Dear Acting Administrator Barsa and Secretary Pompeo,

We write to urge you to assist the people of Yemen in their time of need by restoring $73 million in suspended U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) funding to Houthi-controlled areas in Yemen and working with the international community and warring parties to disburse critical medical supplies needed to prevent the spread of COVID-19 within Yemen. As you are aware, the Yemeni people are currently suffering from the world’s largest and most acute humanitarian crisis. The war has left millions without basic services and starving, accelerated internal displacement, and abetted the spread of disease, including cholera, dengue fever, and COVID-19. To address this worsening crisis, the United States must resume aid to Yemen and allocate new assistance targeted at countering malnutrition and disease spread.

While USAID faces challenges disbursing aid in Houthi-controlled areas, any suspension risks the lives of countless Yemenis, while letting Houthi leaders off the hook for their own failures. Yemenis faced the world’s worst humanitarian crisis before the spread of COVID-19. Core humanitarian principles demand that we continue helping people in need and work through access issues, as USAID does across the world. Further, cutting humanitarian assistance will prolong the conflict in Yemen by allowing Houthi leadership to deflect blame for their failure onto the United States and lessening U.S. credibility as a voice for peace in Yemen. To be clear, we do not believe the Houthis should be given a pass for impeding the delivery of humanitarian assistance, failing those they rule, and attacking Saudi Arabia, but we also do not believe that the Yemeni people should be punished for these failures.

---

U.S. assistance will help address urgent healthcare capacity shortfalls in Yemen resulting from years of conflict. Airstrikes led by the Saudi-Emirati coalition against the Houthis have decimated dozens of hospitals and other health care infrastructure since the conflict began in 2015, halving the number of facilities in the country.[3] Internal displacement caused by the conflict, the destruction of infrastructure alongside the Saudi *de facto* air, land, and sea blockades of Yemen, combine to make Yemen the second hungriest country in the world.[4] These conditions facilitate the unchecked spread of COVID-19, cholera, and other diseases.

COVID-19 has devastated Yemen, killing roughly 27% of those who contract it, the worst COVID mortality rate in the world. Many of those who have died are healthcare workers, underscoring the desperate need for Yemenis to be able to access medical supplies and protective equipment.[5] Further, reports indicate that if it spreads unabated, COVID-19 could take enough lives to “exceed the combined toll of war, disease, and hunger over the last five years,” equating to roughly 230,000 deaths.[6] Current estimates indicate that roughly 80% of Yemen’s population is in need of some form of humanitarian assistance.

We urge the Administration to follow the example of humanitarian agencies, such as the World Food Program, which have been able to utilize biometric accountability measures to prevent fraud and diversion of humanitarian assistance and drawbacks from Houthi efforts to tax aid.[7] Though we are encouraged by the State Department’s grant of $225 million in emergency food aid for Yemen through the United Nations World Food Program, we are concerned that this assistance may not reach 70% of the population in Yemen and will not compensate for the medical assistance provided by previously suspended USAID funding, or provide badly-needed personal protective equipment (PPE) and medical supplies such as swabs, reagents, hospital and ICU beds, ventilators, and tests.[8]

We join with numerous U.S. civil society organizations that have called for restoring aid to Yemen, with the added focus of combatting COVID-19.

Sincerely,

---

Patty Murray
United States Senator

Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator

/s/ Cory A. Booker
Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

Debbie Stabenow
United States Senator

Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator