

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 12, 2020

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

Mr. John Barsa
Acting Administrator, U.S. Agency for International Development
Ronald Reagan Building
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20523

Dear Secretary Pompeo and Acting Administrator Barsa:

We write regarding the reduction in U.S. humanitarian assistance to northern Yemen, and request immediate clarification of U.S. assistance policies in the face of COVID-19, which threatens in Yemen to worsen what is already the world's most urgent humanitarian crisis. The first officially diagnosed case of COVID-19 in Yemen was reported on April 10. The disease's impact stands to be especially catastrophic in Yemen given the degradation and damage five years of war have visited upon the country's health system, which by UN estimates is only operating at 50 percent capacity.

In Yemen, COVID-19 will worsen an already dire humanitarian situation: 80 percent of the population is in need of humanitarian assistance, the majority of whom are women and children; two-thirds of the country lacks adequate access to clean water and sanitation; millions are living on the brink of starvation; nearly 20 million people lack access to adequate healthcare; and cholera, dengue, and other preventable diseases are rife. These factors create an environment conducive to the severe and rapid spread of the COVID-19 virus, threatening countless civilian lives.

This month, due to repeated Houthi-imposed constraints on relief efforts in northern Yemen, USAID continued its partial suspension of humanitarian programming in northern Yemen. USAID has stated it will continue "supporting limited life-saving activities that partners can conduct without Houthi interference, [and]...continue supporting robust advocacy efforts for an improved operating environment in close coordination with other donors, international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), and UN agencies."

On April 16, the United Nation's Under Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock warned the Security Council that three quarters of the United Nations' 41 major programs "will start closing down in the next few weeks" without additional funds, adding "we will have to start eliminating many of the activities that may offer

Yemen is the best chance to avoid [contracting] COVID-19.” As a result of U.S. and other international suspensions, the World Food Program has said it would halve its food aid to recipients in Houthi-controlled areas.

We recognize the challenge that Houthi obstruction poses to relief efforts in Yemen, obstruction that is made even more harmful during the COVID-19 pandemic. We must ensure that development dollars provided to Yemen actually benefit the people most in need of help, and do not enrich Houthi forces or their partners, who have regularly imposed unacceptable constraints on common-sense measures to track and account for funds and supplies.

In April, the State Department announced two tranches of funding for the global response to COVID-19, suggesting that Yemen would receive some of these funds but no other details. Then, on May 6, the State Department stated it would be providing \$225 million in emergency aid to Yemen, destined in part to support the World Food Program’s (WFP) operations in southern Yemen “as well as a reduced operation” in northern Yemen.

Given the urgency of the crisis facing Yemen, we are asking for immediate clarification from State and USAID on U.S. aid to Yemen. Specifically:

- What are the specific categories of “life-saving activities” exempted under the March 27 cut in U.S. aid?
- Has USAID revisited these categories since March 27 to expand the definition of “life-saving aid” to include categories such as personal protective equipment (PPE), ventilators, or support to Yemen’s badly damaged health sector, given Yemen now has active cases of COVID-19?
- Given predictions by the World Food Program (WFP) and the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) that food insecurity in Yemen will increase dramatically due to COVID-19, how limited will support to WFP programs be in northern Yemen, and will USAID consider food security programming part of its “life-saving aid” carve out?
- What details can you provide about where in Yemen the recently announced \$225 million in emergency aid will be used and for what purposes?
- What efforts is the administration undertaking to contribute to a sustainable ceasefire in Yemen?
- Have the Houthis improved the operating environment for humanitarian programs since the suspension? What challenges/obstacles remain?
- What needs to happen before the administration will consider lifting aid suspensions to Yemen – targeted to addressing the most pressing needs – to ensure the pandemic does not further strain the worst humanitarian crisis in the world?

We remain committed to working with you to promote America's national security interests and humanitarian principles in Yemen. We know you share our goals of ending the civil war, alleviating the humanitarian crisis, and protecting civilians.

Sincerely,



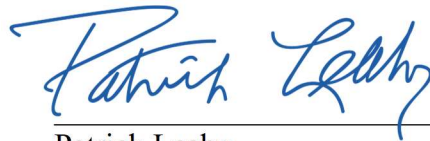
Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator

/s/ Todd Young

Todd Young
United States Senator



Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator



Patrick Leahy
United States Senator



Bernard Sanders
United States Senator

/s/ Jack Reed

Jack Reed
United States Senator