

Humanitarian agencies condemn the closure of Yemen's air, sea and land ports

Eighteen humanitarian agencies expressed serious concern today over the Saudi Arabia-led Coalition's decision to temporarily close all entry points to Yemen, effectively sealing the country off. The agencies demand that humanitarian operations are allowed to resume immediately and request clarity on the planned duration of the current closure and contingencies to allow humanitarian supplies to be delivered.

On Monday, the Coalition ordered the temporary closure of all Yemeni ground, air and sea ports, amongst other measures. Their statement said this was to address vulnerabilities in the inspection process, while maintaining the entry and exit of humanitarian supplies and personnel. The statement did not however, give any clarification on the duration of the closure, or how humanitarian assistance can be delivered.

Given the current acute food-security crisis and cholera epidemic, any delays to the restoration and expansion of humanitarian access will cost the lives of women, men, girls and boys across the whole of Yemen.

Johan Mooij, CARE Country Director, said: *"While we welcome the assurances of the Coalition which has vowed the continuation of access for humanitarian assistance and personnel, aid ships in Hodeida haven't been allowed to off-load, and at least three United Nations Humanitarian Air Assistance flights have been denied approval since 6th November. We are deeply concerned as this has a direct impact on our ability to maintain life-saving assistance. Yemen is one step away from famine, cholera is rife and provision of public services continues to deteriorate."*

In less than a day, this blockade already hiked up fuel prices in some governorates by as much as 60% as people scramble to stock up, and led to disruption of public transportation. The closure of all sea and land ports means urgently-needed lifesaving medical supplies have ceased, potentially affecting hundreds of thousands of people.

This will also substantially reduce the amount of food coming in the country – already, 1,200 tons of UN food and medical supplies have been delayed going from Djibouti to Yemen. Any reduction in imports and increase in food prices will exacerbate the existing massive hunger crisis and widespread child malnutrition.

Tamer Kirolos, Save the Children Country Director, said: *"Supplies of food and medical aid coming through Yemen's ports are keeping millions of children alive. It's already been tough enough to get help in – we've been forced to rely on routes that are long and slow for years. But if access shuts off entirely, even for a single week, then disaster will be the result. This is the nightmare scenario, and children will likely die as a result. It is crucial that aid workers and vital supplies like food, medicine and fuel are permitted to enter Yemen freely and without delay, and all blocks are removed."*

In the absence of clarity and detail from the Coalition, worrying questions remain about the extent and duration of these measures and their expected impact on the civilian population. If this issue is not resolved immediately, we fear an already catastrophic humanitarian and economic crisis will get substantially worse.

Furthermore, the humanitarian sector alone cannot fulfil the needs of the civilian population in Yemen as we cannot replace the commercial sector's ability to supply essential goods to the Yemeni people.

Shane Stevenson, Oxfam Country Director, said: "Yemen is the world's biggest humanitarian crisis, with 21 million people in desperate need of assistance. To prevent more lives from being lost and the needless suffering of millions, it is vital that aid is not delayed or impeded another hour. The Coalition needs to clarify immediately the measures it has taken and ensure that aid deliveries to Yemen and humanitarian operations are not affected in any way."

Agencies who have signed:

1. ACTED
2. Action Contre la Faim
3. ADRA
4. CARE
5. DRC
6. Handicap International
7. Human Appeal
8. International Rescue Committee
9. Islamic Relief
10. MdM
11. NRC
12. Oxfam
13. PU-AMI
14. Relief International
15. Saferworld
16. Save The Children
17. War Child
18. ZOA

