

Analysis and Situation Report on Children and Orphans in Yemen

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Abstract:

Situation report on children and women as victims of bombing attacks within armed conflict and war in Yemen is analyzed.

Introduction

A catastrophic war is destruing Yemen for almost five years. Millions of people are impoverished, Infrastructure is badly damaged and hundreds of thousands infected with cholera. More than 24 million people (80% of the population) need humanitarian aid. Children are dying on a daily basis from bombing or starvation. The UN reports that more than two million children are malnourished, with one in two now suffering from stunted growth because of food shortages. Education has been shattered, leaving 3.4 million out of school. The result is a child protection crisis with an estimated 7.4 million children in need of urgent help. According to figures released at the end of 2019 by UNICEF, on average one child dies every 10 minutes owing to preventable diseases such as malnutrition, diarrhea and respiratory infections.(1-6) More than 2.2 million children are in need of urgent care, and at least 462,000 suffer from severe acute malnutrition - a drastic increase of about 200% since before the war. (7-10) An Arab coalition led by Saudi Arabia launched a military campaign in March 2015. Since then, hundreds of thousands of Yemenis have been killed by airstrikes and starvations and millions are displaced, the UN says.

Situation Report 2019

The coalition (UAR,SA) has been responsible for several attacks on medical centers, including some run by the international aid group *Doctors Without Borders* (MSF), schools, factories and homes which have killed hundreds of thousands of civilians. The Houthis have besieged Yemen's capital city Sanaa and second largest city, Taiz, and have been also blamed for shortages of food, water and medicines. They have also been accused of recruiting hundreds of child soldiers. Of all the different groups of people in Yemen, it is children who are by far the worst affected by this war. In the chaos and cruelty of Yemen's war, boys are being recruited to fight in it. The Houthi rebels have child soldiers as young as 11 in their ranks, according to the United Nations. Airstrikes by the Saudi-led coalition have hit children, too, like the 40 killed in August 2019 when a coalition bomb was dropped on a bus full of little boys. And then there is the menace of starvation. Millions of Yemenis are on the brink of famine, as the coun-

try's fragile economy has collapsed in this war. Over 200,000 children have already died of malnutrition and preventable diseases, according to the charity *Save the Children*. Nearly 14 million people are at risk of famine. Parents are witnessing their children waste away, while vehicles transporting food are targets of attack. Five million children are out of school and are at risk of exploitation and abuse. The children of Yemen have been robbed of their basic rights to life, health and education. The war in Yemen has hit hardest those who are least responsible – children. Facing violence and with many forced to flee their homes, Yemen's children are struggling in the face of a national economic crisis, widespread malnutrition and the grave threat of cholera and other life-threatening diseases. Recently 12.3 million children are in need of humanitarian assistance.

According to the humanitarian organization *War Child*, the situation of orphaned children is even worse. The *Dar Ri'ayat al-Aytam Orphanage* in Sanaa has been struggling with a lack of funds since Houthi rebels captured the capital in autumn 2014, and the situation has worsened since then. *Dar Ri'ayat al-Aytam* is the oldest orphanage in Yemen. It opened its doors to boys in 1925, and moved from Sanaa's ancient Old City to this spot in the 70s. Now around 400 boys call it home, some sent here by extended family, others abandoned by their destitute parents or taken in from the streets.

Abdullah al-Hindi, the head of the orphanage, said that almost five years of war had decimated the economy, and there have been severe cuts to public spending. Fadel al-Qahtani, a child living at the orphanage, spoke of dire conditions, adding that on most nights the 400-plus children



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housed there would go hungry. „We used to have complete meals, including stew, fruit and meat - there were even extras to go around. But now, we don't get anything other than rice,“ he said. After almost five years of war, orphans in the Yemeni capital Sanaa have only one dream - to survive. The *al-Shawkani Foundation for Orphan Care* is located around 100 meters from the al-Nahdain mountain, widely believed to be an arms depot that has been repeatedly bombarded by Saudi-led coalition's fighter jets. In March 2015 after the war erupted, bombardment of the explosive-laden peak mountain sent huge mushroom clouds (like nuclear explosion) erupting into Sanaa's skies and shook the whole city. As the war rages on, the orphans suffer through a constant state of fear and trauma. “We were scared, and every time we hear the plane's noise, they (orphanage staff) would rush us quickly to the basement fearing for our safety,” said Mousa Saleh Munassar, 14 years.” Nine-year-old Abdulaziz Badr al-Faisari of the orphanage said he and his fellow orphans were terrified when bombs shook the whole building, but appeared resigned to his fate. “We have had nowhere to flee.” As the civil war in Yemen enters its sixth year, many children who have lost or been abandoned by parents have suffered the most, both physically and emotionally. Little Mohsin Douma's father was killed in Yemen's current, brutal civil war. He is 12 years old and arrived with two older brothers to the orphanage.

Jane Ferguson, an award-winning international journalist and Special Correspondent for *PBS NewsHour* in Yemen brings information about the recent daily situation in the Sanaa orphanage. As she explains in the Arab world children are often considered orphans when their father dies. In Yemen, impoverished by the war, single mothers cannot cope financially. Some are forced to remarry and start new families. Ahmed, child from orphanage is 11 years old and lost his father also fighting in this war. When we asked what happened to his father, he simply says the Arabic word for airplane. Ahmed hasn't been spared the experience of war. He, like so many of the children here, has seen too much already. “Fighter jets used to bomb, and farms were exploding. And next to our house, there was bombing. Things were exploding and burning.” The other boys here tell me of the times the airstrikes

hit near the orphanage, and they were terrified. „When the airstrikes come, we pray and ask God to save us,“ one of them reports. At times, the war outside the orphanage walls has come dangerously close.

Conclusion

Most vulnerable population attacked by bombing during tribal armed conflict and war related air strikes are children and mothers. Malnutrition and outbreaks of cholera and diphtheria are the most acute catastrophic results of this tragedy of people in Yemen.

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