

Yemen Humanitarian Senior Officials Meeting V

23 May 2023

CO-CHAIRS' SUMMARY

The fifth Yemen Senior Officials Meeting (SOM V) took place in Brussels on 23 May 2023, co-hosted by the European Union and Sweden. The meeting gathered humanitarian actors to discuss the humanitarian crisis in Yemen, and was preceded by preparatory consultations in Amman on 7 – 8 May 2023. The participants – Donors, United Nations agencies, International Financial Institutions and international and Yemeni Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) – reviewed the progress achieved since the previous SOM meeting, assessed the challenges in delivering lifesaving assistance and identified recommendations. They reaffirmed their commitment to continue acting collectively to alleviate the suffering of the population of Yemen.

SOM V took place at a key moment for Yemen with ongoing political efforts giving rise to hope for a possible end to the conflict – the only sustainable solution to the humanitarian crisis.

Participants noted that while efforts to reach a new agreement and initiate a political process are gaining momentum, eight years of conflict have caused immense and deep-rooted humanitarian and development needs, which will require continued and sustained efforts by the humanitarian community and a significantly increased engagement by development actors. Basic services are under severe strain and the coping mechanisms of the Yemeni population have been depleted. Despite limited frontline violence since the truce agreement in April 2022, the number of civilian casualties in 2022 was largely unchanged from 2021, notably due to an increase of casualties from Explosive Remnants of War (ERW). Migrants and refugees face systematic and widespread abuse, particularly women and children. The impact of climate change further exacerbates instability and vulnerability. Urgent humanitarian and development needs must be addressed during ongoing attempts for a political solution to the conflict.

Participants noted that the delivery of a principled, timely and accountable humanitarian response is constantly challenged by shrinking humanitarian space, including access restrictions and bureaucratic impediments, worsened by continued insecurity. Participants stressed that humanitarian access to all those in need, in all parts of Yemen, is necessary for mobilising continued support for humanitarian funding, and that a conducive operating environment is a prerequisite for scaling up development efforts. In particular, the restrictions of the freedom of movement of national female aid workers put the principled and effective delivery of aid at risk and limit vulnerable women and girls' access to lifesaving assistance and services. Delays and restrictions on the ability of humanitarian organisations to conduct independent assessments, monitoring, contracts, and tendering processes further impede humanitarian objectives. Participants unanimously renewed their call to all parties to facilitate rapid, safe, unimpeded humanitarian access, as well as to cooperate with actors providing longer-term assistance.

Participants highlighted the considerable and growing funding gap for the life-saving response in Yemen. The 2022 Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan was only 53.8% funded and for the

first time in years the 2022 ICRC appeal was underfunded. Despite commitments made at the High-level Pledging Event hosted by the UN, Sweden, and Switzerland in Geneva on 27 February 2023, the prospects for 2023 look even bleaker. Participants called on all donors that have not yet done so, to increase or at least maintain their previous level of funding, and to disburse their pledges promptly.

Participants welcomed the Inter Agency Humanitarian Evaluation report and key recommendations made to improve the quality of humanitarian assistance in Yemen. Participants noted efforts made by humanitarian partners to prioritise assistance and encouraged this to continue to ensure those Yemenis most in need are provided with the assistance they require.

Donors reaffirmed their full support to the UN and all humanitarian international and national NGOs working to deliver an effective and principled response to the crisis in Yemen, and stressed that politicisation of humanitarian aid must be avoided.

They stressed that the unified approach adopted by the humanitarian community in the previous SOMs must be maintained. In the current context, articulating collective actions and advocacy efforts to ensure principled and accountable humanitarian and development aid delivery is key.

Participants agreed to:

- 1. Maintain the constructive dialogue with the parties in Yemen on the basis of coordinated and coherent advocacy and high-level engagement, including through more frequent high-level missions to Yemen, to support a safe and conducive environment for principled humanitarian operations on the ground and the overarching imperative to reach and help people in acute need;*
- 2. Address the delays and restrictions on the ability for humanitarian organisations to conduct independent assessments, access banking services as well as to conduct monitoring, contracting and tendering processes by consistently advocating for humanitarian principles and insisting donor requirements oppose such interference, delays and restrictions;*
- 3. Continue the Technical Monitoring Group monitoring of the six asks, making use of the updated benchmarks, and in absence of progress within the next three months, agree as donors to adjust activities and to instruct implementing partners to adapt, temporarily pause or suspend programmes where needed;*
- 4. Address the restrictions on the freedom of movement of national female aid workers, and in the absence of progress within the next three months, rapidly engage in a gradual methodical approach combining assessment of progress, advocacy and engagement and, where needed, adjust or redirect aid programmes including to areas or governorates where the free movement of female aid workers enables the appropriate and principled delivery of aid to people in need, particularly to women and girls;*
- 5. Uphold support and commitment to the centrality of protection through targeted advocacy, protection mainstreaming, integrated and/or multisector programming and increasing its inclusion in inter-cluster coordination, as well as to commit dedicated*

protection action to allow for the efficient implementation of an updated common protection strategy;

- 6. Further mainstream the needs of migrants, refugees and other marginalised groups in the humanitarian response;*
- 7. Reassess the Yemen response in view of the twelve recommendations of the Inter Agency Humanitarian Evaluation (IAHE). Donors invite the Inter Agency Standing Committee to do a follow-up review of the humanitarian response in country and the efforts undertaken to address the IAHE recommendations;*
- 8. Mobilise additional resources and engage additional donors in support of the 2023 Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan and disburse pledges made during the High-Level Pledging Event on 27 February 2023 to ensure humanitarian agencies' capacity to sustain critical and lifesaving programmes and demonstrate preparedness to rapidly meet the needs of additional populations should access improve;*
- 9. Scale up and advocate for increased development assistance to Yemen where and if the operating environment, access, and security conditions allow, and call on the international community, financial institutions and the UN Special Envoy for Yemen to intensify efforts to address the economic drivers and development deficits fuelling humanitarian needs;*
- 10. Work together closely to create pathways towards durable solutions to displacement and support safe, voluntary, and dignified integration, relocation or return of internally displaced persons;*
- 11. Encourage the participation of the civil society in humanitarian, development and peace efforts. Strengthen localisation and engagement with local actors to improve accountability to affected people;*
- 12. Boost advocacy and efforts on mine action in response to the increase in ERW casualties, scaling up the essential implementation of demining activities, risk education, surveys for contaminated land and clearance work and victims' assistance.*

Participants asked the co-chairs of SOM V to disseminate the outcomes of this meeting and to, together with the UN RC/HC, debrief relevant Yemeni actors on the outcomes.

ANNEX 1 – Details of discussion and outcomes of preparatory consultations

SOM V was prepared through comprehensive and inclusive consultations in Amman on 7 and 8 May 2023. This annex intends to capture the outcomes of these technical preparatory inputs.

Safeguarding humanitarian access

The operating environment for humanitarian and development actors in Yemen continues to deteriorate. Bureaucratic impediments are hindering timely access to beneficiaries in need, independent assessments, and informed delivery of assistance. Participants underlined that the Technical Monitoring Group's (TMG) seven asks reflect a precondition for principled humanitarian assistance, recalling that their benchmarks are based on the recognised international standards for humanitarian and development interventions. All parties must facilitate the unrestricted implementation of country-wide needs assessments, independent monitoring and evaluation of programmes.

Since SOM IV the time to approve sub-agreements has improved. Nevertheless, the sub-agreement approval for NGO projects still takes too long for an effective delivery of emergency assistance. There is a lack of progress, notably on increasing interference in programme activities and budgets and heavy administrative procedures that continue to hamper effective and timely assistance. Participants recalled that without approval of sub-agreements, independent needs assessments and monitoring of actions, the funding and implementation of critical life-saving programmes will be delayed and reduced in quality. Participants discussed red lines and gradual consequences of continued access restrictions. Donors will be compelled to reconsider programming in areas where restrictions hamper the delivery of assistance.

Addressing restrictions on the freedom of movement of national female aid workers

Increasing restrictions of movement of female aid workers through “Mahram” requirements are having a substantial negative impact. They prevent vulnerable women and children, two thirds of the population in need, from accessing lifesaving services. They damage the ability of humanitarian and development actors to reach those in need. National female aid workers are critical to delivering principled humanitarian assistance across all sectors throughout the country. Only female Yemeni aid workers can deliver many of the programmes that directly target women and children, such as primary and reproductive health care. These restrictions put the delivery of humanitarian and development aid at risk.

The continuation of development and humanitarian assistance requires that Yemeni female aid workers be able to travel without restrictions. In the absence of solutions, and while committed to stay engaged in Yemen, especially on sensitive gender and protection programmes, donors will have to adapt their geographical and sectorial funding priorities to be able to continue to provide aid.

Assuming the centrality of protection

The Yemeni Crisis is increasingly a protection crisis with 17.7 million people in need of protection services in 2023. Protection risks affect both Yemeni and refugees, asylum seekers and migrants with the most vulnerable being particularly exposed. The upward trend in protection needs and associated harmful coping mechanisms call for urgent action and to

ensure the centrality of protection through a more strategic engagement and coordination directed towards a stronger Protection response. Peace and reconstruction prospects only reinforce the need to act and to scale up targeted protection funding.

To prevent and mitigate protection risks, donors and humanitarian partners shall endeavour to strengthen protection advocacy and mainstreaming, provide survivors and people at risk with targeted protection services and integrated programming following an area-based approach, and link humanitarian aid with longer term solutions. To ensure relevance and efficiency, an evidence-based and inclusive approach is essential. Engagement with affected communities, civil society, authorities, partners and donors is required, as is a stronger and better inter-clusters coordination.

Further enhancing the quality of aid

The Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation (IAHE), published in July 2022, identified important shortcomings in the quality of the humanitarian response in Yemen. Since its publication, the UN leadership, together with the main humanitarian actors, developed a Management Response Plan to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the humanitarian response. With the widening funding gap, it is paramount implement the IAHE recommendations to have more impact.

Following the findings of the Emergency Directors Group (EDG) visit to Yemen in May 2023, and one year after the IAHE it is important to further improve the quality and accountability of humanitarian aid delivery, through reinforcing its cost effectiveness, strengthened coordination, recalibration and accountability on common principles, the operationalisation of interoperability mechanisms, biometric systems when required, and targeting and retargeting exercises towards the most in need.

Strengthening nexus and durable solutions

A positive political momentum gives hope to the Yemeni people and a prospect of potential reconstruction and increased engagement by development actors and private investors. More engagement by the development community is needed. Humanitarian, development and peacebuilding actors must work together more closely to create pathways towards durable solutions to displacement and support safe, voluntary, and dignified integration, relocation or return of internally displaced persons.

It will be key to ensure the best synergies between future peace, reconstruction, and humanitarian efforts, and to address resilience, capacity building and the human impact of climate change. Continuing to invest in human capital, one of Yemen's fundamental resources, is essential. Supporting the participation, space and capacity building of a local independent civil society is critical. The contamination of land with UXO and APL, is a barrier to access livelihood opportunities and achievement of durable solutions to displacement. An increased engagement in the mine action sector is needed to prevent further threats to civilian lives.