

A joint letter from the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) actors in Yemen

COVID-19 is rapidly spreading through Yemen.

The existing humanitarian crisis is compounded by the pandemic on an unprecedented scale.

Yemen remains one of the most water scarce countries in the world. Over five years of conflict have damaged water systems, left the health sector on the brink of collapse and led to disease outbreaks, including cholera. We estimate that up to 70 per cent of Yemenis currently lack access to soap for handwashing and personal hygiene. 11.2 million lack access to the basic water supplies they need to survive.

Since the escalation of the conflict in 2015 the joint humanitarian response has rehabilitated thousands of damaged water systems, built mass solar electricity systems to address fuel shortages for water pumps, and provide up to 12.6 million people with clean water every day. Without this humanitarian aid Yemen's water, sanitation and hygiene systems and institutions would collapse.

But, we are facing a funding crisis; only 4 per cent of our requirements have been met. By the end of June, without adequate resources, we will have to cut services that provide nearly 6 million people - almost half of them children - with the clean water they need to survive. By July, if funding shortfalls continue, 6.3 million people will be affected. The rapid response teams that help prevent the spread of disease will be stopped, as will our water services for people displaced by conflict.

We know that water, and hand hygiene, are central to curbing the spread of COVID-19. Right now, communities around the world have been reminded of the importance of handwashing with soap in limiting the COVID-19 virus.

We are facing a gut-wrenching prospect. In the middle of a global pandemic, where we know how important hand hygiene is to protect against disease, we will have to stop a lifeline to those in need.

As the leaders of the WASH response in Yemen, we are sounding the alarm that the public health response to the COVID-19 pandemic, a response that also addresses cholera, malnutrition and the risk associated with polio prevalence, will become impossible as access to clean water and soap is cut off to vulnerable families in need.

We know that COVID-19 has brought global chaos and shifted priorities for many countries grappling with new public health challenges but we need the global community to understand that Yemen is on the brink of catastrophe.

We would like to hold countries to the commitments made at the humanitarian pledging conference earlier this month while appealing for more, urgent support for WASH programmes the majority of which will close in two weeks.

We have a responsibility to empower the most vulnerable to join us in the fight against the global pandemic, but we cannot do this without sustained and urgent support.

Signatories:

Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), Social Fund for Development (SFD), Solidarites International (SI), UNICEF, Oxfam, International Organization for Migration (IOM), Action Against Hunger (ACF), Medair, Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe (DKH), Abana Saada Association For Development Social And Charity (ASADSC), Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), Yemen Family Care Association (YFCA), International Medical Corps (IMC), ACTED, UN-HABITAT, ZOA, Yemen Association for Response and Development (YARD), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), Save the Children, Bena Charity For Human Development (BCFHD), Danish Refugee Council (DRC), Yemeni Development Network (YDN), Generations Without Qat (GWQ), All Girls Foundation for Development (AGF), CARE, Life Makers Meeting Place Organization (LMMPO), Abs Development Organization (ADO), Relief & Development Peer Foundation (RDP), SOUL, Building Foundation for Development (BFD), National Foundation for Development and Humanitarian Response (NFDHR), ACTED, UN-HABITAT, ZOA