

Yemen Humanitarian Senior Officials Meeting IV

23 June 2022

CO-CHAIRS' SUMMARY

The fourth Senior Officials Meeting (SOM IV) on the humanitarian crisis in Yemen took place in Brussels on 23 June 2022, with the participation of the main humanitarian actors active in the country. The meeting was co-hosted by the European Union and Sweden and was preceded by consultations and technical working groups. The participants – donors, United Nations agencies, World Bank and international and Yemeni Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) – reviewed the progress achieved since the previous SOM meetings, assessed new challenges and confirmed their commitment to continue acting collectively to alleviate the suffering of the Yemeni population.

Participants noted that the SOM IV took place at a critical time for Yemen, with contradictory trends. On the one hand, the commitment by the parties to the two-month truce and its extension in June has reduced civilian casualties and improved freedom of movement and humanitarian access. On the other hand, the economic crisis in Yemen and the global increase in food and energy prices aggravated by the Russian aggression against Ukraine risks pushing Yemenis further into food insecurity.

Participants agreed that the renewed truce provides an opportunity towards a negotiated political solution. A political resolution to the conflict remains the only durable solution to the humanitarian crisis. While the political process continues, however, participants agreed that the international community must continue ensuring an effective and principled humanitarian response. Despite the relief provided by the truce, the humanitarian crisis continues to deteriorate. Unaddressed humanitarian needs and missed development opportunities could accentuate political instabilities and worsen conditions for a political solution. The efforts of humanitarian workers are hampered by access restrictions and campaigns to discredit the work of the international community in Yemen. There is a severe risk of famine and collapse of basic services across the country and increased insecurity in the south. Donors strongly condemned direct attacks against humanitarian staff.

Progress achieved since SOM III and way forward

Participants noted that in the previous SOMs¹, the humanitarian community adopted a unified approach, articulating collective actions and advocacy efforts to ensure principled and accountable humanitarian aid delivery.

Since SOM III in June 2021, participants noted progress² on several of the agreed action points². The constructive dialogue with the parties has been maintained, allowing a sustained channel of communication to facilitate humanitarian operations on the ground in line with the seven asks. The Technical Monitoring Group (TMG) has ensured a regular follow up on the status of the seven asks and related benchmarks, informing common advocacy messages and strategic approaches. Advocacy has been intensified through high-level missions by the SOM co-chairs and other humanitarian donors, principals of UN agencies and INGOs. The truce has reduced violence against civilians and improved access, notably for the imports of fuel and the opening

¹ Yemen Humanitarian previous SOM meetings were held on 13 February 2020, 12 November 2020 and 1 June 2021

² Action points 1, 2, 3, 6 and 9

of Sana'a airport for commercial flights after six years of closure. The truce is also having a positive impact on the economic situation and is improving conditions for livelihoods.

However, participants also noted that progress on other action points remain insufficient³. Limited progress has been made on the implementation of key actions contributing to the quality of aid delivery. The ongoing "Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation of the Response to the Yemen Crisis" is expected to provide independent, concrete recommendations on further improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the humanitarian response. Participants noted the need to further work on a consensus approach to operationalize humanitarian principles while seeking timely programme implementation. Humanitarian funding also remains insufficient, which has led to the downscaling or closure of life saving programmes.

Participants acknowledged that the funding shortfall has not been mitigated by a sufficient scale-up of longer-term assistance to address the drivers of needs. There is need for more progress on the integration of humanitarian and development programmes. Efforts to better integrate short term, resilience and recovery actions are not least needed amidst the truce and ongoing political efforts, which improve the prospects for impact of development aid.

Meanwhile, participants noted new challenges to principled aid delivery confronting the humanitarian community and actors engaged in longer-term support⁴. Increasing restrictions of movement through "Mahram" requirements, impede access to vulnerable women and girls. The necessary measures restoring access to women and girls by female aid workers must be urgently adopted.

Participants re-affirmed that the seven asks remain a central prerequisite for principled humanitarian assistance. The benchmarks used to monitor them must be updated through the TMG, including the restrictions stemming from "Mahram" requirements. The parties must reduce the approval delays for NGO project sub-agreements and facilitate the unrestricted implementation of country-wide needs assessments as well as monitoring and evaluation of programmes.

Participants also noted that a scaled up engagement by the development community is needed in the Yemen response. This includes concerted efforts by humanitarian and development actors to foster nexus operations and work towards durable solutions, including on displacement and supporting safe, voluntary and dignified return of internally displaced persons (IDPs), addressing food insecurity, and on economic empowerment of women, youth and vulnerable groups. The parties must facilitate the adequate conditions for continuing the humanitarian response and upscaling development aid.

Participants also discussed the contamination of land across Yemen with UXO and APL⁵. Such contamination is a serious threat to civilian lives and is a barrier to access to services, livelihoods, and achievement of durable solutions to displacement. Participants noted the need for engagement with authorities to scale-up demining programmes including through risk education, surveying, and clearance work.

Finally, participants reiterated that a sustainable solution in Yemen requires a comprehensive peace agreement reached through an inclusive political process. It is essential that the parties continue to engage with and support the UN-led political process aiming at reaching a peaceful

³ Action points 3, 4, 5, 7 and 8

⁴ Action points 8 and 9

⁵ Unexploded Ordnance and Anti Personal Landmines

solution to the conflict. While the political process continues, it is imperative to avoid the politicisation of humanitarian matters and preserve an independent humanitarian track.

Participants agreed to:

1. Maintain and intensify the constructive dialogue with the parties in Yemen, on the basis of regularly updated advocacy points and high level engagement, to support a safe and conducive environment for principled humanitarian operations and to facilitate greater progress on the seven asks to ensure humanitarian access to all people in need, in all parts of Yemen.
2. Continue the TMG monitoring of the seven asks making use of the updated benchmarks and agree on strategic approaches to address impediments of delivery of assistance, with focus on recent developments such as enforcement of “Mahram” restrictions on female aid workers, insecurity for aid workers and staff visas.
3. Scale up and increase support for mine action efforts, including through direct engagement with authorities, to ensure timely implementation of demining programmes, risk education, surveying, and clearance work.
4. Accelerate the improvement of the quality and impact of humanitarian programmes, continue to reinforce its cost effectiveness, including the streamlining of coordination, operationalisation of interoperability mechanisms, biometric systems when required, targeting and retargeting exercises, and strengthen the centrality of protection in the design and implementation of the humanitarian response, ensuring the inclusion of marginalised groups.
5. Ensure the implementation of a monitoring and early warning capacity on food security to face the risks of imminent famine in a global context of increasing food and energy prices and prioritisation of the most vulnerable in the food security response.
6. Discuss collectively on how to support the implementation of the proposed management response to the recommendations of the “Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation of the Yemen Crisis”. Improve communication among humanitarian actors to allow the operationalisation of humanitarian principles⁶.
7. Swiftly disburse pledges made during the High-Level Pledging Event on 16 March 2022 and thereafter, and rapidly mobilise additional resources in support of the 2022 Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan and ensure the appropriate allocation of resources to address needs identified in newly accessed areas.
8. Strengthen localization and engagement with local actors through capacity-building initiatives with the aim of empowerment and improve transparency and accountability to affected people by addressing existing gaps and barriers to local inclusion in the humanitarian coordination architecture.
9. Scale up more predictable support for Yemeni communities through humanitarian and development assistance especially to education, health, nutrition, food security including local food production, sustainable jobs and livelihoods, durable solutions for displaced people and economic empowerment of vulnerable groups, including women and youth, as well as restored civilian infrastructure, electricity, water and sanitation, basic social services and demining.
10. Support and advocate for measures by the international community, financial institutions and the UNSE to address the key economic drivers and development deficits fuelling the humanitarian crisis. Note the impact of climate change as a major new driver of humanitarian consequences and integrate its adaptation and mitigation in the international aid response.

⁶ As recommended by HERE-Geneva’s report on “Principled Humanitarian Programming in Yemen: a Prisoner’s Dilemma”.

11. Strengthen the complementarity between humanitarian, resilience and development programmes with emphasis on improving the linkages between humanitarian coordination and the coordination structures of development as well as bundling emergency and resilience building interventions in locations with chronic high incidence of food insecurity, through a continuum of support. In this regard, participants proposed to follow up these efforts in a forum during autumn 2022.

Participants asked the co-chairs of SOM IV to follow up the outcomes of this meeting together with the UN RC/HC and to debrief relevant Yemeni actors on the outcomes of this meeting. Annex 1 includes a more detailed summary of the discussions held by participants.

ANNEX 1 – Details of SOM IV discussion

Humanitarian funding, access and quality of aid

Donors reaffirmed their commitment to continue providing focused and realistic life-saving support to the people of Yemen in line with the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, independence, and impartiality as well as with donor accountability regulations.

Participants noted the drastic impact of the continued funding shortfall to the humanitarian response in Yemen resulting in the suspension or downscaling of life-saving programmes. They called on all donors to promptly disburse announced pledges at the High-Level Pledging Event on 16 March 2022 and thereafter. They urged donors to, at least, maintain their previous funding levels and called for rapid mobilisation of additional resources to ensure humanitarian agencies' capacity to sustain critical programmes.

Donors strongly condemned the increasing attacks against aid staff on the ground. They called on all parties to the armed conflict to comply with their obligations under IHL, notably those regarding the protection of civilians as well as humanitarian relief and health personnel. Furthermore, participants denounced the increasing trend of defamatory messages and smear campaigns targeting UN agencies and NGOs alike. They called for rapid improvement, without which the humanitarian response will be less effective and efficient, further compounding the suffering of millions of Yemenis. Donors reaffirmed their full support to all humanitarian and development assistance workers working in Yemen.

Participants reaffirmed the seven asks⁷ to the parties of the conflict. They welcomed the continued use of the previously agreed principal agreement format, some improvement in the average approval timeline for sub-agreements, especially in the North, and the agreement enabling the Multi Cluster Location Assessment (MCLA), the SMART (nutrition) surveys and the Food Security and Livelihoods Assessment (FSLA) to be completed in 2021/22.

Participants highlighted that while access has improved with the truce, major administrative and bureaucratic restrictions remain in the North and the South. They renewed their call to all parties to provide full, safe, unimpeded humanitarian access, as well as to cooperate with agencies providing longer-term assistance. Participants also stressed that entry into all areas of

⁷ 1) Avoid taxation of humanitarian aid through levies or any other form of tax; 2) Implement WFP biometrics and re-targeting pilot project and bring it to scale; 3) Approval of Principal Agreements avoiding clauses in breach of humanitarian principles; 4) Facilitate the timely approval of project sub agreements; 5) Allow unrestricted needs assessments so aid can be allocated based on needs without exclusion of marginalised populations; 6) Respect humanitarian actors' independence and accountability in managing donors' grants and; 7) Facilitate humanitarian staff entry into Yemen, operational movement across the country and monitoring.

Yemen by humanitarian staff should be facilitated. Particular concern was shared on the impact of the increasing enforcement of “Mahram” requirements for female humanitarian workers, which hamper the effective access of women and girls to services. Donors called on the parties to remove any restrictions to the freedom of movement of aid workers, restoring access to women and girls.

Participants noted that migrants from east Africa transiting through Yemen are a particularly vulnerable group often excluded with limited access to aid. While efforts of IOM to increase opportunities for safe repatriation were acknowledged. Donors called on the parties to respect the rights of migrants and stressed the need to ensure their effective inclusion in the response. Participants acknowledged the work undertaken by the TMG in continuously monitoring progress on the seven asks. They agreed to update the related monitoring benchmarks used by the TMG, with an increasing attention on “Mahram”-related restrictions, expansion of taxation analysis to include wider humanitarian taxation demands, as well as to update the monitoring visa of concerns to include delays and not only rejections. Participants agreed on the need to continue adapting and recalibrating programmes should obstructions hamper principled and accountable delivery of aid.

Noting insufficient progress on the implementation of several asks, participants reiterated the need to reduce the approval delay for NGO project sub-agreements, which currently averages close to four months. Participants called for the timely, unrestricted and independent implementation of global needs assessments as well as monitoring and evaluation. In the future, country-wide assessments need to be supplemented with localized assessments to improve the quality of responses and the thematic assessments and capacity building needed to plan and perform longer-term assistance work.

Participants also explored options to improve the impact of aid and quality of operations. They took note of the ongoing “Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation of the Response to the Yemen Crisis”. They agreed to work on its recommendations on measures to further increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the humanitarian response. The group also took note of HERE-Geneva’s report on “Principled Humanitarian Programming in Yemen” which highlights the need for humanitarian leadership to ensure risk analysis and structures are in place for improved collective positioning and operationalizing of humanitarian principles. They agreed on the need to strengthen the centrality of protection in the design and implementation of the humanitarian response. Participants further emphasized the need to accelerate the development of interoperability mechanisms, biometric systems, targeting and retargeting exercises coupled with re-prioritization of the most vulnerable, and improve monitoring and analysis systems on food security as well as enhance environment and climate change related responses. Noting the surging trend of returnees as a result of the truce and the increasing risk that UXO and APL presents to civilians, participants called for targeted engagement with authorities to resolve existing access challenges and to support the scaling up of humanitarian demining efforts across Yemen to allow safe return and durable solutions for IDPs.

Coordination between humanitarian, peace and development initiatives and economic drivers of the crisis.

Participants noted that the increase of humanitarian needs and risk of famine is a direct result of the conflict, rising global food prices further exacerbated by Russia’s aggression against Ukraine, economic issues including inflation in the south and supply-side restrictions in the north, as well as development deficits and declining aid. Considering risks of supply shortages, participants noted India’s openness to allow exports of cereal grains to Yemen, which would

help to source staple commodities and prevent a looming famine dependant on the timely arrival of exports.

Participants assessed the current efforts aimed at mitigating the economic drivers of the crisis. They took note of the ongoing efforts to improve the economic governance of the country and promote coordinated monetary and fiscal policies. Participants also urged the parties to engage with the UNSE in reaching an agreement allowing for revenues gathered in Hodeida and other ports to be used to pay the salaries of public servants and allow continuity in public service delivery while protecting human capital.

Participants welcomed the financial support pledged by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates to the Central Bank of Yemen and stressed the need to help stabilise the economy and prevent further food price rises. Participants further noted the potential of the crisis-related IMF allocation of Special Drawing Rights (SDR) for stabilising the economy as well as the recent progress in unlocking frozen reserves of the Central Bank of Yemen, which have contributed to an appreciation of the Yemeni rial. The efforts of the parties to agree on mechanisms allowing an effective and accountable use of these resources, and on facilitating food, fuel and medical imports, is essential to support the most vulnerable.

Participants noted that there is scope for more integration of humanitarian, peace and development objectives and recommended to scale up nexus operations. Participants stressed the need to strengthen connections between the humanitarian and development coordination structures. This would be particularly timely as the ongoing political process increases the prospects of reinforced development and financial assistance in support of agreements reached by the parties to the conflict.

Participants welcomed the efforts of the UN RC/HC in supporting coordination, as well as discussions bringing together humanitarian, development and financial actors to improve coordination and plan future financing and programming.