

Date: 20/09/2018

## **YEMEN: A further one million children at risk of famine as food and fuel prices soar across the country**

Any disruption to food and fuel supplies coming through Hodeidah port could cause starvation on an unprecedented scale, warns Save the Children

Hodeidah, September 19 – An additional one million severely food insecure children in Yemen risk falling into famine as families struggle to afford basic food and transport to health facilities for treatment. This brings the total number of children in Yemen at risk of famine to 5.2 million. Already, more than two-thirds (64.5 per cent) of Yemen’s population don’t know where their next meal is coming from.

As Hodeidah experiences [renewed fighting](#) there is a real risk its port – a vital lifeline for goods and aid for 80 per cent of Yemen’s population – could be damaged or temporarily closed, reducing the supply of available food and fuel as well as driving up prices even further. This would put the lives of hundreds of thousands of children in immediate danger while pushing millions more into famine. The United Nations has warned that failure to keep food, fuel and aid flowing into Yemen, particularly through Hodeidah, could result in one of the [worst hunger crises in living history](#).

A depreciating currency and collapsing economy are pushing communities to the brink of starvation.

Food prices are up by an average of [68 per cent](#) since 2015. The Yemeni Rial (YER) has depreciated nearly [180 per cent](#) in the same period. It now costs 600 YER to buy one US dollar, up from [215 YER](#) when the conflict escalated more than three years ago. The [price of fuel commodities](#) like petrol, diesel and cooking gas has increased by 25 per cent between November last year and September 2018. The [price of food has doubled](#) in some parts of the country in just a matter of days.

Though there are food supplies in the marketplace for now, families are unable to afford even the most basic items like bread, milk or eggs, making an already precarious situation even worse. Our teams have heard that some households are being forced to make impossible choices like deciding to take a malnourished baby to hospital at the expense of feeding the rest of the family.

### **Dr \*Ali, Save the Children’s Nutrition Adviser in Amran, Yemen, said:**

*“I’ve noticed people’s deteriorating financial situation as it’s very common that parents don’t bring their children to health facilities to get treatment, simply because they can’t afford the transport costs. People haven’t received salaries for years and they don’t have another source of income, so they simply don’t have the money to get their children to hospital.”*

A recent UN [survey](#) of 2,098 respondents across Yemen confirms the extent of the problem. An alarming 98 per cent of households said food was their primary expenditure. Equally alarming, 93 per cent named high commodity prices as their primary challenge, including food and fuel, while 72 per cent of households said they’re cutting down on food consumption to cope with a lack of income.

Nutrition [surveys](#) conducted during the first half of 2018 confirm alarming rates of malnutrition. In Hodeidah for example, home to Yemen’s largest commercial port and the primary gateway for food and fuel to the rest of the country, [one in every twenty children under five years](#) is suffering from severe acute malnutrition. Half of all children in Yemen are stunted.

**Helle Thorning-Schmidt, CEO of Save the Children International, said:**

*“The nutrition crisis in Yemen has serious implications. Millions of children don’t know when or if their next meal will come. In one hospital I visited in north Yemen, the babies were too weak to cry, their bodies exhausted by hunger. This could be any hospital in Yemen.*

*Severely malnourished children are 12 times more likely to die from preventable diseases like pneumonia, measles, cholera or diphtheria. Children who are stunted suffer physical and often irreversible long-term cognitive damage. It’s essential that children get the food they need to survive and thrive.”*

*What happens in Hodeidah has a direct impact on children and families right across Yemen. Even the smallest disruption to food, fuel and aid supplies through its vital port could mean death for hundreds of thousands of malnourished children unable to get the food they need to stay alive. It could drive up the price of fuel – and as a result transport – to such an extent that families can’t even afford to take their sick children to hospital.*

*“This war risks killing an entire generation of Yemen’s children who face multiple threats, from bombs to hunger to preventable diseases like cholera. All parties must agree a political solution to this conflict and give children hope of a brighter future. Let the immense suffering of children in Yemen end.”*

The brutal conflict in Yemen means communities across the country face huge barriers that prevent them from seeking care for their sick and undernourished children, including financial obstacles. The root causes of chronic and acute malnutrition and the factors leading to it are complex. But the current conflict creates conditions where malnutrition can take hold, exacerbated by poverty, lack of access to aid and low socioeconomic status. Women and girls and boys suffer disproportionately.

## **ENDS**

### **CASE STUDIES**



#### **\*AMARA**

Three months ago, 10-month-old \*Amara became ill and suffered from diarrhoea. Although the illness passed, she kept losing weight until she became severely malnourished. Her father, 18-year-old \*Omar and his wife, are both unemployed and struggle to provide \*Amara with enough daily nutrition.

#### **\*Omar, \*Amara’s father, said:**

*“Life has changed a lot during the war. The hardest change for my family is the rise in prices. Even if I manage to find work, the cost of food is just too high. We used to eat meat and fish but now I can only afford bread, so that’s what we eat. Sometimes we can also eat vegetables if I save up. We often go two whole days without eating, and I feel very guilty when that happens. I feel like I’ve failed my child.”*



### **\*SUHA**

Two-and-a-half-year-old \*Suha suffers from severe malnutrition which makes her weak and unable to eat on her own. Her mother \*Manal has given birth to fourteen other children, some of whom have died. She struggles to feed her family as prices continue to increase because of the war. She couldn't breastfeed as she is undernourished herself, saving what little food she has for her children.

#### **\*Manal, \*Suha's mother, said:**

*"I have fifteen children, almost half of them died. Two girls and one boy died from malnutrition, two boys from high fever and diarrhea. And the other two were stillborn. When \*Suha was six months she became sick. I could see her bones, I could not do anything for her. I had no money for transportation. I had to borrow some money to take \*Suha to the Hospital far away from our village. Most of the time we eat two meals a day. In the morning we eat bread with tea and for lunch it's potatoes and tomatoes. Usually, I don't eat. I keep it for my children."*



### **\*MANSUR**

14-month-old \*Mansur from Amran suffers from Severe Acute Malnutrition. He started becoming undernourished seven months ago, when he suffered from diarrhea. Mansur's father used to be a farmer before the conflict, but now struggles to find work. As a result, the family can't afford the nutritious food their children need. The main meal the family eats is milk from

their neighbour's livestock, along with bread.

#### **\*Lamia, \*Mansur's mother, said:**

*"My husband already sold our land to survive in this crisis. When it started, we could not find anything to eat. The doctor said that Mansur is getting better. He gave me nutrition for my son. He told me that I should continue breastfeeding and showed me why it's important."*

### **About Save the Children**

Save the Children believes every child deserves a future. In New Zealand and around the world, we work every day to give children a healthy start in life, the opportunity to learn and protection from harm. When crisis strikes, and children are most vulnerable, we are always among the first to respond and the last to leave. We ensure children's unique needs are met and their voices are heard. We deliver lasting results for millions of children, including those hardest to reach.

We do whatever it takes for children – every day and in times of crisis – transforming their lives and the future we share.

#### **To arrange interviews, please contact:**

For interviews with staff on the ground contact Heidi Coetzee, Chief Executive, Save the Children NZ, phone 021 733 951 or email [heidi.coetzee@scnz.org.nz](mailto:heidi.coetzee@scnz.org.nz)

## NOTES TO EDITORS

- Since the Saudi-led military intervention in Yemen began in March 2015 it has become three times more expensive for Yemenis to buy foreign currency. More information on the depreciation of the Yemeni Rial can be found [here](#).
- The UN's humanitarian [update](#) for the period 27 August – 6 September warns that an additional two million Yemenis are at risk of famine as a result of the currency collapse and price hikes. Based on the credible assumption that approximately half of Yemen's population is under 18 years, Save the Children estimates that one million additional children under 18 years are at heightened risk of famine.
- According to the UN's [World Food Programme](#), 8.4 million people in Yemen are severely food insecure and at risk of being pushed into famine. Based on this, Save the Children estimates that 4.2 million children under 18 years are at risk of famine in Yemen.
- The UN estimates that [17.8 million](#) people in Yemen require emergency food assistance. World Bank [data](#) shows Yemen's population as 27.58 million (2016). Based on this, 64.5 per cent (or two-thirds) of the population requires emergency food assistance.
- Earlier this month Save the Children warned that with a 2018 caseload of nearly 400,000 severely malnourished children under five years in Yemen, more than [36,000 children](#) would likely die from extreme hunger this year. For more information read full report [here](#).
- The humanitarian crisis in Yemen is widely acknowledged as the worst in the world. 60 per cent of the country's population is hungry, including 8.4 million acutely food insecure people who do not know where their next meal will come from and an additional 10 million people who could slip into pre-famine conditions by the end of year unless the conflict ends. At least 1.8 million children and 1.1 million pregnant or breastfeeding women are acutely malnourished, including 400,000 children under the age of five who are suffering from severe acute malnutrition.

Save the Children has over 50 years of experience working in Yemen. Operational since 1963, the charity was the first international aid group in Yemen. We work nationally and locally to promote and protect children's rights, with programmes in education, protection, health, nutrition, water, livelihoods, and food security. More information [here](#).