

## Yemen Crisis

### Regional Durable Solutions Secretariat Position Paper

July 2015

The escalation of the armed conflict in Yemen in March 2015 has resulted in a large-scale humanitarian crisis with over one million people internally displaced, over 21 million in need of humanitarian assistance, and around 40,000 fleeing the country in search of refuge.<sup>1</sup>

Prior to the escalation of violence in March 2015, Yemen already faced a large-scale humanitarian emergency, with nearly 16 million people in need of humanitarian assistance. Humanitarian conditions within Yemen have since rapidly deteriorated further, as much needed supplies are critically low due to a de facto air, sea and land blockade. A full restoration of supply routes for vital commodities including food, fuel and medical supplies is required to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe. Health and nutrition treatment services are decreasing due to shortages in supplies and limited humanitarian access, while needs are drastically increasing.<sup>2</sup>

Since March 2015, over 18,000 people have already arrived from Yemen in Somalia, namely in Puntland and Somaliland. On 13 June 2015, a boat carrying 2,019 people arrived at the port of Bossasso,<sup>3</sup> while over 19,000 people have fled to Djibouti in search of safety.<sup>4</sup>

As conditions continue to deteriorate, it is expected that thousands, or tens of thousands, more people will leave Yemen in search of safety. Civilians fleeing conflict are arriving in Djibouti, Ethiopia, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Somalia and Sudan, mainly by sea or overland.<sup>5</sup> The majority of newly displaced people are Somali or Yemeni nationals. Many of these people have been displaced more than once as either refugees or internally displaced persons. Prior to the outbreak of this conflict, Yemen was an area of asylum hosting 250,000 refugees, most of whom were Somalis seeking protection.<sup>6</sup>

The Regional Durable Solutions Secretariat (ReDSS) urgently recommends the following actions in response to this humanitarian crisis:

#### **Funding must be released without delay**

The Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan requires \$1.6 billion to provide critical life-saving assistance. By the end of June, less than 12% of these funds had been received.<sup>7</sup> **Delays in the release of funds**

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<sup>1</sup> UNOCHA, Yemen Situation Report No 11 (as of 10 June 2015)

<sup>2</sup> UNOCHA, Situation Report No 10 (as of 3 June 2015)

<sup>3</sup> UNHCR, IOM, Somalia Task Force on Yemen Situation, weekly sitrep #24, 10 – 16 June, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> UNHCR, Yemen Situation UNHCR regional update #11, 26 June, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> UNHCR, Yemen Situation UNHCR crisis update #7, 29 May, 2015.

<sup>6</sup> UNHCR, Yemen Situation UNHCR crisis update #7, 29 May, 2015.

<sup>7</sup> UNOCHA, Yemen Humanitarian Catastrophe Report No 13 (as of 30 June 2015)

**for the Yemen response will lead to a further deterioration of the dire humanitarian situations in both Yemen and Somalia, will be more costly to address, and will further impede solutions for the displaced and host communities.**

**Funding should be released without delay, with flexible funding modalities to allow existing funds to be reallocated, and new funds to be responsive to the unfolding crisis and increasing humanitarian needs.** Displacement levels in East and Horn of Africa are among the world's highest, and critical attention is needed for people displaced within Yemen and across borders.

#### **Recognise the diverse vulnerabilities of different displacement groups**

Thousands of people arriving in Somaliland and Puntland are Somali. They are predominantly from south and central Somalia, areas that continue to experience conflict and cyclical natural disasters such as drought and flooding. The region already hosts many IDPs, while unfavourable conditions in south and central Somalia continues to generate the displacement of thousands of people.

Somali refugees and migrants from Yemen that have now fled the current conflict are seeking protection in Somaliland and Puntland. **These new arrivals have been predominantly labelled as 'Somali returnees'.** Yet in a country where there are programmes assisting IDPs and refugees to voluntarily return to their areas of origin, **this label risks creating confusion.**

Different displacement groups have diverse profiles, vulnerabilities and needs. It is of great importance that Somalis fleeing conflict in Yemen are not categorised in the same manner as people making a choice to return to their areas of origin. People who have fled conflict and seek safety in other countries, including Somalia, have done so because they require specific protection and access to services and commodities. This should be reflected in the assistance they receive.

#### **Programming should be needs based; existing programming must be modified to meet new and changing needs**

**The classification of people fleeing conflict has an impact on programming, funding and the engagement of donors.** For example, the classification of Somalis fleeing conflict in Yemen as 'Somali returnees' has delayed or precluded assistance in cases where programmes are funded by refugee rather than emergency funding mechanisms.

Somalia, along with other states in the region, is fragile, susceptible to shocks and cyclical crises. Resilience programming is ongoing in areas of return in Somalia. **Somalis fleeing conflict in Yemen should be incorporated into programs with early warning triggers, and resilience programming should have contingency plans** that allow for timely scaling up to prevent further stresses and shocks, and in order to ensure gains made are not lost. This provides an entry point for engaging development actors, and for **consistent, collaborative coordination between humanitarian, resilience and development interventions.** In line with this, **development actors should develop mechanisms for flexible funding,** ensuring there are no gaps in responding to needs due to classification issues, while **establishing a quick release mechanism for funds.** The approach to the displacement crisis in Yemen should be consistent across countries and actors.

Current interventions are giving Somalis fleeing conflict in Yemen the option to return to their areas of origin. **These returns must be the result of a free and informed voluntary choice to return to their areas of origin.** Voluntariness results from "an absence of physical, psychological or material pressure" to return.<sup>8</sup> Those that return should not be exposed to additional risks to their physical safety, while

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<sup>8</sup> UNHCR, Handbook: Voluntary Repatriation, International Protection, 1996, 3.1.

a duty of care must be upheld to all people who are assisted to return. Travel by road from Bossaso and Hargeisa to Mogadishu and other areas of south and central Somalia is perilous. It is concerning that there has been no monitoring of Somalis fleeing conflict in Yemen who are assisted to return to their areas of origin to date. **There should be a monitoring system installed to ensure there is an understanding of any challenges faced in access to services or in protection needs.**

Military offensives led by the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and the Somali National Armed Forces (SNAF) in the coming months will impact the security environment in parts of south and central Somalia, and on trade routes for the provision of services and resources, likely leading to further displacement. If a durable solution such as return and reintegration is to be sustainable, it should not be rushed, but has to be well planned, coordinated and supported throughout.

**There is a need for consistency in approach to returns.** Where there are programmes assisting IDPs, refugees, migrants or Somalis fleeing conflict in Yemen to return to their areas of origin, there should not be differences between assistance packages, but rather a common approach.

Many Somalis fleeing conflict in Yemen have not returned to their areas of origin, but instead have made their way to urban centres such as Hargeisa, Bosaso and Mogadishu, where there is access to services. Some have joined existing IDP settlements. **Alternative assistance should be provided for all people who have fled the conflict in Yemen and need protection, including Somalis who are unwilling or unable to return to their area of origin, in order to ensure the material safety of the displaced.** Where there is a need for service provision, there are opportunities to provide assistance beyond the care and maintenance approach, **learning lessons from resilience programming and livelihoods interventions using a market oriented focus.** Access to livelihoods as well as an adequate standard of living will further the material safety of people displaced by the conflict in Yemen. Programmes should ensure standards of physical safety are met, and maximum efforts should be made to ensure legal safety so that individuals are not exposed to further protection risks.

With a likelihood of tens of thousands of people moving out of Yemen in search of protection, it is urgent to ensure a range of appropriate interventions are available, while imperative to uphold legal and humanitarian commitments to protect people fleeing conflict.

#### **Specific Recommendations:**

##### **For Development actors and Donors:**

1. Release pledged funds for the Yemen response immediately;
2. Ensure mechanisms for flexible funding and the quick release of funds;
3. Avoid the categorization of 'Somali returnees' for Somalis fleeing conflict in Yemen;
4. Allow development actors to incorporate civilians fleeing conflict in Yemen into existing programming where possible, via crisis modifiers or other rapid program modification processes;
5. Ensure consistent, collaborative coordination between humanitarian, resilience and development interventions.

##### **For UN and Humanitarian actors:**

1. Urge flexibility to reallocate funds and release new funds to be responsive to the unfolding crisis and humanitarian needs;
2. Avoid the categorization of 'Somali returnees' for Somalis fleeing conflict in Yemen;
3. Incorporate people fleeing conflict in Yemen into early warning triggers and development programming;

4. Ensure consistent, collaborative coordination between humanitarian, resilience and development interventions;
5. Ensure a monitoring system is installed for people assisted to return, or for those availed other forms of protection and service provision;
6. Ensure a unified approach to returns, based on the needs and protection of all those seeking protection;
7. Ensure returns to areas of origin are the result of a free and informed voluntary choice;
8. Ensure the provision of alternative assistance to returns for all people who have fled the conflict in Yemen and need protection, learning lessons from resilience programming and livelihoods interventions using a market oriented focus.

