

UN chief urges countries to help address economic crisis in war-torn Yemen



United Nations, December 16 (RHC)-- United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has called on world countries to provide financial assistance to resolve the severe economic crisis in Yemen, which has been under incessant attacks by a Saudi-led coalition over the past several years.

Saudi Arabia and a number of its regional allies launched a devastating war on Yemen in March 2015, in an unsuccessful attempt to suppress an uprising that had toppled a Riyadh-friendly regime.

"I call on all member states to step up their financial support for United Nations relief operations, and to help address the severe economic crisis in the country," Guterres said in a statement issued via his spokesperson Stephane Dujarric on the second anniversary of the Stockholm Agreement between Yemen's Houthis and Riyadh-sponsored loyalists to the former regime of Yemen.

Guterres said the 2018 agreement was a diplomatic breakthrough aimed at bringing an end to the conflict in Yemen, and said "far more needs to be done" to achieve that goal and the profound suffering of the Yemeni people had persisted.

"The preservation of this lifeline is even more vital now as pockets of famine-like conditions have returned in Yemen and millions are facing severe, growing food insecurity, in particular against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic," he said, adding that it is crucial to avoid any action that could exacerbate the dire situation in Yemen.

"Only through dialogue will the Yemeni parties be able to agree on a nationwide ceasefire, economic and humanitarian confidence-building measures to alleviate the suffering of the Yemeni people, as well as the resumption of an inclusive political process to reach a comprehensive negotiated settlement to end the conflict," the UN chief said.

The remarks by Guterres came as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) raised the alarm about millions of Yemenis risking falling into worsening levels of hunger by mid-2021.

The FAO warns that 5 million people in Yemen "will likely be living just one step away from famine" next year, urging immediate support. The United Nations World Food Program (WFP) also described the crisis in Yemen as "the world's worst humanitarian crisis," and warned against the continuation of the protracted conflict there.

"The Yemen crisis remains the world's worst humanitarian crisis with millions trapped in a cycle of conflict and hunger. Everyday life in Yemen gets harder for millions as the window to prevent famine narrows. We must act now," the WFP said in a tweet.

The United Nations offers the new staggering death toll of 233,000 from the Saudi-led war on Yemen, stressing the importance of a ceasefire.

In a related development on Tuesday, the spokesman for Yemen's Houthi Ansarullah movement, Mohammed Abdul-Salam, criticized the UN's silence on the Saudi-led siege of Yemen and said the continuation of the blockade would implicate the international body in the crime against Yemenis. "The continuation of the siege and the closure of Sana'a International Airport and the port of Hudaydah is a crime in which the United Nations participates by allowing the aggression forces to persist in their assault and atrocities against the entire nation," read the tweet.

The Saudi-led coalition has since five years ago enforced an all-out aerial, naval, and land blockade on the impoverished country. The war has taken a heavy toll on Yemen's infrastructure, destroying hospitals, schools, and factories. The UN says over 24 million Yemenis are in dire need of humanitarian aid, including 10 million suffering from extreme levels of hunger.

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