

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 26, 2020

The Honorable Mike Pompeo
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable Mark Green
Administrator
U.S. Agency for International Development
Ronald Reagan Building
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20523

Dear Secretary Pompeo and Administrator Green:

We write with deep concern about the catastrophic humanitarian crisis in Yemen, especially as the world faces a global pandemic. As the war in Yemen enters its sixth year, 10 million Yemenis remain on the brink of famine and 80% of the population remains in urgent need of aid, according to the United Nations. Worse yet, the U.N. has stated at least 2.2 million children under the age of five suffer from severe malnutrition and risk perishing if aid is cut off. The U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has been unequivocal in calling the situation in Yemen “the world’s worst humanitarian crisis.”

We recognize and appreciate the significant role U.S. assistance has played in mitigating this tragedy, including the \$700 million provided to Yemen last year and efforts to engage with other donors in multilateral fora such as the Brussels Conference in February 2020. Yet recent reporting indicates the administration is planning to reduce or even cease significant streams of humanitarian assistance to areas of Yemen most in need of aid.

We acknowledge that Yemen presents a difficult and operationally complex environment for the efficient, needs-based delivery of assistance in both the north and south, but we must do all we can to ensure that U.S. humanitarian assistance is delivered in accordance with humanitarian principles. For example, the Houthi-led government in Sana’a has arbitrarily denied permission for humanitarian programming in the North, imposing a number of unacceptable conditions that have constrained the delivery of lifesaving assistance to some of the

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most vulnerable populations in Yemen. And, the prolonged Saudi-led campaign, which has been backed by the United States, has exacerbated the humanitarian crisis. In the South, the Republic of Yemen Government's (ROYG) Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MOPIC) has also restricted the movement of NGOs and aid delivery.

These restrictions are unacceptable, but all political and diplomatic channels to resolve these issues must be exhausted before contemplating a large-scale, unilateral suspension of U.S. assistance, which risks catastrophic humanitarian impacts. The recent agreement by the Houthi aid coordination agency to withdraw some of its unacceptable demands demonstrates that donors and humanitarian organizations are making progress through negotiation and diplomatic pressure.

In light of the global COVID-19 pandemic, we urge you to reconsider the planned suspension and outline which areas of assistance could be exempt. A suspension of assistance during a pandemic would risk the health response in a country in which at least 50% of its healthcare is offline due to fighting. This certainly and needlessly leads to more lives lost. In the meantime, we urge the administration not to re-program funding for Yemen assistance and to make every effort to ensure implementing partners are able to maintain their operational capacity in order to reach vulnerable populations when assistance and funding issues are resolved. Given the U.S. is among the largest humanitarian donors to Yemen, abruptly ceasing aid would exacerbate an already tragic humanitarian crisis.

We look forward to your response and a clear, coordinated strategy as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

ELIOT L. ENGEL
Chairman
House Committee on Foreign Affairs

ADAM SMITH
Chairman
House Committee on Armed Services

TED DEUTCH
Chairman
Subcommittee on the Middle East,
North Africa, and International Terrorism

TED LIEU
Member of Congress

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RO KHANNA
Member of Congress

DEBBIE DINGELL
Member of Congress

TOM MALINOWSKI
Member of Congress