

Food Security in Refugee Camps in Yemen

Topic A

High Commissioner for
Human Rights



Introduction of the Committee

This committee is the body of independent experts that help carry out the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. According to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the main purpose of the Committee is to protect political and civil rights, therefore, resulting in various changes in laws, practices, and policies. This course of action has helped improve the lives of people around the world. It continues to work to ensure that everyone can enjoy fully and without discrimination all the political and civil rights guaranteed by the Covenant. (OHCHR)

According to the High Commissioner for Human Rights, no country's record in protecting and promoting civil and political rights is perfect and free from criticism. As a result, the task of the Committee is to encourage each State party to keep strengthening laws, policies, and practices that improve the enjoyment of these rights, to withdraw or amend measures that are destructive or corrosive of Covenant rights, to take an appropriate and positive action when a State party has failed to act to promote and protect these rights and to consider the effects in terms of the Covenant of new laws, policies, and practices that a State party proposes to introduce in order to ensure that it does not regress in giving practical effect to Covenant rights.

One of the Committee's greatest strengths is its moral authority, which comes from the fact that it represents all corners of the world. Rather than representing a single point of view, the Committee speaks with a unified voice.

The work of the Committee over the years has led to many changes in policies, practices, and laws. This directly affects individual cases around the world. The Committee will continue to discharge its monitoring functions while ensuring that its work remains relevant and applicable to all States parties as well as striving for universal civil and political rights which are enjoyed without discrimination by all people. (OHCHR)

Historical Background

In 2014, the Yemeni war started when Houthi rebels – a Zaydi Shiite insurgent group with a significantly different doctrine and belief system from the general Shiite community (who dominate in Iran and Iraq). They own a history of acting against Sunni governments; the majority of the Muslims of Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia are Sunnis – captured Saná, the capital city and largest city in Yemen. Following failed negotiations between the Houthis and representatives from the Yemeni government, President Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi's presidential palace was seized by the rebels in January 2015. Consequently, Hadi resigned from his position as president; Saudi Arabia initiated an air campaign against the Houthis at the beginning of March 2015 using both ground forces and financial sanctions. (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023.)

According to Robi Sugara, the famine in Yemen is a direct consequence of the Saudi Arabian military intervention and blockade. Prior to the war, Yemen was one of the most impoverished nations in the Arabian Peninsula and the Middle East, and Al Hadiyah was one of the poorest cities in Yemen. The city was a prime target for Saudi Arabian airstrikes. Fishing boats were destroyed by the bombing campaign, leaving locals with no means to support their families. (Sugara, 2018)

The intervention of regions in Yemen's conflict, including Iran and Gulf states driven by Saudi Arabia, threatens to draw the nation into the broader Sunni-Shia divide. Various Iranian weapons shipments to Houthi rebels have been intercepted within the Gulf of Aden by the maritime blockade since April 2015. In response, Iran has dispatched its own naval convoy, which highlights further risks of a military escalation between the two nations. (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023.)

The Yemeni conflict is having a devastating effect on the civilian population. The UN estimates that around 131,000 individuals have perished because of indirect causes since 2015 (UN, 2020) – this includes malnourishment and lack of access to health services. In addition, more than five million Yemeni citizens are in need of help and assistance, two million are at risk of starvation, and there has been an outbreak of cholera influencing over one million people. All sides involved in the conflict have reportedly violated human rights and humanitarian law.

In addition to the civil war in Syria, the United States proceeds with counterterrorism operations in the Yemeni region. These endeavors are centered on targeting al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and militants related to the self-proclaimed Islamic State. In 2016, U.S. forces conducted approximately 35 airstrikes in Yemen; this number increased by approximately 130 percent in 2017. In April of 2016, a reduced group of American advisors was sent to help Saudi troops battling against AQAP. (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023.)

Topic Overview

Food security is a major issue in refugee camps in Yemen due to the ongoing conflict and humanitarian crisis. The lack of access to food, safe water, and basic health services has resulted in widespread malnutrition and hunger, especially among children. The World Food Programme (WFP) and other international organizations are working to provide food assistance to refugees in Yemen, but ongoing fighting, logistical challenges, and funding shortages make it difficult to reach all those in need. Improving food security in Yemen will require a sustained effort to address the root causes of the conflict and provide stable and predictable funding to support aid organizations working in the country. (World Food Programme, 2022.)

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, approximately 40% of Yemenis are food insecure based on a recent national assessment done in April 2022. Recent food insecurity shows that 42% of the families experienced food insecurity equivalent to Phase 3+. This is supported by other food consumption indicators. Currently, one percent of the population is facing very severe hunger, equivalent to a Phase 5 Catastrophe. (FAO, 2022.)

After eight years of conflict, Yemen civilians have been affected and are currently suffering the consequences of the ongoing economic crisis. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA, 2022) approximately 21.6 million people need humanitarian assistance. Yemen's public infrastructure and services have been severely impacted by the conflict, more than 80% of the country's population struggles to access food, safe drinking water, and adequate health services, and nearly 90 percent of the population has no access to electricity.

According to UN Humanitarian Response Plan, during 2019 humanitarian partners will be making major efforts to expand and improve access. In different areas where the main access impediments and conflict-related, civil officers will be deployed to help open and structure the operating space. In areas where the main impediments are bureaucratic, partners will build on the Emergency Concept of Operations for Hodeida to introduce mutual accountability frameworks detailing the assessment, targeting, registration, implementation, and monitoring arrangements for humanitarian activities. OCHA will also continue to track the status of all visa requests, travel permits, humanitarian imports, and sub-agreements with the aim of strengthening advocacy and engagement with authorities.

The World Food Programme (WFP) currently is working on a project that aims to provide emergency financial support to improve the availability of food across Yemen, develop the country's agricultural and environmental infrastructure, and have a lasting impact on food security resilience across

Yemen. The Food Security Response and Resilience Project in Yemen finance a package of interventions delivered to almost 60 districts in the country.

“New analysis has confirmed the deterioration of food security in Yemen. The resounding takeaway is that we need to act now. We need to sustain the integrated humanitarian response for millions of people, including food and nutrition support, clean water, basic health care, protection, and other necessities”, said the Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Yemen, David Gressly. (ONU, 2022)

“We are running out of time... approximately 16 million people cannot put food on their table. This is a disaster, it is a time bomb, and the world needs to act now”, WFP spokesman Tomson Phiri told reporters at a scheduled news conference in Geneva. Around a million women also need treatment for acute malnutrition, Mr. Phiri continued, pointing to “years of conflict and economic volatility that have pushed the country “over the edge”. (UN, 2020)

According to the United Nations (2020), a total population of 30.5 million, the WFP has said that more than 23.4 million Yemenis need some form of humanitarian assistance. The UN refugee agency, UNHCR, also noted that a famine was looming for hundreds of miles of internally displaced people. They have been victims of “relentless rape” and the COVID-19 pandemic, which has left them without work to support themselves, spokesman Babar Baloch told reporters in Geneva. He cited a new UN food security survey in Yemen that showed the risk of “famine-like” conditions was increasing. “With rampant inflation and few livelihood opportunities, families can no longer, afford the basics,” Mr. Baloch said. “To put food on the table, many displaced families are buying their belongings, taking their children out of school and sending them to work, begging in the streets or eating just one meal a day”.

FAO’s Quarterly Food Security Report (2022) states that the consequences of the Russia-Ukraine conflict have precipitated global food shortages, and have affected many households in Yemen, since prices of food, especially grain-based, become unaffordable for vulnerable families. The export ban imposed by alternative import countries such as India further accelerates the food price increase.

In conclusion, the food security situation in refugee camps in Yemen is dire due to the ongoing conflict and humanitarian crisis. Despite the efforts of international organizations, ongoing fighting, logistical challenges, and funding shortages hinder their ability to fully address the issue. Improving food security in Yemen requires a multi-faceted approach that addresses the root causes of the conflict and provides stable funding to support aid efforts. The situation remains a pressing concern and requires ongoing attention and support to ensure that refugees have access to adequate food and resources to sustain themselves.

Guiding questions

1. What should Yemen's course of action towards refugees be?
2. What sort of motivation does Saudi Arabia have to impose the blockade?
3. What measures should the Horn of Africa region take to avoid this crisis?
4. What should organizations (like de WFP) do to support those affected by this crisis?
5. How could neighboring countries react to guarantee the rights of people going through this alimentary crisis?

References

- OHCHR. (1996 - 2023). *Human Rights Committee*. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies/ccpr>
- Relief food assistance to refugees in Yemen | World Food Programme. (2016, 31 March). *World Food Programme*. Recuperado 5 de enero de 2023, de <https://www.wfp.org/operations/200305-relief-food-assistance-refugees-yemen>
- Yemen: food insecurity a 'ticking timebomb', warn aid agencies*. (2020, 15 December). UN News. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/12/1079832>
- Yemen: Acute hunger at unprecedented levels as funding dries up*. (2022). <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/yemen-acute-hunger-unprecedented-levels-funding-dries>
- Yemen: Food Security Response and Resilience Project | World Food Programme*. (2022, 28 January). <https://www.wfp.org/publications/yemen-food-security-response-and-resilience-project>
- Yemen: Quarterly Food Security Report: Global Events, Inflation and Erosion of Livelihoods Driving Food Insecurity in Yemen (April – September 2022) - Yemen*. (2022, 12 August). https://fscluster.org/sites/default/files/documents/qfsr_q2_2022_final_220812_110207.pdf
- 2600 millones de dólares de esperanza humanitaria para 24 millones de yemeníes desesperados*. (2020, 2 marzo). Noticias ONU. <https://news.un.org/es/story/2019/02/1451872>
- Yemen Humanitarian Needs Overview 2023 (December 2022) [EN/AR] - Yemen*. (2022, 20 December). ReliefWeb. https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/yemen-humanitarian-needs-overview-2023-december-2022-enar?_gl=1*_ojlkx2*_ga*MTY0NzMyNjM2OC4xNjc2MzE1ODAw*_ga_E60ZNX2F68*MTY3NjUxNTAxNC4zLjAuMTY3NjUxNTAxNC42MC4wLjA
- Sugara, Robi (2018)*. "The Responses of Indonesian Muslims to Humanitarian Crisis in Syria, Yemen and Myanmar". Proceedings of the 1st International Conference on Recent Innovations.
- War in Yemen*. (2023, 7 February). Global Conflict Tracker. <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/war-yemen>