis in Yemen, namely, the protection of civilians, humanitarian access, funding for the aid operation, support for the economy, and the need for a political solution.” Presently, there are a number of humanitarian organizations whose priority it is to start producing roads to recovery. An exceedingly crucial humanitarian actor to the Republic of Yemen is the International Rescue Committee. The mission of the IRC as a whole, is to assist people whose lives and wellbeing become demolished through conflict and disasters to recover and regain control of their futures <sup>[12]</sup>. They provide healthcare, nutrition, water, and sanitation services to over a quarter of a million people! The IRC delivers resources where they are needed the most, like education to children or helping to train health staff on cholera treatment and prevention. The IRC, like the United Nations, is calling for a country-wide ceasefire to hopefully achieve a lasting peace with help from international communities. <sup>[12]</sup>

Countries like the United States have done their share by providing funding to Yemen in order to better the livelihoods of their people. A press release on March 16, 2022 stated that “The United States announces nearly \$585 million in new humanitarian assistance for the people of Yemen as crisis threatens millions of lives.” <sup>[21]</sup> The United States has remained one of the most generous of benefactors to Yemen as they have provided over 4.5 billion USD since the beginning of the conflict. The U.S. has called others to contribute to the movement to abolish poverty in less fortunate countries. As citizens of the United States, it may not be our first thought to provide foreign aid to others as we currently have a multitude of problems of our own, however it must be thought about in a different way. We are as of now one of the

wealthiest countries in the world and have been for an extremely long time. As the United States continues to contribute to Yemen, it allows for our country to gain diplomatic recognition, and facilitate the convenience of sending diplomats to foreign countries, not to mention obtaining respect for the roles we fulfill to benefit international institutions. Though an average citizen may not see the benefit in providing foreign aid, everyone must begin to understand that if those who can provide help to countries like Yemen do their part, we are tackling global issues one step at a time. Even if we only help this one country as of now, the world is only becoming better as a result.

Though Yemen fares much better from foreign aid and international institutions, local organizations still administer an enormous amount of help to those in the areas where they provide relief. An example of small, local organizations in Yemen are “Baitulmaal” and “Mona”<sup>[22]</sup>. These localized institutions can provide medical supplies, clothing, and immediate, nutritious food to individuals. Providing clean water through filtration installments is also a major focus. These groups are sensitive to the Muslim inhabitants of Yemen and make sure to provide meat and nourishment that align with the doctrines of Islamic faith to allow citizens to continue the practice of their religion even in a strenuous state of affairs. Specifically, “Baitulmaal also runs an orphan sponsorship program that cares for the nutritional, educational, psychological, health and social wellbeing of orphans.”<sup>[23]</sup> By donating and providing awareness about these institutions, individuals can increase the amount of resources that they provide to those in need of assistance.

Though Yemen does have one of the most abhorrent humanitarian crises in the world, there is another country in the Middle East that has been suffering alongside through an equally brutal set of circumstances. This war has created the largest refugee crisis in the world, located in Syria. In March of 2011, there was an escalation of pro-democracy demonstrations which brought forth an uprising in the rebellion against coercive and restraining leaders<sup>[17]</sup>. A plan of action can be taken by the United States and the first step in this process is to find a way to deliver aid to Syria<sup>[19]</sup> and it is crucial that international partners come together to enforce demands of a cease-fire to the United Nations. This can be equally as helpful in a country like Yemen, because in order to obliterate the conflict once and for all, a ceasefire is fundamental to any hope of helping to contribute aid to suffering countries like Yemen<sup>[16]</sup>. We must terminate hostilities as the cause of war, to start building countries in need back up to appropriate standards of living.

Issues like irredentism between the countries of Ukraine and Russia, and the violence caused by attacks are widely known and reported on social media platforms. Though it is important to recognize how these recent attacks may affect more developed countries, it is ignorant to ignore how damaging conflict can be just as, if not more, damaging to smaller countries, some that we may not even have involvement in. Countries should come together as an international unit to prevent crises like wars in Syria and Yemen, from occurring. It is important that ceasefires are established to end conflict immediately in order to start building

states back up to a livable standard. By putting an end to conflicts in less developed countries, organizations can provide aid to those with food insecurity and continue to help the fight to end hunger and poverty, once and for all. Because as Dr. Norman Bourlaug once said, “The first essential component of social justice is adequate food for all mankind, food is the moral right for all who are born into this world.”

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