

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 13, 2021

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

We write to express our concern about restrictions imposed by the Saudi-led coalition on commercial and humanitarian imports into Yemen and ask that you urgently push for them to be lifted.

Since 2015, the restrictions imposed by the coalition have critically exacerbated the humanitarian crisis in Yemen. The interference, delay, and outright blocking of commercial goods and humanitarian assistance shipped to Yemen's ports is a principal cause of price inflation, food insecurity, economic collapse, and the failure of public services in Yemen. These measures do not interrupt the supply of Iranian and other weapons to the Houthis, especially given the establishment of the UN Verification and Inspection Mechanism (UNVIM) in 2016.

At times, the economic warfare practiced by the Saudi-led coalition, the Republic of Yemen government, and the Houthis has culminated in even more acute crises, particularly concerning fuel. The Houthis are guilty of widely reported black market manipulation of fuel supplies and diversion of customs revenues which, pursuant to the Stockholm Agreement, were intended for the payment of public sector salaries. These actions have themselves worsened the humanitarian crisis and undermined prospects for a more comprehensive political settlement. However, we do not regard the coalition's actions in response – namely, its refusal to grant clearance to 14 fuel ships to berth in Hodeidah between late December 2020 and late March 2021 – as constructive or legitimate. Prices have skyrocketed as a result, rippling across all sectors of the humanitarian response and pushing millions toward the brink of famine. The World Food Program recently indicated that fuel scarcity could imminently trigger an escalation of the conflict.

We appreciate the Biden administration's commitment to address the humanitarian crisis in Yemen and resolve the underlying conflict that drives it. The administration has taken responsible steps that will position the US to help to broker a political settlement to the conflict despite the Houthis' continued rejection of dialogue and lack of concessions toward peace. At this moment, the Houthis' offensive on Marib threatens to re-displace hundreds of thousands of Yemenis – most of whom specifically sought refuge in Marib to escape Houthi aggression and repression. The Houthis should immediately end their assault on Marib and engage in a political process to resolve the conflict.

We acknowledge the Saudi and Yemeni governments' decision on March 25 to let four fuel ships dock at Hodeidah, which indicates that the administration's engagement is bearing fruit. The Saudi government's recent pledge to send fuel products to the Yemeni government is another positive development. However, none of this excuses the Saudi-led coalition's continued obstruction of commercial and humanitarian imports to Yemen, which serves no legitimate humanitarian, political, or security purpose. Ending this practice will boost Yemen's economy, de-escalate the conflict, and prevent this humanitarian catastrophe from worsening - all important U.S. objectives.

We understand that the conflict in Yemen is complex and affects broader political and security interests, but we nonetheless ask that you stress the need to remove import restrictions immediately on humanitarian grounds. Congress will remain an important partner as you, Special Envoy Lenderking, and others work to chart a path toward peace in Yemen.

Sincerely,

Ted Deutch
CHAIR, SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE
MIDDLE EAST, NORTH AFRICA, AND
GLOBAL COUNTERTERRORISM

Joe Wilson
RANKING MEMBER, SUBCOMMITTEE
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