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TO PROTECT



20 July 2017

To United Nations Security Council Ambassadors,

Re: Worsening crisis in Yemen and need for United Nations Security Council Action

Following the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) briefing on 12 July, where senior UN officials warned of a dramatic worsening of the crisis in Yemen, we felt compelled to write to you as the NGO Task Force on the Code of Conduct regarding Security Council action against genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes.

The Special Envoy for the Secretary-General has warned an escalation in violence is causing an ‘appalling’ humanitarian situation in Yemen. The Chief of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Stephen O’Brien, reported that 7 million people are at risk of famine, and highlighted that the UNSC has primary responsibility for this conflict and member states must do more. Other officials reported that the cholera outbreak, which has already killed over 1800 people, is unprecedented (affecting 22 out of 23 governorates) and warned that the disease will kill many more due to the collapse of basic health services and the fact that nearly 15 million people – over 55% of the population – do not have access to basic health care or clean water.

The dire humanitarian situation in Yemen is a man-made catastrophe – not a natural disaster. The ongoing armed conflict and the manner in which it is being fought only contributes to and exacerbates this humanitarian crisis. We call on all members of the UNSC to take immediate action to end violations of international humanitarian law by the parties to the conflict, prevent further deterioration of the humanitarian situation and ensure accountability.

113 UN member states – including eight current Security Council members – have endorsed the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency (ACT) group Code of Conduct and in doing so have pledged to support timely and decisive UNSC action to prevent or end the atrocity crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes. Yemen is clearly an atrocity situation, as multiple briefings by senior UN officials have confirmed. Human rights organizations have gathered information showing that all parties to the conflict, including the Saudi Arabia-led coalition and the Houthi armed group and allied forces as well as anti-Houthi forces, have committed serious violations of international humanitarian law, which may amount to war crimes.

It is time for the UNSC to end its paralysis on Yemen and to take concrete steps to

prevent mass atrocity crimes and thereby uphold its collective responsibility to maintain international peace and security as mandated in the UN Charter.

Specifically, we call on UNSC members to:

Ensure that measures related to protection of civilians and addressing the humanitarian crisis in the 15 June Presidential Statement (PRST) become actionable and are implemented in an expeditious manner. The UNSC must demonstrate its commitment to Yemen by asking the Special Envoy to report on progress made on each action point of this long-awaited statement. Thus far, in the five weeks since the statement was adopted, no action has been taken nor has a timeline been set for implementation;

Expand the UN arms embargo established under Resolution 2216 to prohibit the direct or indirect supply of weapons, munitions, military vehicles, spare parts and other military equipment or technology, or logistical and financial support for such supplies or in support of their military operations, to all parties to the conflict in Yemen, including the Saudi Arabia-led coalition, as long as a substantial risk remains that such arms could be used to commit serious violations of international law;

Demand the re-opening of the Sana'a airport for commercial flights so that additional humanitarian supplies can enter the country and people in need of medical treatment can be evacuated. Ensure that access to Yemen is granted for human rights researchers and journalists;

Demand that all parties to the conflict in Yemen fully comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law by ensuring that civilians and civilian objects are not targeted and that no indiscriminate or disproportionate attacks are carried out. All parties must allow and facilitate impartial humanitarian relief and protect vulnerable populations without discrimination on grounds of tribal, religious or political affiliations;

Demand that the parties to the conflict comply with their obligations under international human rights law and release all people who are arbitrarily detained, allow civil society organizations to operate freely, and investigate violations and ensure accountability for those responsible.

Sincerely,

Amnesty International
FIDH - International Federation for Human Rights
Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect
Human Rights Watch
International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect
World Federalist Movement Institute for Global Policy