

## **SIGN-ON LETTER: Ask President Biden to Seek End of Saudi Blockade on Yemen**

Sending Office: Honorable Debbie Dingell  
Sent By: Timothy.Huebner@mail.house.gov

### **DEADLINE MARCH 29 COB**

**ENDORSED BY:** Friends Committee on National Legislation, Just Foreign Policy, Peace Action, Yemen Relief and Reconstruction Foundation, Freedom Forward, Democracy for the Arab World Now, Yemeni Alliance Committee

Dear Colleague,

According to the UN, 400,000 children under the age of 5 in Yemen could die of hunger this year without urgent action. In light of a March 10th news report, “CNN investigation finds the U.S.-backed Saudi blockade is leading to deadly fuel & food shortages in Yemen, where hospitals are full of starving children,” we are urging the Biden Administration to use the full weight of U.S. diplomatic resources and leverage with the Saudi regime to demand an immediate and unconditional end to its blockade on Yemen, which threatens the lives of 16 million malnourished Yemenis living on the brink of famine.

The Nobel Peace Prize-winning World Food Programme Executive Director recently remarked that as a result of the Saudi blockade on fuel shipments into Yemen, “most hospitals only have electricity in their intensive care units because fuel reserves are so low.” He pleaded: “It is hell on earth in many places in Yemen right now,” and concluded, “That blockade must be lifted, as a humanitarian act. Otherwise, millions more will spiral into crisis.”

Please join us in calling on the Biden Administration to publicly increase pressure on Saudi Arabia to lift this blockade immediately, unilaterally, and comprehensively, as well as ensuring that the United States is providing no political, diplomatic, operational or military support of any kind to the Saudi-led war and blockade, so that food, fuel and medicine can reach millions of people in desperate need.

For further questions, contact [Timothy.Huebner@mail.house.gov](mailto:Timothy.Huebner@mail.house.gov) in Rep. Dingell’s office, [Leslie.Zelenko@mail.house.gov](mailto:Leslie.Zelenko@mail.house.gov) in Rep. Pocan’s office or [Kate.Gould@mail.house.gov](mailto:Kate.Gould@mail.house.gov) in Rep. Khanna’s office.

Sincerely,

Debbie Dingell

Mark Pocan

Ro Khanna

Member of Congress  
Member of Congress

Member of Congress

March xx, 2021

Dear Mr. President:

We greatly appreciate your first steps toward ending U.S. support for the war in Yemen, including announcing an end to U.S. military participation in offensive Saudi actions; a review of weapons sales to Saudi Arabia for use in its six-year air war in Yemen; and a revocation of President Trump's terrorism designation against the Houthis, with the express purpose of averting a hunger crisis.

However, we remain alarmed by the continuation of Saudi Arabia's unconscionable blockade of Yemen. Particularly in light of a CNN investigation finding that "the U.S.-backed Saudi blockade is leading to deadly fuel & food shortages in Yemen, where hospitals are full of starving children," we urge you to use all available U.S. leverage with the Saudi regime to demand an immediate and unconditional end to its blockade, which threatens 16 million malnourished Yemenis living on the brink of famine.<sup>[1]</sup>

We are deeply concerned by CNN's reports that the major port of Hodeidah "is now a ghost town," and that "hundreds of food aid trucks sit parked in a line stretching for miles," without fuel, as their cargo spoils. "Saudi warships have not allowed any oil tankers to berth at Hodeidah since the start of the year," CNN reporter Nima Elbagir observed, citing the World Food Programme, which documented that more than a dozen ships carrying 350,000 metric tons of commercial fuel have been prevented from entering Yemen for over two months.<sup>[2]</sup> On March 12th, the UN Secretary General's office confirmed that "no commercial fuel imports were allowed through Hodeidah Port" last month, "the first time since the escalation of the conflict in 2015 that we have seen the level drop to zero."<sup>[3]</sup>

According to the UN, 400,000 children under the age of 5 could die from hunger this year without urgent action.<sup>[4]</sup> The Saudi blockade has long been a leading driver of Yemen's humanitarian catastrophe, triggering recent fuel shortages, inflation and greatly reducing access to food, water, electricity, and transportation.<sup>[5]</sup> The blockade also threatens to imminently close down hospitals reliant on power generators to care for famine victims, making emergency travel to hospitals prohibitively expensive, condemning untold numbers of children to die at home.

On March 11th, addressing the UN Security Council, World

Food Programme Executive Director David Beasley warned, “most hospitals only have electricity in their intensive care units because fuel reserves are so low.” He pleaded: “It is hell on earth in many places in Yemen right now,” and concluded, “That blockade must be lifted, as a humanitarian act. Otherwise, millions more will spiral into crisis.”<sup>[6]</sup>

Former CIA analyst and Middle East policy expert Bruce Riedel describes the ongoing blockade as “an offensive military operation that kills civilians.”<sup>[7]</sup> Given its continued imposition, we are concerned by the administration’s portrayal of Saudi Arabia as “committed and eager to find a solution to the conflict.”<sup>[8]</sup> While U.S. special envoy for Yemen Tim Lenderking has argued that Saudi Arabia is “ready to sit down to negotiate an end to the conflict”<sup>[9]</sup> with the Houthis, “during which access to ports and other issues could be addressed and resolved,”<sup>[10]</sup> every day that we wait for these issues to be resolved in negotiations is another day that pushes more children to the brink of death. Tens of thousands more people may die before negotiations over the blockade even begin.

We strongly support a comprehensive political settlement that addresses all aspects of the conflict, including a nationwide ceasefire, currency stabilization, and payment of government salaries. At the same time, a U.S demand to end the blockade must occur independently of negotiations, particularly given that recent Saudi bombings of Sana’a and the Houthis’ offensive on Marib have cast the fate of those talks into doubt. Riedel warns that “linking lifting the blockade to a ceasefire is a recipe for prolonging the suffering of the Yemeni people. The two issues need to be decoupled.”<sup>[11]</sup>

We ask you to take additional steps to publicly pressure Saudi Arabia to lift this blockade immediately, unilaterally, and comprehensively. This must include guaranteeing that humanitarian and commercial imports can freely enter Yemen; entrusting security oversight to the UN Verification and Inspection Mechanism for Yemen (UNVIM); fully permitting flights in and out of Sana’a airport; and ensuring that crossings for commercial and civilian traffic are permanently opened.

Thank you again for your previous actions to end U.S. complicity in the war in Yemen and resolve the country’s humanitarian crisis. We now ask you to use the full weight of U.S. influence and all tools at your disposal to end the blockade so that food, fuel and medicine, and other essential goods can reach millions of people in desperate need.

We respectfully ask that you give our requests your full and fair consideration, consistent with applicable statutes and regulations. Thank you for your consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,

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<sup>[1]</sup> <https://unsdg.un.org/latest/stories/yemen-cant-wait-more-16-million-people-will-go-hungry-year>

<sup>[2]</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2021/03/10/middleeast/yemen-famine-saudi-fuel-intl/index.html>

<sup>[3]</sup> <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/noon-briefing-highlight?date%5Bvalue%5D%5Bdate%5D=12%20March%202021>

<sup>[4]</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/yemen-security-malnutrition-int/at-least-400000-yemeni-children-under-5-could-die-of-starvation-this-year-un-agencies-idUSKBN2AC18V>

<sup>[5]</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/08/world/middleeast/yemen-saudi-blockade.html>

<sup>[6]</sup> <https://www.wfp.org/news/yemen-heading-toward-biggest-famine-modern-history-wfp-chief-warns-un-security-council>

<sup>[7]</sup> <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2021/03/01/getting-yemens-houthis-to-yes-on-a-ceasefire/>

<sup>[8]</sup> <https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-at-the-2021-high-level-pledging-event-for-the-humanitarian-crisis-in-yemen/>

<sup>[9]</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2021/03/10/middleeast/yemen-famine-saudi-fuel-intl/index.html>

<sup>[10]</sup> Ibid.

<sup>[11]</sup> <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2021/03/01/getting-yemens-houthis-to-yes-on-a-ceasefire/>