



Committee on International Justice and Peace

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WEBSITE: WWW.USCCB.ORG/JPHD • FAX 202-541-3339

May 19, 2017

The Honorable Bob Corker, Chair
Committee on Foreign Relations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Ben Cardin, Ranking Member
Committee on Foreign Relations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Corker and Cardin,

As Chairman of the Committee on International Justice and Peace of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishop, I urge Congress to support diplomatic and humanitarian efforts to alleviate a major famine in Yemen. In March 2017, a USAID official testified before the Senate that 17 million Yemenis (60 percent of the population) are suffering from food insecurity. The magnitude of the famine is staggering. According to a January 2017 report to the UN Security Council, Yemeni children are at greatest risk, with two million acutely malnourished and half a million starving.

This dire situation and famine in Yemen stem from a civil war fueled by regional powers and internal groups, including Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). A coalition of Sunni countries led by Saudi Arabia, where Yemeni President Hadi resides in exile, is struggling against the Houthis, a Shia group that protested against President Hadi and is now allied with former Yemeni President Saleh. The United States has been providing technical and logistical support for the Saudi coalition's air attacks; the Houthis receive some support from Iran. AQAP has expanded its operations in the midst of the resulting chaos and breakdown in the rule of law. In the past two years, 10,000 Yemeni civilians have been killed and over 3 million displaced. Yemen also hosts some 278,000 refugees and asylum seekers from other countries.

Both U.S.-supported Saudi coalition forces and Houthi-Saleh forces have destroyed or damaged the infrastructure needed for transporting life-saving aid and food to civilians. The port of Hodeidah, currently controlled by Houthi-Saleh forces, has been a major conduit for goods entering Yemen, a country that is 80-90 percent dependent on food imports. The Saudi coalition has proposed attacking Hodeidah. I would strongly advise the United States to refrain from providing any support for this operation. An attack on Hodeidah would gravely affect access for desperately needed food, medicine, and other supplies to civilians.

Instead, I would urge Congress to support U.S. leadership for promotion of the safe passage of food and essential goods so as to alleviate famine and further loss of life by starvation. Congress should also press the Administration to intensify efforts to bring the warring factions to the negotiating table to resolve this conflict and protect civilians, and to provide robust humanitarian aid in Yemen.

Last year in response to violence in Yemen, Pope Francis prayed that "this pointless slaughter will awaken consciences, lead to a change of heart, and inspire all parties to lay down their arms and take up the path of dialogue." I echo his call. Rather than exacerbating the conflict through U.S. military intervention and involvement, the United States should work with regional and international partners to bring a peaceful end to Yemen's civil war and to provide humanitarian relief to counter the desperation that feeds extremism.

Sincerely yours,

Most Reverend Oscar Cantú
Bishop of Las Cruces
Chair, Committee on International Justice and Peace



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May 19, 2017

The Honorable Ed Royce, Chair
Committee on Foreign Affairs
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Eliot Engel, Ranking Member
Committee on Foreign Affairs
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Royce and Engel,

As Chairman of the Committee on International Justice and Peace of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishop, I urge Congress to support diplomatic and humanitarian efforts to alleviate a major famine in Yemen. In March 2017, a USAID official testified before the Senate that 17 million Yemenis (60 percent of the population) are suffering from food insecurity. The magnitude of the famine is staggering. According to a January 2017 report to the UN Security Council, Yemeni children are at greatest risk, with two million acutely malnourished and half a million starving.

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