

Coronavirus pandemic intensifies humanitarian disaster in Yemen

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In war-torn Yemen—devastated by five years of a US- and EU-backed war led by Saudi Arabia—the coronavirus pandemic is exhibiting its murderous potential. Doctors there report a death rate of 20 to 30 percent among those infected.

Intensive care physician Tankred Stöbe from the aid organization Doctors Without Borders told the German newspaper *Tagesspiegel* of the dramatic consequences of the pandemic. The pandemic, he noted, has swept through the bitterly poor and war-ravaged country “like a deadly desert storm.”

Stöbe estimates a 30 percent mortality rate among COVID-19 patients, the highest in the world. A significant lack of testing renders the official figures—just over 2,000 confirmed cases and 600 deaths—meaningless. “The vast majority of patients have suffocated in their homes without being counted, diagnosed or treated.”

Many Yemenis live far from a clinic and are left to fend for themselves if infected with the coronavirus. The virus spreads virtually unchecked. “There is hardly a family that has not been affected by the pandemic,” Stöbe reports.

Doctors Without Borders erected a specialized COVID-19 clinic whose 40 beds were immediately filled. “The mortality was very high because patients came too late,” Stöbe explained. “The average length of stay was five days—but not because people recovered, but because they died.” The clinic contends with a chronic shortage of personnel and materials. Moreover, the staff must transport oxygen bottles across residential districts devastated by war.

The high mortality rate is primarily due to the preexisting, unimaginable humanitarian catastrophe in the country from a years-long civil war and an imperialist-backed bombing campaign.

Saudi Arabia has waged an unrelenting air war in Yemen since March 2015 aimed at toppling the Houthi rebel government and reimposing the puppet regime of imperialist stooge Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi. The United States, France, Great Britain and Germany have all supported this murderous war, directly or indirectly. The German government has exported over €1 billion in weaponry to countries participating in the war.

Stöbe described the situation now unfolding in Yemen as an “unbelievable tragedy.” Bombing and live fire continue on a daily basis: “Tens of thousands have already died. Millions have been displaced.”

Were the criteria and legal principles of the Nuremberg Trials to be applied to Yemen, the politicians responsible for these crimes against humanity would be tried in court and locked behind bars. Sentences handed down in Nuremberg after the Second World War sent the surviving leaders of the Third Reich to the gallows or a lifetime in prison.

Today, however, the United Nations sees this differently: Of all countries, they chose Saudi Arabia to host the charity conference for Yemen in June 2020.

Under international pressure, early this year Saudi Arabia announced a temporary halt in air raids against Yemen “for humanitarian reasons.” In fact, the bombing continued. Between March and June, the Yemen Data Project recorded 1,078 air attacks, at least 142 on civilian targets like residential areas, schools and hospitals.

The war perpetrated by Saudi Arabia with the support of Western powers against the Yemeni population has impacted primarily civilians. The monarchy in Riyadh, led by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, has blockaded food and medical aid to the country with the conscious intention of causing mass suffering and starvation. Roughly 20 million Yemenis depend on

food aid for survival.

Ten million human beings are threatened by starvation, as reported this summer by the German broadcaster Tagesschau. It has been two years since the aid organization Save the Children reported that 85,000 Yemeni children had starved to death.

Other diseases—cholera, malaria, dengue fever—are taking an additional toll. Just this year over 110,000 people contracted cholera. A cholera clinic set up and operated at great personal sacrifice by Doctors Without Borders volunteers was bombed by Saudi fighter planes in the battle for the port city of Hodeidah.

Doctors Without Borders' account of the pandemic is corroborated by Essen, Germany cardiologist Dr. Marwan Al-Ghafory, an advocate for suffering Yemenis. Via the free app "Tabiby" (my doctor) he has reached tens of thousands of people in Yemen.

The cardiologist concludes that the real situation in Yemen is far worse than officially reported. According to Johns Hopkins University, there are currently 2,070 known coronavirus infections and 602 deaths. "But the information our team has gathered, the statistics that we have collected ourselves, tell us quite something else," the doctor said in an interview. "We peg it at more than 100,000 cases with a mortality rate of over 20 percent."

For Dr. Al-Ghafory, the most important task is warning the population about a second, more severe wave of coronavirus. Yemenis have very little access to reliable information. He said: "I write articles every day and translate medical studies. My team and I post between seven and ten articles a day. We've taken the task upon ourselves to educate our forgotten people about COVID-19."

The coronavirus pandemic is only accelerating the enormous catastrophe long wrought by imperialism. As a result of the war, the country is lacking not only necessary health care, but clean water for drinking and washing, sanitary systems, sufficient nutrition, shelter, as well as prospects for the future—in short, every elementary necessity for a healthy life.

The imperialist powers, especially the US, but also Germany, support the belligerence of Saudi Arabia because they consider Riyadh an important ally in their conflicts with Iran, Russia and China. Above all, however, they see in the Saudi monarchy a bastion against the threat of working class uprisings throughout the Middle East.



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