

Why we should care about Yemen

Opinion piece by Heidi Coetzee, CEO Save the Children NZ

Yemen: when you hear that word, what do you think of?

- a) Somewhere there's a war
- b) Pictures of starving kids
- c) A country somewhere in the Middle East, but can't think where, exactly
- d) Who cares?

And why should we care? It's not exactly a country that we have any relationship with, do we? And it's a long way from New Zealand.

But really - why should we care? There are multiple reasons. Most importantly, because most of the people affected by this conflict are innocent civilians just like you and me. There have been numerous unashamed breaches of human and child rights, which is simply unacceptable

Leaving aside the complex question of who's right and who's wrong in this multi-faceted war, there's no question that masses of innocent civilians, including children, have wrongly become targets. Hospitals, schools, mosques and other non-military locations have been destroyed indiscriminately, and some of these attacks may amount to war crimes.

In 2018 the coalition bombed a wedding killing 22 people, including eight children. Later in the year, a bus filled with children on a school trip was bombed, killing at least 26 innocent children.

Yes children, young boys aged from six to 11 on a school trip. Children just like yours, having fun on a trip. Anyone who sent their kids off to school today should care. Any anyone who cares about basic human rights should care.

Because today, Yemen is the worst place in the world to be a child.

A United Nations report on Children and Armed Conflict released in early July showed that over 7,500 children have been killed or wounded in the past five and a half years as a direct result of the fighting in Yemen. It is yet more evidence that children are paying the heaviest price for this brutal crisis. Since December 2018 a staggering eight children every day have been killed or injured in Yemen. Yes, every day. This **must** stop.

Disease outbreaks, like cholera, are now rife due to the collapse of the health system and weak sanitation systems. This is exacerbated by a population which is increasingly more vulnerable due to forced displacement and malnutrition. Around 85,000 children have died from extreme hunger and disease since the war escalated in 2015, and that number is rising every day. Only half of the health facilities in Yemen are functional.

Beyond the bombs, threats of hunger and disease are rampant and deadly. Restrictions on imports and blockades of goods like fuel have worsened the dire humanitarian situation.

Many children have witnessed haunting acts of violence and the destruction of their communities and homes. Children have told us that they would like to go back home and resume their normal life as they miss their daily activities and their friends. There are concerns about the psychological impact the violence is having on children. Research shows an increased likelihood of long-term mental health implications for children, especially if left untreated.

The only way that the people of Yemen will get any respite is for the war to stop. And stop now. Save the Children has called on international governments to pressure the warring parties to stop

the fighting and spare the lives of Yemeni children who are trapped in this vicious war. To deter those responsible from continuing attacks against civilians, including children, and civilian infrastructure, they must be held accountable to their obligations under international laws.

Monday 19 August is World Humanitarian Day, a day when we pay tribute to aid workers who risk their lives in humanitarian services and rally to support people affected by crises around the world. It's a day to remind us why we should care and that children are our present, our future and our hope for rebuilding countries affected by war. No child should be subjected to the trauma and fear that comes from armed conflict. And every child, no matter where they live, has the right to protection – a right grounded in our shared morality and underpinned by human rights.

Children living through conflict are among the least likely to be guaranteed their rights. Attacks on children must end, not just in Yemen but in Syria, the Sudan and wherever else in the world where children's rights are violated. Rights that should be protected under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC). An agreement that's supposed to protect the right of all children, everywhere, to be free from discrimination, violence and neglect. Rights that are violated with impunity in today's conflicts.

This year is the 30th anniversary of the signing of UNCROC. We have come a long way over the last three decades in upholding the rights of children: we've improved access to education, reduced the number of girls forced into marriage and child labour numbers are less. Sadly, this anniversary comes at a time when more countries are embroiled in internal or international conflict than at any other time in the past three decades.

The time has now come to reach those children left furthest behind. Abandoning children in conflict zones to a violent fate is unacceptable. We need governments to act now so that future generations might remember us for what we did to better protect children affected by armed conflict and not for what we failed to do.

And we need to care, because if we don't there is nothing to protect - not just the children of Yemen and Syria - but children everywhere: your children, your grandchildren, your friend's children. And that's worth caring about.

If you do want to show you care, please [sign our petition](#) asking our Government to take action to protect children living in war zones.

ENDS

Captions:

*All names have been changed.



CH1359906 - Yemen Bus Attack - Khaled*'s Story

Khaled* standing beside his house.

Khaled*, 12 years old, was one of the children who survived the school bus attack in Saada in August 2018. He was going on school field trip with his friends when an airstrike targeted the bus, killing 40 children.

Khaled* had a severe injury in his head and leg. He is out of the wheelchair but still can't walk without crutches. He faces difficulties remembering things that happened in the past and still requires surgery to remove remaining broken glass from his head.



CH 1286690 - Sami - Sami* 13, right and his brother Ammar*, 15, from Hajja

In April 2018, a deadly airstrike hit a wedding which Sami* and his brother Ammar* were attending. The two brothers survived but were badly injured and taken to hospital. Ammar* lost his right foot and Sami's right leg was badly broken. Their family could not pay for the medical treatment so Save the Children covered their hospital expenses and provided them with psychological support.



CH 1280337 - Qadir*, 10 months, Lahj district, Yemen.

Qadir*, 10 months, at Save the Children's Outpatient Therapeutic Programme (OTP), in a camp for Internally Displaced People (IDP), Lahj district, Yemen, where he receives treatment for Severe Acute Malnutrition. Qadir* and his family were displaced from Hodeidah, Yemen.



CH1218161 - Razan*, 8, standing by her father, Samir*. Razan* was seriously injured during an airstrike in Hodeidah.

Razan* was seriously injured in an airstrike when fleeing violence in Hodeidah, Yemen. Eight-year-old Razan*'s eye was seriously injured when she was hit by shrapnel during an airstrike in Hodeidah. At the time she was fleeing the violence with her family. She remained untreated for five days at home as her family couldn't afford the cost of transport to a hospital. Save the Children referred Razan* to a specialist hospital for emergency surgery and is providing psychosocial support to help her to come to terms with her experiences. Razan* is now recovering from her ordeal in Sana'a, but she needs further surgeries on her retina and cornea. Razan*'s school is next to a government building that is often targeted by airstrikes, so it's no longer safe for her to attend.