**The Humanitarian Crisis in Yemen: Addressing Current Political and Humanitarian Challenges**

The human rights situation in Yemen continues to deteriorate amidst continued crackdowns on freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, the arbitrary arrest and detention of human rights activists, the institutionalised inequality of women, and the ongoing conflict in the country. The United States directly assist the Saudi Arabia-UAE led coalition’s campaign that has led to one of the most severe contemporary humanitarian crises of our time. The U.S. has in the past been receptive to reports on rights abuses, ending the sale of cluster munitions to Saudi Arabia following reports of their use against civilian populations. This has not, however, deterred Saudi authorities from accessing these weapons from other sources. Moreover, despite reports demonstrating Saudi Arabia’s use of U.S. munitions, and use of logistical services such as mid-air refuelling, to conduct strikes on civilian populations that might amount to war crimes, the U.S. has continued to invest significantly in building Saudi Arabia’s military capacity.

Saudi Arabia and the states of the Arabian Peninsula are of great strategic importance to the United States, with the latter maintaining military bases in Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Saudi Arabia is the single largest importer of U.S.-manufactured arms, with the UAE and Qatar following closely.

As the conflict in Yemen conflict moves into its fourth year, continued US inaction on ongoing human rights abuses cannot be afforded. The significant reliance of the Gulf States on U.S. economic and military support grants Washington with the leverage necessary to press regional leaders to comply with international humanitarian laws and norms.

Amnesty International USA would like to highlight some of the key concerns that we feel the United States must directly address with regards to the crisis in Yemen:

* The Saudi-UAE led coalition intervention in Yemen
* Houthi Violations
* UAE involvement
* US involvement

1. **The Saudi-UAE led coalition conduct in Yemen**

The civil war in Yemen continues to represent one of the gravest humanitarian crises of the modern era. So far, the conflict has resulted in the deaths of 80,000, placed 11 million at risk of famine[[1]](#footnote-1) – with severe and acute malnutrition threatening almost 400,000 under the age of 5 – three million people displaced without refuge as a result of Saudi Arabia’s border blockade, and 22 million reliant on humanitarian assistance to survive.[[2]](#footnote-2) A land, sea and air blockade enforced by the Saudi-led coalition of eight mostly Sunni Arab states including Bahrain, Kuwait, Jordan and Sudan – backed by the U.S., UK and France – has restricted the provision of vital resources including humanitarian aid, food and fuel to the impoverished nation.[[3]](#footnote-3)

*Saudi Violations*

Saudi Arabia is a key actor in the conflict, primarily responsible for leading the coalition currently engaged in quelling the Houthi rebellion and restoring the former Yemeni government. Amnesty International reports over 36 airstrikes undertaken by the Saudi-led coalition may have violated international humanitarian law and constitute war crimes. These strikes claimed over 500 civilian lives including 157 children. The attacks appeared to have deliberately targeted civilians and civilian objects such as hospitals, schools, markets and mosques – which would amount to war crimes.

Throughout 2017, the Saudi-led coalition regularly employed cluster munitions, lethal explosive weapons banned under international law. Investigations by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch found unexploded BLU-108 skeets and other remnants of U.S.-origin smart cluster munitions in Yemen. After reports of civilian casualties resulting from use of cluster munitions by the Saudi coalition, the U.S. suspended further transfers to Saudi Arabia in 2016 and the manufacturer Textron ceased.[[4]](#footnote-4) Saudi Arabia was, however, reported to have employed cluster munitions throughout 2017, manufactured by Brazil.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Amnesty International has called on Saudi Arabia and its coalition to destroy its cluster bomb stockpiles and accede to the International Convention on Cluster Munitions but has yet to do so.

*Houthi Violations*

Houthi forces have been involved in the arrest of political opponents, human rights defenders, journalists and academics arbitrarily seizing critics at gunpoint and subjecting some to enforced disappearances in an attempt to quash dissent. A report commissioned by UNSC Resolution 2342 (2017) produced by the Panel of Experts on Yemen found that economic challenges facing Houthi-controlled territories have “resulted in children being compelled to search for economic alternatives on behalf of their families” – including recruitment to armed conflict.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Amnesty International has investigated 30 ground attacks conducted by both pro and anti-Houthi forces which did not attempt to reduce civilian casualties, killing at least 68 – most of whom were women and children. These involved the use of imprecise weapons such as artillery and mortar fire, Grad rockets in heavily populated areas and operated amidst civilian infrastructure including residential areas, schools and hospitals. The UNSC cited above found Houthi-Saleh forces responsible for several cases involving the indiscriminate use of ordnance against civilian populated areas.

*UAE Involvement*

The UAE is a leading member of the Saudi-led coalition operating in Yemen. Human Rights Watch has documented 87 apparently unlawful coalition attacks, likely constituting war crimes, that have killed nearly 1,000 civilians since March 2015.[[7]](#footnote-7) The UAE had deployed 30 aircraft to take part in coalition operations. The UNSC Yemen report concluded that “the government of Yemen, the United Arab Emirates and Houthi-Saleh forces have all engaged in arbitrary arrests and detentions, carried out enforced disappearances and committed torture.”

The report found 12 instances of individuals deprived of liberty held in detention facilities operated by the UAE that involved beatings, electrocution, “constrained suspension and imprisonment in a metal cell”, denial of medical treatment, and enforced disappearances. The UAE is known to run at least two informal detention facilities in Yemen, and authorities have ordered the continued detention of people despite release orders. Amnesty International documented 49 cases (including four children) who were arbitrarily detained or forcibly disappeared in the provinces of Aden and Hadramout in 2016, primarily undertaken by UAE-backed security forces.

*U.S. Involvement*

The United States, along with the UK and France, have assisted the Saudi-led coalition throughout the Yemen conflict through the provision of logistical support, the sale of weapons and aircraft, and mid-air refuelling support, amongst others. Saudi Arabia is the single largest market for U.S. arms sales. In 2017, a Saudi-U.S. arms deal resulted in an immediate arms purchase of $110 and $350 billion over 10 years.[[8]](#footnote-8) The sale occurred in the backdrop of Saudi Arabia’s deepening involvement in the Yemen conflict, and ongoing crackdowns on free expression and assembly in the country – contributing to the environment of impunity in which the Kingdom operates.

This has included the sale of 30 F-15 fourth-generation fighter jets, 84 combat helicopters, 110 cruise missiles, and nearly 20,000 guided bombs.[[9]](#footnote-9) Amnesty International has confirmed that US-made munitions by Saudi airstrikes in which civilians have been killed, including children, and that mid-air refuelling support provided by the U.S. Saudi-UAE coalition targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure and irrigation wells.[[10]](#footnote-10)

In December 2018, progress was made towards ending US complicity in war crimes committed by the Saudi-led coalition when the Senate voted to end military assistance to Saudi Arabia in the wake of the assassination of dissident journalist Jamal Khashoggi and in response to mounting allegations of war crimes.[[11]](#footnote-11)

**Recommendations**

Amnesty International USA recommends that The United States take the following actions in order to put an end to the disastrous Saudi-UAE led intervention in Yemen and begin improving human rights conditions across the country:

* Pass the Yemen Refuelling Prohibition Act (HR910) which would prohibit U.S. refuelling of Saudi Coalition Aircraft engaged in the civil war in Yemen.
* Introduce a house companion bill to Menendez-Young
* Call on the release of human rights defenders and prisoners of conscience currently detained in Yemen.
* Suspend weapons sales to Saudi Arabia.
* Hold to account all actors in Yemen – including both the pro and anti-Houthi forces – responsible for violation of international law or guilty of war crimes and civilian casualties.
* Use bilateral meetings with regional heads of states, as well as international partners and organisations, to hold regimes to account on improving conditions for women, migrant workers, ethnic and religious minorities in the region.

1. UNICEF Yemen https://www.unicef.org/appeals/yemen.html [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Remarks by the Secretary-General of the United Nations to the Pledging Conference on Yemen, 3 April 2018 https://www.unog.ch/unog/website/news\_media.nsf/(httpNewsByYear\_en)/27F6CCAD7178F3E9C1258264003311FA?OpenDocument [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. New York Times (2018), “The Tragedy of Saudi Arabia’s War”, 29 October 2018 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Arms Control Association (2016), “Textron to Halt Cluster Bomb Production” https://www.armscontrol.org/Textron-to-Halt-Cluster-Bomb-Production [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Amnesty International (2017), Yemen: Saudi Arabia-led Coalition uses banned cluster munitions on residential areas”, 9 March 2017 https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/03/yemen-saudi-arabia-led-coalition-uses-banned-brazilian-cluster-munitions-on-residential-areas/ [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Final report of the Panel of Experts on Yemen mandated by Security Council Resolution 234 (2017) https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/N1800513.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Human Rights Watch (2018), “Hiding Behind the Coalition”, 24 August 2018 https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/08/24/hiding-behind-coalition/failure-credibly-investigate-and-provide-redress-unlawful# [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. CNBC, “US-Saudi Arabia Seal Weapons Deal”, 20 May 2017 https://www.cnbc.com/2017/05/20/us-saudi-arabia-seal-weapons-deal-worth-nearly-110-billion-as-trump-begins-visit.html [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute’s Arms Transfer Database [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Human Rights Watch (2016), “Yemen: Embargo Arms to Saudi Arabia”, 21 March 2016 https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/03/21/yemen-embargo-arms-saudi-arabia [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. New York Times (2018) “Senate Votes to End Aid for Yemen Fight Over Khashoggi Killing and Saudis’ War Aims”, 13 December 2018

    https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/13/us/politics/yemen-saudi-war-pompeo-mattis.html [↑](#footnote-ref-11)