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After eight years of war, Yemen on the brink of economic collapse – Oxfam

As Yemen enters its ninth year of war, its people are facing a devastating humanitarian crisis with more than two million children acutely malnourished. Rounds of currency depreciation, an economy on the brink of collapse, and sharp increases in the cost of fuel and other key commodities, have left millions more Yemenis in danger of catastrophic hunger. Over 17 million people are still experiencing high levels of food insecurity, 75 per cent of them are women and children.

Sunday 26th March marks eight years since the escalation of the conflict in Yemen. A temporary UN-brokered truce expired in October and, whilst it has largely held, uncertainty around the political and economic future of Yemen remains.

The conflict has devastated the country. Over 19,000 people have been killed and millions more forced to flee their homes. More than 21.6 million people - two thirds of the population - need humanitarian assistance and protection yet donors have so far committed only a third of what is needed, and the support offered to people has been cut.

Ferran Puig, Oxfam in Yemen Country Director, said: "The people of Yemen are exhausted by war. Rising food prices and unpaid salaries mean even basic food stuffs have been pushed beyond the reach of many Yemeni people.

"Donors must not turn their backs on what remains one of the world's most severe humanitarian crises.

"It is past time that world leaders exerted real pressure to bring all sides back to the table so they can bring a permanent end to the conflict."

Cost of living crisis

Yemen has been hit hard by the worsening global food crises.

- Since 2015, prices of wheat increased by almost 300 per cent in areas under Houthi control and by almost 600 per cent in IRG controlled areas
- The price of cooking gas has increased by almost 600 per cent since the start of the war. Many families are forced to use waste plastics as fuel for cooking, at great danger to their health

Yemen imports 90 per cent of its food, including 42 per cent of its wheat from Ukraine. Importers have warned that the global increase in costs will challenge their ability to secure wheat imports into Yemen. In a country where many people depend on bread for most of their daily food to survive, this could push millions towards starvation.

Eman, 38 and a mother to three children said: "Everything changed when the war started. We suddenly lost the only sources of income we had. Things went from bad to worse. We lived through hell. We had no money and we were barely able to get through the day. Almost everyone we knew was impacted."

Impact on households

Many Yemenis have had to adopt negative coping mechanisms to survive.

- Families have reduced the quantity and quality of the food they consume. 2.2 million Yemeni children under the age of five are now acutely malnourished
- Many are forced to buy on debt or take out loans from friends or families to pay for basic food items and medicines
- Many have sold their assets, such as livestock, property, or machinery
- The most severely impacted are female headed households, who account for 26 per cent of the population most in need
- Many girls have had to drop out of school. Many are forced into early marriage or into begging in the streets
- Around 56 per cent of the four million internally displaced people have no source of income at all. Women and children who make up around 77 per cent of the displaced population are at greatest risk of starvation

International response

As the need grows, the lack of resources to respond comes with devastating consequences. The World Food Program has been forced to reduce the amount of aid it provides. A recent high-level pledging event concluded with a collective commitment of under a third of the amount needed (\$1.2 billion of the \$4.3 billion needed).

Oxfam in Yemen is supporting people to earn a living, providing basic services like clean water, sanitation, cash, and establishing solar energy at household and community levels.

Oxfam is calling for the international community to provide adequate funding of life-saving aid, a rescue economic package to stabilize the economy and put money into people's pockets, and increased efforts to negotiate a lasting comprehensive peace in Yemen.

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Notes to editors

Spokespeople available for interview on request.

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