"Every Day Things are Still Getting Worse"

Attacks on Health Care and Denial of Humanitarian Access in Yemen in 2017

In April 2017, Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict ('Watchlist') and Save the Children launched *"Every Day Things are Getting Worse" The Impact on Children of Attacks on Health Care in Yemen.* The report highlights how the targeting of medical facilities and personnel and denial of humanitarian access throughout Yemen in 2015 and 2016 had devastating consequences for children's health. Ahead of the three-year anniversary of the outbreak of war in Yemen on March 25, 2018, Watchlist researched attacks on medical facilities and personnel and denials of humanitarian access carried out between January and December 2017.[1]

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The number of incidents Watchlist documented in 2017 is much smaller than in 2015 and 2016. This is not an indicator of fewer attacks and denials, but rather the narrowing space for humanitarian and human rights organizations throughout the country.[2] Publicly available information (e.g., United Nations reports) that Watchlist has utilized as part of its research on attacks and denials in Yemen was very limited in 2017 compared to the preceding two years. Yet, the number of airstrikes increased significantly; for example, in just the first six months of 2017, there were more airstrikes than in all of 2016.[3] Strikes routinely hit civilian infrastructure, causing serious damage or destruction and injuring or killing civilians.

In November, the Saudi Arabia-led coalition implemented a full blockade of all humanitarian and commercial supplies by land, sea, or air, following months of severe import restrictions that had pushed the country to the brink of famine. The coalition formally lifted the blockade by December, though continued to impose a range of bureaucratic impediments (e.g. delaying or denying the issuance of visas to humanitarian workers) that substantially limited the import of food, fuel, medicine, and humanitarian aid. By the end of the year, UN leaders, who had already designated Yemen as the world's worst humanitarian crisis, declared that the blockade imposed by the Saudi Arabia-led coalition made "an already catastrophic situation far worse."[4]

Watchlist found that widespread disruptions in health care access from ongoing conflict, attacks on medical facilities and personnel, and systematic denial of access to lifesaving humanitarian aid have had devastating impacts on children's health. Tens of thousands of children continued to suffer or die from diseases that are preventable or easily treatable. In 2017, a cholera epidemic wracked the country; many of the cases were children.[5] Just as the cholera crisis began to ebb, diphtheria was on the rise; one million children were at risk of contracting the disease.[6] The Saudi Arabia-led blockade further prevented the import of food and other commercial goods, contributing to widespread food insecurity; an estimated 1.8 million children suffered from malnutrition at the end of 2017.[7] At the same time, more than 50 percent of all health facilities were either non-functional or only partially functional, in part due to attacks and the unavailability of medicine and supplies.[8]

Key Recommendations:

In light of the continued targeting of medical facilities and personnel and denial of humanitarian access, Watchlist calls on:

- All parties to the conflict to facilitate safe, rapid, and unhindered access for humanitarian supplies and personnel to all affected governorates, and to ensure the full and sustained opening for humanitarian and commercial supplies of all Yemen's ports, including Hodeida and Saleef ports, and airports, including Sanaa airport.

- The Saudi Arabia-led coalition to immediately re-open Sanaa airport for medical evacuation, particularly for children.

- The Secretary-General to continue listing the Saudi Arabia-led coalition for attacks on hospitals in his 2018 annual report on children and armed conflict, in accordance with Security Council Resolution 1998.

- The Saudi Arabia-led coalition to enter into an action plan with the UN to stop and prevent attacks on medical facilities and personnel and share verifiable information on their implementation.

Attacks on Medical Facilities and Personnel

APRIL - JUNE

The UN verified seven attacks on hospitals (and schools) by parties to the conflict.[9]

OCTOBER

5th An airstrike hit Ibn Sinaa Clinic in Hodeidah governorate.[10]

17th Houthis reportedly shelled Al Thawra Hospital in Taiz governorate, damaging the surgical and burn wards and health offices, and injuring at least one staff member.[11]

DECEMBER

4th Médecins Sans Frontières-supported Al Gamhouri Hospital in Hajjah governorate was damaged by an airstrike reportedly carried out by the Saudi Arabia-led coalition. The airstrike damaged the emergency room, operating theater, and intensive care unit; 12 emergency room patients were evacuated because of the airstrike.[12]

12th Unknown armed assailants forcibly entered Al Thawra Hospital in Taiz governorate. At least three medical staff were killed and three injured during the attack. The assailants also reportedly forced patients out of the hospital. Following the attack, Al Thawra temporarily closed.[13]

Examples of Denials of Humanitarian Access

JULY - SEPTEMBER

The UN verified 65 incidents of denial of humanitarian access by parties to the conflict, predominately in Taiz and Saada governorates. Incidents include bureaucratic impediments (42), attacks against humanitarian personnel, assets, and facilities (12), interference with the implementation of humanitarian assistance (11), restrictions of movement of organizations, personnel, or goods into Yemen (1), and restrictions on or obstruction of conflict-affected people's access to services or assistance (1).[14]

JULY

15th Unknown armed assailants looted 850 humanitarian kits in Taiz governorate. During the same incident, two trucks carrying humanitarian supplies were seized by local Houthi authorities.[15]

AUGUST

Unidentified armed assailants looted 79 bags of ground wheat and 80 tins of cooking oil and other food supplies from two different UN food distribution points. Some of the looted items were returned on August 8, 2017, following negotiations with local authorities.[16]

SEPTEMBER

The Saudi Arabia-led coalition carried out airstrikes in Amran and Saada governorates that resulted in the destruction of two water reservoirs.[17]

OCTOBER

10th Saudi Arabia-led coalition warships prevented the entry via Hodeidah port of essential humanitarian supplies.[18]

NOVEMBER

6th - 26th
The Saudi Arabia-led coalition closed all Yemeni border crossings, seaports, and airports to humanitarian and commercial supplies, effectively implementing a blockade by land, sea, and air. During the 20 day blockade, the coalition stopped 32 scheduled humanitarian flights from flying to Yemen and multiple ships carrying thousands of tons of humanitarian aid from docking in port cities.[19]

Endnotes

1 Incidents included on this list, unless otherwise cited, were obtained from UN reports, media, and from information that is not publicly available.

2 UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), "2018 Humanitarian Response Plan: Yemen," January 2018," https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/20180120_HRP_YEMEN_Final.pdf (accessed March 14, 2018), p. 25.

3 Protection Cluster Yemen, "Protection Cluster Update: Yemen," August 2017, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/protection_cluster_yemen_situation_update_august_2017.pdf (accessed March 21, 2018), p. 1.

4 "UN Leaders Appeal for Immediate Lifting of Humanitarian Blockade in Yemen – Lives of Millions are at Risk," World Health Organization (WHO), World Food Programme (WFP), and UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) press statement, November 16, 2017, https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/un-leaders-appeal-immediate-lifting-humanitarian-blockade-yemen-lives-millions-are-risk (accessed March 14, 2018).

5 Amanda Erickson, "1 Million People Have Contracted Cholera in Yemen. You Should Be Outraged," *The Washington Post*, December 22, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/12/21/one-million-people-have-caught-cholera-in-yemen-you-should-be-outraged/?utm_term=.023e88933c13 (accessed March 14, 2018).

6 "UN Leaders Appeal for Immediate Lifting of Humanitarian Blockade in Yemen – Lives of Millions are at Risk," WHO, WFP, UNICEF press statement.

7 WHO, "WHO Steps Up Efforts to Fight Severe Acute Malnutrition Cases in Yemen," December 7, 2017, http://www.emro.who.int/yem/yemen-news/who-ramps-up-efforts-to-fight-severe-acute-malnutrition-cases-in-yemen.html (accessed March 14, 2018).

8 OCHA, "2018 Humanitarian Response Plan: Yemen," p. 33.

9 Information not publicly available.

10 Facebook, "Abdullah Al-Musallab," October 6, 2017, https://www.facebook.com/amaq2012/posts/1439183122864594 (accessed March 14, 2018).

11 "Shelling of the Militia Targeted the Revolution Hospital in Taiz and Wounded Two People," *Taiz News*, October 17, 2017, http://m.akhbartaiz.com/news2756.html (accessed March 14, 2018).

12 Médecins Sans Frontières, "Yemen: Intense Fighting and Blockade Further Reduces Access to Healthcare," December 6, 2017, https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/yemen-intense-fighting-and-blockade-further-reduces-access-healthcare (accessed February 20, 2018).

13 "Yemen: Largest Government Hospital in Taiz Stops Work After an Armed Attack," *Arabic 21*, December 13, 2017, http://bit.ly/2kgDGDr (accessed March 14, 2018).

14 Information not publicly available

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 Insecurity Insight, "The Aid in Danger Monthly News Brief," October 2017, http://www.insecurityinsight.org/aidindanger/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/The-Aid-in-Danger-Monthly-News-Brief-October-2017.pdf (accessed on February 20, 2018).

19 Insecurity Insight, "The Aid in Danger Monthly News Brief," November 2017, http://www.insecurityinsight.org/aidindanger/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/The-Aid-in-Danger-Monthly-News-Brief-November-2017.pdf (accessed February 20, 2018).

Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict
122 East 42nd Street, Suite 1620, New York, NY 10168-1289
Telephone: 212.972.0695 • Fax: 212.972.0701

About Watchlist

Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict strives to end violations against children in armed conflicts and to guarantee their rights. As a global network, Watchlist builds partnerships among local, national, and international nongovernmental organizations, enhancing mutual capacities and strengths. Working together, we strategically collect and disseminate information on violations against children in conflicts in order to influence key decision-makers to create and implement programs and policies that effectively protect children.

Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict is a project of Tides Center, a non-profit public charity.

watchlist@watchlist.org
www.watchlist.org