



General Assembly

Distr.: General
22 February 2019

English only

Human Rights Council

Fortieth session

25 February–22 March 2019

Agenda item 4

Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by Iraqi Development Organization, a non-governmental organization 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.

[11 February 2019]

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



The Devastating Impacts of the Saudi Arabia-led Coalition's Economic Measures That Use Impoverishment and Starvation as a Weapon of War against Civilians in Yemen

IDO, together with Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain and Arabian Rights Watch Association, take this opportunity at the 40th Session of the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council to express our continued deep dismay about the ongoing systematic violations of rights, particularly economic rights, by the Saudi Arabia-led intervention in Yemen. The unlawful economic coercive measures employed by the Saudi-led Coalition (Coalition) are illegally imposed on the entire population, resulting in devastating impacts on the most vulnerable, particularly women, children and the elderly.

On 26 March 2015, before UNSC Resolution 2216 was adopted, the Coalition began conducting daily bombardments on targets in Yemen while imposing an aerial and naval blockade. The Coalition's unilateral action occurred without a UN mandate and preceded the adoption of Resolution 2216 by three weeks. Despite this, the Coalition cites the resolution as a retroactive justification for its unilateral military action, claiming that it is enforcing the arms embargo that the resolution mandates.¹ In practice, the military action has been marked by indiscriminate violence against civilians, resulting in severe human rights violations, particularly against those civilians who are most vulnerable: the elderly, women and children. The Coalition airstrikes, coupled with the blockades, constitute "comprehensive" unilateral coercive measures that seriously impede the Yemeni people's right to self-determination by killing and maiming civilians, destroying civilian infrastructure, and disrupting the import and export of commercial goods (including food, medical supplies, and fuel) and humanitarian aid. In the absence of international action that is enforced in practice rather than merely displayed on paper, the crisis will likely continue to intensify as violations against civilians continue with impunity.

Deliberate, Systematic Destruction of Yemen's Economy

The economy has contracted sharply since the war began mainly due to the unlawful restrictions and measures imposed on exports and imports which resulted in sharp price increases for commodities available in the market. The monetary and fiscal policies of the internationally recognized Saudi Arabian-led Coalition backed government in de facto exile coupled with the corruption and fragmentation of the Central Bank of Yemen has also played a central role in the weakening of the economy by causing a major devaluation of the Yemeni riyal. Not depositing oil revenues in the Central Bank of Yemen, starving the economy of hard currency, relying on printing large sums of the Yemeni riyal, enforcing a de facto blockade on commercial imports and hampering exports all contributed to the sharp devaluation. Whereas the value of the Yemeni Riyal was YR 215 before the imposition of these policies, the value steadily decreased to YR 520 at the end of 2018, and was hovering between YR 525 to YR 575 during January 2018. The UN Panel of Expert notes that the "volatile exchange rate appears to have reduced overall imports of essential commodities, including fuel, to Houthi-controlled areas and to have constrained essential humanitarian assistance."

As a welcomed step towards alleviating some of the suffering, pensions belonging to about 40,000 people were disbursed in the months of November and December 2018 and January 2019. These pensioners have not received their full back-pay for the two years they were withheld. Although there are continued efforts to pay a half salary every three months from the de facto authorities in Sanaa to cover the balance of the back-pay which was withheld by the internationally recognized government, we urge continuation of the half salary payment until all entitlements have been fully disbursed. Although pensioners have begun

¹ Saudi Coalition response to United Nations Special Rapporteurs' Joint Communication. 27 December 2016. <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadFile?gId=33332>

to receive their entitlements, public sector employees have not received their salaries for 2.5 years which continues to directly impoverish over a million people and their dependents, weakening the economy further.² It is estimated that businesses have laid off over half the workforce and because of the systematic targeting of the agriculture and fishery sectors, which was the main source of income for three quarters of the population prior to the escalation of conflict, livelihoods have been severely impacted. Mobility of people and goods continues to be a major issue with the continued imposition of an unlawful flight ban to and from Sanaa International Airport which negatively affects commerce and exacerbates the dire humanitarian situation.

The Stockholm Agreement and its Humanitarian Confidence Building Measures

We welcome the efforts made by the international community and the UN Special Envoy, Martin Griffiths, which culminated in the landmark Stockholm Agreement and the subsequent adoption of UN Security Council resolution 2451 and 2452 codifying the terms of the agreement. But we express dismay that not only was the flight ban on Sanaa International Airport not lifted, one of the most pressing issues facing civilians was not discussed, namely the economic measures imposed on the civilian population which is being used to impoverish and starve millions of Yemenis as a weapon of war.

Prisoner Exchange

While we welcome the agreement to exchange over 15000 prisoners held by the parties to the conflict, we express grave concern regarding the list provided by the Saudi-led Coalition backed government which included over 100 people who are deemed to be members of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).³ While it is reported that AQAP is fighting alongside the Coalition in the battle against what they call Houthis, some of the AQAP prisoners the Saudi Coalition backed government seek to be released were convicted and imprisoned before the war and others during the war, a number of whom have admitted to committing extrajudicial executions of Yemenis. We question the cover of legitimacy and recognition given to an expired, exiled government that appoints members of AQAP to its cabinet, hires them as negotiators, utilizes other such designated people as clerics and that now seek their release despite their imprisonment for materially supporting what is arguably the single most dangerous terrorist group in the world today.

The delegation of the de facto authorities in Sanaa submitted a list of over 7000 of which the Coalition only recognized custody over about 700 despite the ICRC having visited some and the families having direct contact with the prisoners. On a brighter note, we welcome the unconditional release on 29 January 2019 of Musa Awaji,⁴ the Saudi prisoner of war who was suffering from an ailment that could not be treated in Yemen due to the blockade on medicine and medical supplies. We also commend the reciprocity shown by the Saudi Coalition in releasing 7 prisoners belonging to the forces of the de facto authorities.⁵ We hope that good faith measures such as these translate to the building of the requisite confidence to arrive at a political solution, and ultimately an end to the war.

Hodeida Ceasefire

Regarding the Hodeida ceasefire brokered in Stockholm, we strongly condemn the ongoing ceasefire violations, repeated targeting and destruction of wheat silos in the Al Hali District of Hodeida, and the recent targeting and the killing of a member of the landmine removal personnel attempting to create safe passage to the silos. We also condemn the targeting of UN personnel working to monitor the ceasefire agreement.

² https://twitter.com/arwa_rights/status/1052547631178797056

³ https://twitter.com/arwa_rights/status/1078603155766689792

⁴ https://twitter.com/OSE_Yemen/status/1090270141344927744

⁵ https://twitter.com/OSE_Yemen/status/1090657170931281921

Recommendations

Protecting the Yemeni economy is an objective that all parties should strive for given that its decline and potential collapse will affect civilians in all governorates, who must be spared the horrors of war. The payment of public sector salaries and continued payment of pensions to all is critical in alleviating the humanitarian suffering faced by millions and will help jump start the economy. To this end, the Central Bank of Yemen must be administered by a board of capable directors established by consensus and revenues from oil exports must be deposited in a CBY account for distribution. This requires the presence of representatives from all sides, without which no agreement can be had, as witnessed with the consultations in Stockholm. Instead, an agreement was made for a prisoner swap, a ceasefire in Hodeida and a de-escalation in Taiz, none of which have been implemented in full. However, we understand that the Stockholm Agreement was made to happen because of pressure from the international community borne out of an understanding that there can be no military victory in a battle that will further worsen a situation that is being called the worst humanitarian crisis in the World today. It is this type of sustained pressure we urge the United Nations and members states to exert on the parties to the war in order for them to come to an agreement that avoids an entire collapse of the economy and alleviates the suffering among millions of civilians. In addition, we urge the member states of the United Nations to maintain the pressure on the parties to fully implement the Stockholm Agreement and UN Security Council resolution 2451 and 2542 and express our full support for the efforts of the U.N. Special Envoy Martin Griffiths in that regard.
