

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 19, 2020

The Honorable Michael R. Pompeo
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20230

The Honorable Kelly Craft
Ambassador of the United States of America
United Nations
799 United Nations Plaza
New York, NY 10017

Dear Secretary Pompeo and Ambassador Craft,

We write to express grave concern about the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Yemen. We worry that the Trump administration's actions, including the potential escalation of sanctions against the Houthis, will have a disastrous impact on the ability of aid organizations to provide relief to millions of Yemenis who depend on this assistance for survival. We urge the Administration to take immediate steps to mitigate these harmful effects and combat rising food insecurity and malnutrition in Yemen.

Years of civil conflict, together with the devastation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, have greatly increased the risk of famine and starvation to Yemeni civilians, especially women and children, a problem exacerbated by funding shortfalls in the international humanitarian response.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, international humanitarian assistance allowed certain regions of Yemen to avoid falling into famine. Now, as the pandemic continues to spread, the level of desperation and food insecurity is even more severe. The country now has the highest number of malnutrition cases since the war began in 2015. In 2020 alone, Yemen saw a 10 percent increase in cases of malnutrition, and a 15.5 percent rise in acute cases. More than half a million cases of acute malnutrition among children under five have been reported in southern Yemen, and the UN warns the results of a survey of the north currently underway are expected to be "equally concerning." This puts hundreds of thousands of lives in immediate peril.

The Administration's reported new designation is likely to only worsen this devastating humanitarian crisis and poses a serious obstacle for both the already overstrained humanitarian response and precarious political process in Yemen.

The heads of top humanitarian aid organizations—Oxfam America, Save the Children, Mercy Corps, CARE USA, and International Rescue Committee—warned that "a designation of Ansar Allah could cause even greater suffering, given the number of people under its jurisdiction, its control over state institutions, and the already frightening levels of food insecurity and humanitarian need across Yemen." As you know, individual Houthi leaders were already subjected to U.S. and U.N. sanctions prior to the imposition of this new designation. We have no

illusions about the dangerous actions of the Houthis, but a blanket designation will dramatically increase risks associated with transferring humanitarian funds to Yemen.

Amidst this unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe and ongoing funding shortfalls, the chilling effect of the sanctions designation on international donors' willingness to contribute will likely put malnutrition programs that are desperately needed at risk of being curbed, and do significant harm to innocent civilians in Houthi-controlled areas.

With thousands of lives at stake, we urge the Administration to take the following steps:

- 1) Restore the \$73 million in U.S. humanitarian assistance suspended in March and consider additional aid in response to the consequences of COVID-19.
- 2) Use U.S. leverage at the U.N. to press key international donors—especially Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait—to make up the current funding deficit for malnutrition treatment programs which, according to UNICEF, amounts to roughly \$1.77 billion. These countries have contributed significantly less in 2020 to the U.N. Humanitarian Appeal for Yemen than in years past—the UAE has provided no money—and must bear a share of the cost of the humanitarian response if Yemenis are to avoid starvation.
- 3) Utilize U.S. influence on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and other countries in the Saudi-led coalition to press for an end to restrictions on commercial and humanitarian shipments in and out of Yemen. These restrictions have devastated the economy, which imported 90 percent of its food prior to the conflict, and exacerbated skyrocketing food prices, which are now on average 140 percent higher than pre-conflict averages.
- 4) Urge the international community to use its leverage to press the Houthis to end the obstruction of aid and prevent obstacles to the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

We ask that you as representatives of our nation—which has historically been the largest single provider of humanitarian assistance worldwide—ensure the U.S. and the global community come together to end the war, and urgently meet the funding need for emergency food assistance, malnutrition treatment, and restoration and sustenance of Yemen's food systems. The U.S. must be at the forefront of encouraging contributions to the international humanitarian response in Yemen, not disincentivizing aid donors with the threat of additional harmful sanctions.

The consequences are catastrophic if we fail to do so.

Sincerely,

Ted Deutch
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Ro Khanna
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Jan Schakowsky
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Ted Lieu
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Mark Pocan
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Pramila Jayapal
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Tom Malinowski
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Debbie Dingell
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