

Letter for The Times (9 Sept 2015)

Preventing famine and refugees from Yemen

Sir,

While the world is looking elsewhere, the largely hidden humanitarian situation in Yemen grows ever worse. Fighting has moved north to the province of Taiz, where the UN report over 3 million in desperate need of assistance. Vital water infrastructure has been heavily damaged, public health is plummeting and all government hospitals and most schools are now closed with no fuel. The delivery of emergency supplies has become nearly impossible. The UN now estimates 80% of the Yemen's 25 million are in need of help with 1.4 million already displaced and refugee numbers growing daily. But supplies seeking to enter the main port of Hodeida are being denied permission to unload.

After over five months of bombing and the Saudi coalition's recent retaking of much of the south, there is an opportunity for the UK to up its game, building on previous efforts to push for a permanent ceasefire and encouraging all sides to negotiate a long term political solution. In the meantime the UK can use its experience to broker safe passage agreements particularly for the ports and ensure the UN Verification and Inspection Mission is effective in unblocking delays. Not only food but also fuel is desperately needed - for transport, hospitals, water supplies, agriculture and fishing. This is vital to avert famine and continued massive displacement, but also to reverse the recent devastation of the Yemeni economy. Preventing such a catastrophe is entirely in line with the Prime Minister's comments on the need to address refugee crises at point of origin.

As development professionals and former diplomats with strong connections to Yemen, we call on the Prime Minister to act now - before ground fighting moves to the capital Sana'a unleashing another massive escalation in human and economic destruction, and making the task of creating a viable future Yemen yet more difficult and costly. [300 words]

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And co-signatories (see over): (22 total to date)

Professor Tony Allan (King's College London, Author on Yemen and Middle East Water Security, Stockholm Prize Winner 2008)

Professor Martha Mundy (Professor Emerita of Anthropology LSE, Author on Yemeni Society and Agriculture)

Professor Allan Hill (Population and International Health, University of Southampton, Author on Yemen demography)

Dr Noel Brehony CMG (Former Diplomat, Editor of Rebuilding Yemen, Author of Yemen Divided)

Stephen Day CMG (Former Head of FCO Middle East Department and Diplomat in Yemen)

Vic Henderson (former British Ambassador to Yemen 1997-2001)

David Bryer CMG (Former Director of Oxfam UK and former Yemen and Middle East Director)

Captain P Holihead RN Retd (Head of Western Indian Ocean Counter - Piracy UN IMO 2010-2015, Former Defence Attaché Yemen 2006 -2009)

Captain Roy Facey (Senior Adviser to the Yemen Ports Corporations in the Gulf of Aden and Red Sea 1995 - 2014)

Taher Ali Qassim MBE (Former Chair of the Yemen Communities Coordinating Council UK)

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Dr Robert Wilson OBE (Former Diplomat in Yemen, Writer / Researcher on Yemeni history)

Dr Christopher Handley (Consultant and Author of Water Stress on the situation in Taiz Yemen)

Chris Shute (British Consul-General, Deputy Head of Mission in Sana'a 2007-2010)

Dr Richard Franceys (Cranfield University, Consultant in Yemen and Author on water management)

Emily Allardyce (Director of the British Yemeni Arabic Institute, Education Consultant)

Dr Miranda Morris (St Andrews University, Ethnographer and Linguist, specialist on Yemen and Southern Arabia)

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Joana Cook (King's College London, Author on the Women's Political Participation, engagement in security and public safety in Yemen)

Dr Gerhard Lichtenthaler (Author of Political Ecology and the Role of Water, Environment, Society and Economy in Northern Yemen)

Stephen Akester (Director MEP Fisheries consultancy, Senior World Bank and EU Consultant in Yemen since 1985)

Robert Grose (Former CIIR / Progressio Director for Yemen and HLSP/Mott MacDonald Programme Director)

Still to hear back from:

Professor Nora Ann Colton (Deputy Vice Chancellor, University of East London, Author on Political Economy of Yemen)

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Dr Christopher Ward (Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter, and Author of The Water Crisis in Yemen)

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