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for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the
High Commissioner and the Secretary-General**

Joint written statement* submitted by Alsalam Foundation, Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain Inc, non-governmental organizations in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[01 February 2021]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



The Humanitarian Crisis in Yemen and the Involvement of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE)

Alsalam Foundation and Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain Inc (ADHRB) takes this opportunity at the 46th Session of the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council (HRC) to raise serious concerns about the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Yemen and the direct involvement of the Saudi-UAE led coalition in the creation and protraction of this crisis. We are particularly concerned about the ongoing famine, economic crisis, the outbreak of cholera and the COVID-19 pandemic, and the effects that the conflict has had on the lives of citizens, particularly women and children.

The Humanitarian Crisis in Yemen

In March 2015, an international coalition led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE intervened militarily at the request of the Yemeni President. This conflict has resulted in the largest humanitarian crisis in the world and has resulted in the deaths and injuries of thousands of Yemeni civilians. The conflict has resulted in over 24 million people – approximately 80 percent of the population – in need of dire humanitarian assistance, including over 12 million children. This humanitarian crisis has been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic as sanitation and clean water are in short supply and only half of the country's health facilities are operational, with many that remain functional lacking basic necessities such as masks and gloves, let alone the oxygen and other necessary supplies to treat COVID-19.

The conflict has resulted in civilians lacking access to the most basic of services, an economic crisis, a culture of impunity among local security forces, and collapsed governance, health, education, and judicial systems. Moreover, the ongoing violence has resulted in large amounts of internally displaced persons (IDPs) which further impedes the humanitarian response. This, coupled with a destroyed economy, high levels of unemployment, and the lack of salaries for many of those employed in the public sector, has resulted in millions of Yemenis being forced into debt and unable to support their families.

The Direct Involvement of the Saudi-UAE Coalition in the Deepening of this Crisis

The Saudi-UAE led coalition has played an instrumental role in the onset and continuation of this humanitarian crisis. Since March 2015, the coalition has conducted numerous indiscriminate and disproportionate airstrikes which have killed thousands of civilians and decimated civilian structures such as school buses, hospitals, detention centers, factories, farms, mosques, and bridges. According to the Yemen Data Project, the coalition has conducted over 20,100 airstrikes in Yemen since the war began, averaging 12 attacks a day. Human Rights Watch has also documented at least 90 unlawful airstrikes perpetrated by the coalition, these have included deadly attacks on Yemeni fishing boats which have killed dozens and appear to be deliberate attacks on civilians and civilian property, which is in direct violation of the laws of war.

Moreover, the restrictions on imports placed by the Saudi-UAE led coalition have gravely worsened the already dire humanitarian situation in Yemen. The coalition has actively delayed and diverted fuel tankers, shut down vital ports, and prohibited goods from entering the Houthi-controlled seaports. The coalition has also blocked fuel which is necessary to power generators in hospitals and to pump water to homes.

The coalition's actions are directly responsible for the ongoing famine in Yemen. Yemen is heavily reliant upon imports since very little food is grown there. As such, food security in the country is heavily dependent upon the arrival and distribution of imports across the country, as well as, incomes for household access. The Saudi-UAE led coalition has

knowingly and deliberately undermined both the population's access to imports and income since the war began in 2015.

However, despite the grave violations of international humanitarian law outlined above, the UN Security Council has only utilized its sanctions regime against the Houthis. This is despite the fact that the Saudi-UAE led coalition has committed various war crimes according to research conducted by the UN Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts and Human Rights Watch.

Spread of Cholera

The conflict in Yemen has led to a massive sanitation crisis in the country, which has allowed the spread of several diseases, including cholera. Over half the Yemeni population, approximately 17.8 million people, lack access to safe drinking water and sanitation. The ongoing economic crisis has produced soaring prices and reduced purchasing power, further complicating access to safe drinking water and personal hygiene items. Such conditions are aggravating the risk of malnutrition, cholera, and COVID-19.

Yemen is now home to one of the worst cholera epidemics in recent history with over 1.3 million people contracting the disease since 2017. This number has only continued to rise since 2019, as infection rates spread across the country. In 2020, the cholera outbreak could be found in 22 of Yemen's 23 governorates, with children under five representing 26.5 percent of those infected in 2020.

Effects of the Humanitarian Crisis on Women and Children

Before the conflict began, women in Yemen faced discrimination both in law and in practice. However, this gender discrimination and violence has only been further exacerbated by the actions of the Saudi-UAE led coalition. The conditions of war which are characterized by a loss of personal security, family instability, a lack of access to rights, and displacement are generally understood to lead to an exponential increase in gender-based violence, and Yemen is no exception to this. Yemeni women and children are more vulnerable and further exposed to the risk of gender-based violence both within and outside of IDP camps. Moreover, the conflict has not only robbed Yemeni women of their security and bodily autonomy, but also their lives. According to the Yemen Data Project, a quarter of all civilians killed in air raids were women and children.

However, the most detrimental impacts of this conflict affect Yemen's most vulnerable population: children. Every year, 30,000 Yemeni children die due to malnutrition. In any given year, there are 1.8 million Yemeni children suffering from acute malnutrition. On any given day, 400,000 children are suffering from a life-threatening form of severe malnutrition. The result is that half of children under the age of 5 are chronically malnourished. This is part of an ongoing vicious cycle caused by the years of war. In Yemen, 1.1 million pregnant or lactating women are anemic, giving birth to children with low birthweights, thereby starting the cycle of malnutrition and chronic malnutrition.

Additionally, the conflict has significantly impacted access to social services. Since 2015, over 1,700 schools have been impacted by the conflict, leaving over two million children unable to attend school. The conflict has not only resulted in the destruction of schools, but also, due to the concomitant economic crisis, teachers have not been paid their salaries which further reduces children's access to education. Moreover, the detrimental consequences of the lack of access to education are highly gendered since girls are more likely to miss out on education, currently 36 percent of girls are out of school compared to 24 percent of boys.

Conclusion and Recommendations

As a member of the UN HRC, it is important that Saudi Arabia and the UAE be held to high standards when it comes to their commitment to human rights. Their direct

involvement in the ongoing conflict and humanitarian crisis in Yemen is a grave violation of several international humanitarian laws and the laws of war.

Therefore, ADHRB urges the Governments of Saudi Arabia and the UAE to:

- Halt all airstrikes until an international, independent and impartial commission can investigate all allegations of attacks against civilians;
 - Ensure the provision and distribution of clean drinking water to all Yemenis;
 - Halt the delays of fuel and other life-saving imports; and,
 - Immediately end all fighting and work towards a political settlement that would end the conflict.
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