

# Peace “Only Way Forward” For Yemen



A young boy runs with his tyre past buildings damaged by airstrikes in Saada Old Town. UNICEF says health facilities in the country have been cut by more than half, thousands of schools have been destroyed, and over 2,000 children have been killed. Credit: Giles Clarke/OCHA

Tackling the relentless conflict in Yemen has never been more urgent as it has pushed the Middle Eastern nation “deep into the abyss.” However, much can be learned from recent and ongoing initiatives.

While a recent humanitarian conference on Yemen attempted to address the ongoing conflict and humanitarian crisis, Norwegian Refugee Council Europe’s Director Edouard Rodier told IPS that it was a “failed opportunity.”

“We didn’t have the right people because those who are in a position to make political decisions, the kind of decisions that we need, were not there,” he said.

The conference was co-chaired by Saudi Arabia, one of the parties to the Yemeni conflict, and France, who has long backed the Saudi-led coalition, raising concerns over the event’s credibility.

“We all know that the main problem is man-made and if you really need to find a solution, you need the two parties around the table...we cannot expect from a

conference that is only representing one party to the conflict that is supported by allies or countries that have interest on the one-side of the conflict to reach a significant political gain,” Rodier told IPS.

## **An Escalation of Violence**

Since violence broke out three years ago, 22 million Yemenis are now dependent on aid and over eight million are believed to be on the verge of starvation.

After a four-day visit, United Nations Children Agency’s (UNICEF) Executive Director Henrietta Fore observed what was left of children in the war-ravaged country.

“I saw what three years of intense war after decades of underdevelopment and chronic global indifference can do to children: taken out of school, forced to fight, married off, hungry, dying from preventable diseases,” she said.

Approximately 11 million children — more than the population of Switzerland — are currently in need of food, treatment, education, water and sanitation.

Health facilities have been cut by more than half, thousands of schools have been destroyed, and over 2,000 children have been killed, according to UNICEF.

“These are only numbers we have been able to verify. The actual figures could be even higher. There is no justification for this carnage,” Fore said.

Violence has only escalated in the past month after a Saudi-led offensive in Hodeidah, which has already displaced 43,000, left three million at risk of famine and cholera, and provoked an international outcry.

Fore said that basic commodities such as cooking gas has dwindled, electricity is largely unavailable, and water shortages are severe in most of the western port city.

Prior to the war, Hodeidah’s seaport was responsible for delivering 70 percent of Yemen’s imports including fuel, food, and humanitarian aid.

“In Hodeida, as in the rest of the country, the need for peace has never been more urgent,” Fore said.

“Parties to the conflict and those who have influence over them should rally

behind diplomatic efforts to prevent a further worsening of the situation across the country and to resume peace negotiations,” she added.

However, the struggle for control over Hodeidah forced Paris’ humanitarian conference to downgrade from a ministerial-level event to a technical meeting, preventing any political discussion on the crisis.

“It became a very technical meeting with different workshops to discuss things that really then would have needed the presence of people who have a knowledge of what is happening on the ground. It is good to have workshops and technical discussions with the right people at the table,” Rodier said.

But who are the right people?

### **A New Hope?**

Many are now looking to new U.N. Envoy to Yemen’s Martin Griffiths whose recent efforts have sparked some hope for a possible ceasefire and peace deal.

“The U.N. Special Envoy is in the best position to lead this process. He should receive all the backing from all the countries that are presenting good will and that want to see progress,” Rodier told IPS.

Griffiths has been meeting with both parties to the conflict who have agreed to temporarily halt the assault on Hodeidah and have expressed a willingness to return to the negotiating table after two years of failed attempts.

While control over the port city was a point of contention that led to the failure of previous talks, Griffiths said that the Houthi rebels offered the U.N. a lead role in managing the port — a proposal that both parties accepted and a move that could help restart negotiations and prevent further attacks.

He expressed hope that an upcoming U.N. Security Council meeting will result in a proposal to be presented to the Yemenis.

However, political commitment and international support is sorely needed in order for such an initiative to be successful.

For the past three years, the Security Council has been largely silent on the crisis in Yemen and the U.N. continues to be lenient on Saudi Arabia’s gross violations

of human rights.

The U.N.'s recent Children and Armed Conflict report noted that the Saudi-led coalition was responsible for more than half of child deaths and injuries in Yemen in 2017. The report also accused both Houthis and the Saudi coalition of recruiting almost 1,000 child soldiers — some as young as 11 years old.

However, the Secretary-General failed to include the coalition in his report's list of shame.

Instead, the coalition was put on a special list for countries that put in place "measures to improve child protection" despite a U.N. expert panel having found that any action taken by Saudi Arabia to minimise child casualties has been "largely ineffective."

Rodier urged for the international community to maintain a sense of urgency over Yemen.

"We need to have another kind of conference with the ambition to have political gains that is U.N.-led and it has to happen soon," he told IPS.

"We need some kind of mediation...there will be no military solution to the humanitarian crisis today in Yemen. It has to be a political solution," Rodier added.

Fore echoed similar sentiments, highlighting the need for a political solution to the conflict.

"We all need to give peace a chance. It is the only way forward," she said.

It is now up to the international community to step up to the plate to prevent further suffering and violations. If not, peace will continue to remain elusive with repercussions that will last generations.

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