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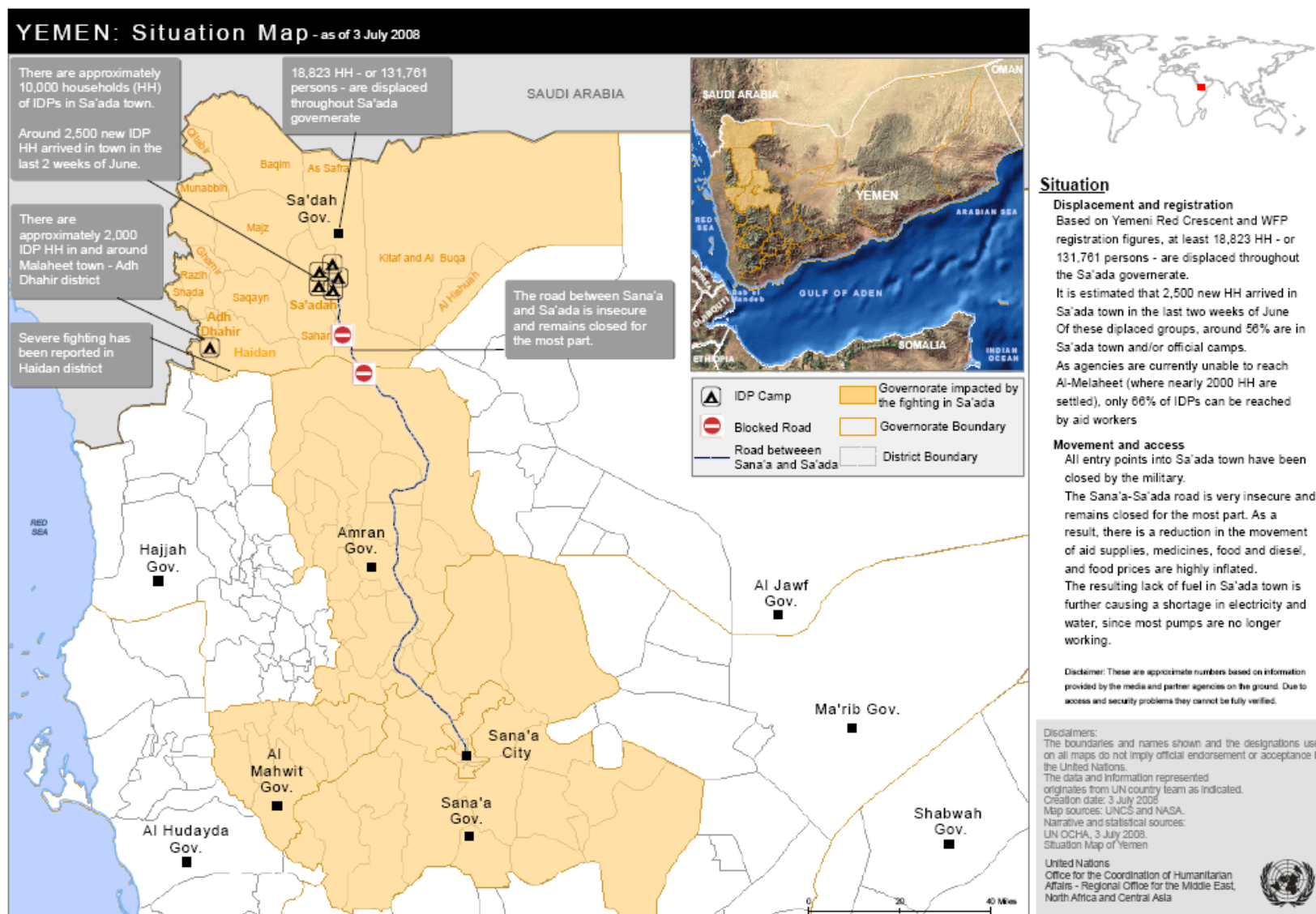
Yemen: Constrained response to protection needs of IDPs and returnees

Fighting between government forces and followers of the late Sheikh Badr Eddin al-Houth have led to displacement in northern Yemen at regular intervals since 2004, peaking during the latest round of conflict in June and July 2008. Though many returned to their places of origin following the end of hostilities in July 2008, large numbers were unable to return home.

An estimated 100,000 people remain internally displaced as result of the Sa'ada conflict, including some who have gone back to places of origin. In June and July 2009 the number of internally displaced people (IDPs) increased by several thousand as intermittent fighting continued.

Though access to affected areas has improved since the conflict, it has remained limited. Attacks on humanitarian personnel have included kidnapping and recently killings.

Internal Displacement in Yemen, at the height of the conflict in July 2008



Source: UN OCHA

More maps are available on <http://www.internal-displacement.org>

Background: Fragile state, natural disasters and ongoing conflicts

Yemen faces a number of severe economic and political challenges. In recent years the government has faced intermittent internal armed conflict in Sa'ada in northern Yemen, a growing southern separatist movement, and resurgence of terrorist groups including *al-Qaida* (USDoS, September 2008). It is the poorest state in the Arab world, with high unemployment and an estimated 35 per cent of the population below the poverty line; it faces food insecurity, widespread water scarcity and depletion of its natural resources including oil (WB, April 2009). The country also hosts over 152,000 refugees, most of them Somali (UNHCR, June 2009).

Several incidents of internal displacement have resulted from internal conflicts and disturbances as well as natural disasters. Recent natural disasters have included widespread flooding and slow-onset disasters such as drought and land erosion. Several thousand were displaced in Al Mahwit governorate since 2007 by droughts, and in October 2008 flooding in the eastern governorates of Hadramout and Al-Mahara caused the displacement of 20,000 to 25,000 people (WFP, December 2008; OCHA, November 2008).

Conflict in the south

Until 1990, Yemen was divided into two states; the northern Yemen Arab Republic and the more secular People's Democratic Republic of Yemen in the south (HRW, October 1994; USDoS, 2007). The two fought three short wars, in 1972, 1979, and 1988. In 1990, national reconciliation led to the unified Republic of

Yemen with Sana'a as its capital, but differences were never resolved (HRW, October 1994) and civil war broke out in 1994. The 70-day war led to the displacement of 53,000 people, mainly from the governorates of Aden, Lahj, Tai'z and Abyan, where most of the fighting took place (HRW, October 1994).

Tensions have since persisted, with southerners protesting against political exclusion, harassment, and the presence of military camps and checkpoints (MERIP, July 2005). Numerous protests have taken place since 2006, most recently in May 2009 in Lahj, Hadramout and Abyan (Al Jazeera, April 2009 and May 2009). In May 2009 around 200 families were reportedly temporarily displaced in Lahj following violent clashes (IDMC interview, May 2009; IRIN, May 2009).

Conflict in the north

In the northern governorate of Sa'ada, a group referred to as "Al-Huthis" after the family name of the leader of the rebellion, has since early 2004 engaged in an armed conflict with the Yemeni army and government-backed tribes. Husain Badr al-Din al-Huthi founded "Believing Youth" (*al-shabab al-mu'min*) primarily to promote Zaydi Shi'ia religious education, but it developed into an opposition movement. The conflict began with isolated clashes in Sa'ada but by mid-2008 extended to the rest of the governorate, in addition to Amran, Sana'a, and Jawf governorates. As of June 2009, Saqayan, Haydan, Razih, and Ghamar districts in Sa'ada were contested or under Huthi control.

There have been five rounds of conflict: from June to September 2004; from March to April 2005; from July 2005 to

February 2006; from January to June 2007; and from May to July 2008 (HRW, November 2008; UN Inter-Agency Report, May 2007). The intensity of the conflict has increased in each round. The government has reportedly used fighter jets, helicopters, tanks and artillery to attack Huthi positions, mostly in rural areas but also in heavily populated towns. The Huthis have also reportedly used heavy artillery and anti-aircraft guns, and have also been accused of violations of humanitarian and human rights law (HRW, November 2008). Both sides have reportedly used landmines (IRIN, September 2008 and April 2007).

Estimates of the number of casualties since 2004 have ranged from several thousand to tens of thousands killed or injured (MERIP, July 2005; IDMC interview, May 2009). Local human rights groups have reported that thousands of people have been arrested, that more than a hundred have been victims of forced disappearance, and that some are still being detained (IRIN, July 2008; HRW, October 2008). Though the government announced a unilateral ceasefire in July 2008, intermittent violence has continued in Sa'ada governorate. Recent reports of increasing violence and mobilisation by both parties have raised concerns of a sixth round of conflict (Yemen Times, June 2009; IRIN, June 2009).

Profile and geographical distribution of IDPs

In contrast to the extensive information available on displacement resulting from natural disasters, information on people displaced by the conflict in the north has been limited by access difficulties and the lack of a profiling exercise.

There was consensus amongst the United Nations and international agencies in July 2009 that an estimated 100,000 people remained displaced (UNHCR July, 2009; WFP July 2009). The World Food Programme (WFP), UNHCR and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) have however different operational figures related to their mandates and geographical areas of operation. In June 2009, WFP was assisting almost 83,000 IDPs including formerly registered IDPs who were able to access distribution sites (WFP, July 2009). UNHCR had registered 25,000 IDPs by June 2009 in accessible areas in Sa'ada and Bani Houshesh in Sana'a governorate, and was waiting to be able to conduct a full profiling exercise (UNHCR, June 2009).

In Sa'ada, registered IDPs were principally located in and around Sa'ada city and al Mahaleet town in Al Dhahr district. There were 6,800 in four camps in Sa'ada city (three camps had closed following the conflict), and 8,100 people located with hosts (UNHCR, June 2009). In Mahaleet, more than 6,700 IDPs were living in small dispersed makeshift settlements of mudbrick shelters, as well as occupying several schools; and there were over 600 IDPs in Bani Houshesh (UNHCR, June 2009).

At the height of the conflict in July 2008, OCHA estimated that 130,000 people were displaced or affected, many of whom had repeatedly been displaced by previous rounds. 77,000 of them had found refuge in Sa'ada city and were receiving assistance from humanitarian agencies. 15,000 to 20,000 of them were living in seven IDP camps located in and around Sa'ada city, while the rest were

sheltering with host communities. Between 60,000 and 70,000 were believed to be displaced in remote rural areas where limits in access were preventing the delivery of assistance (OCHA, July 2008; IDMC interview, July 2009). Following the end of hostilities, many of the IDPs in Sa'ada city reportedly returned to their areas of origin (IRIN, September 2008).

New displacement has followed intermittent fighting. Fighting from March 2009 between Huthi and pro-government tribes in Ghamar, Razih, Saqayen, and Haydan districts displaced people within these districts and towards Sa'ada city and Mahaleet town (IDMC interview, May 2009; IRIN, June 2009). In June 2009, WFP and UNHCR registered 5,000 newly displaced people, and WFP was continuing the registration of an estimated 5,000 IDPs (WFP, July 2009).

However, the total number of people still displaced by the conflict may be higher. In May 2009, several IDP communities in Sana'a city, possibly comprising a hundred or more households, had not been registered by the humanitarian community (IDMC interview, May 2009; Al Nadaa, March 2009). In inaccessible areas, particularly in war-affected areas of Sa'ada and Amran governorates, there is very little information on the number and profile of IDPs and many people displaced by previous rounds of conflict, including IDPs who have returned since July 2008, are unlikely to have found durable solutions.

The Sa'ada conflict caused the displacement principally of poor rural farming communities. In addition, members of public institutions have been displaced

from Huthi-controlled areas on the basis of their allegiance to the state, and others due to their membership of tribes or clans that have assisted the government in the conflict. Meanwhile, people have left areas under government control for fear of being labelled as sympathetic to the Huthis (IDMC interview, May 2009).

70 per cent of IDPs were estimated in January 2009 to be women and children (UNICEF, January 2009). However in certain localities such as the district of Bani Houshesh in Sa'na, the percentage of women and children was initially higher with many men and some boys having been reportedly arrested or detained during the conflict; many of them are still reportedly detained (IDMC interview, May 2009).

Sa'ada is principally Shi'ia of the Zaydi doctrine with a sizeable Sunni population. The majority of IDPs in the north are Shi'ia, though Sunni have also been displaced as well as a small Jewish community of 65 people which the government resettled to Sana'a in January 2007 after threats were made against them (Yemen Times, February 2009 and April 2009).

Protection of IDPs

There is scant information available on the protection concerns of IDPs or returnees. Few UN or other agencies have publically advocated or reported on protection issues due to their sensitivity. Even in accessible areas, protection assessments have been lacking due to restrictions or lack of resources, raising concern that significant protection gaps have not been addressed.

Physical security and integrity

There are no clear indicators of the violence faced by IDPs. Though IDPs in Sa'ada city and Mahaleet reportedly live in security from conflict, intermittent violence in several districts in Sa'ada governorate has continued to put hosts and IDPs in those districts at risk (IDMC interview, May 2009). Improvised explosive devices and unexploded ordnance have reportedly caused a number of deaths and injuries among returnees and host communities following successive rounds of fighting (IRIN, April 2007; Yemen Times, August 2008).

During the conflict and possibly since, civilians including IDPs have reportedly been arbitrarily arrested, detained, based on their alleged political sympathies or have disappeared (HRW, October 2008; IDMC interview, May 2009). In Bani Houshesh, many men and boys were arrested following the end of hostilities and as of May 2009 many remained in detention and faced prosecution on the grounds of supporting the opposition (IDMC interview, May 2009; Yemen Times, July 2009; Yemen Hurr, July 2008).

Restrictions on freedom of movement were still evident in May 2009, although they were fewer than at the height of the conflict in June and July 2008. Tribal, government or Huthi checkpoints were in evidence on main access routes. Since 2008 there have been reports of IDPs being injured, arrested or having possessions taken when crossing checkpoints to flee conflict-affected areas, retrieve possessions or bring trapped relatives to safety (IDMC interview, May 2009; HRW, October 2008 and November 2008).

The extent to which displaced children have been affected is unclear. Though no census has been made, many children, whether displaced or not, are reported to be missing a parent, separated from parents, or orphaned following the conflict (IDMC interview, May 2009). Recruitment of children as young as 12 has been reported by Huthi as well as government and pro-government factions (IRIN, January 2009; IDMC interview, May 2009; Child Soldiers, December 2008; Yemen Hurr, July 2008). The trafficking of children for forced begging, unskilled labour or sexual exploitation has reportedly risen in the last four years and is a source of concern to displaced and non-displaced alike; Sa'ada is one of the main access points to neighbouring countries (Elaph, January 2007; IDMC interview, May 2009; USDoS, January 2009). Child labour (such as begging, smuggling, collection of refuse), which is also prevalent in Yemen, is evident among displaced children in camps and also in vulnerable IDP households in Sana'a (IDMC interview, May 2009).

According to national UN implementing partners, the exposure of women and children to violence has led to high rates of trauma and anxiety among them (IRIN, February 2008; IDMC interview, May 2009). There is no clear information on their levels of exposure to gender-based violence.

Accessing basic needs and livelihoods

During the fourth and fifth rounds of fighting many IDPs could not access essential items. The access of humanitarian agencies to Mahaleet and Sa'ada city has since improved, as well as to other districts of Sa'ada subject to restrictions, but

some needs remain unaddressed. Malnutrition levels have improved, though IDPs registered in camps and those staying with host families and in non-camp situations in Mahaleet still require WFP food assistance to meet their basic needs (IDMC interview, May 2009).

Several humanitarian agencies have assisted registered IDPs in areas accessible in Sa'ada and Mahaleet town by providing potable water, sanitation, health care and shelter. Though humanitarian agencies have reported that minimum requirements are adhered to, IDPs in camps, despite the humanitarian assistance, have voiced concerns regarding water availability, appropriate sanitation, and adequate health facilities (YRCS, January 2009; Yemen Times, March 2009; IDMC interview, May and July 2009). In the dispersed informal settlements in Malaheet, humanitarian actors have sought to address the lack of safe drinking water and sanitation (IDMC interview, May 2009).

IDPs also report difficulties in finding appropriate housing, employment and assistance (IDMC interview, May 2009). Many in Sana'a and Sa'ada live in rented buildings without basic amenities. Relatives and other families have also struggled to host IDPs in overcrowded households (IDMC interview, May 2009). Levels of income have fallen due to the conflict, and poverty levels have risen (UNICEF, January 2009). While some IDPs have savings or as public sector employees have retained salaries, most are unemployed and rely on income from daily labour (IDMC interview, May 2009). The access of IDPs to land is limited and some cope through illegal activi-

ties such as trafficking (IDMC interview, May 2009).

IDPs and national media have reported that assistance has sometimes depended on tribal affiliation or place of origin (IRIN, September 2008). Several media outlets have reported allegations against the Yemen Red Crescent Society (YRCS) of such uneven provision and treatment (News Yemen, April 2009; Yemen Times, January 2009 and March 2009). IDPs from Bani Houshesh have also reported facing discrimination; they remained in May 2009 fearful of harassment or arrest (Yemen Times, June 2008; IDMC interview, May 2009).

In war-affected areas where access is limited, IDPs and returnees reportedly faced harsh living conditions and a shortage of basic needs (Yemen Times, June 2009; IDMC interview, May 2009). IDPs and returnees reportedly live in makeshift shelters, damaged homes, schools and homes left vacant by others who have fled the conflict. The vulnerability of IDPs and returnees has been amplified by the extensive destruction of housing, schools, and medical centres (SRF GoY, April 2009).

Children also face numerous obstacles to their education, with many having reportedly missed up to two years of school as the conflict and the lack of financial means or necessary documentation have prevented their access (IDMC interview, May 2009). As a result of advocacy efforts, in January 2009, school authorities accepted approximately 1,000 internally displaced children in schools, regardless of their lack of documentation, for the first time since the beginning of the conflict in Sa'ada (UNHCR, February 2009).

Return and property concerns

Following the 2008 ceasefire, the government encouraged IDPs to return to places of origin, providing cash incentives, transportation, food and non-food items (ICG, May 2009; IDMC interview, May 2009). Pressure was also reportedly exerted on IDPs, particularly those in the camps, to return, and simultaneously on humanitarian agencies to reduce assistance (IDMC interview, May 2009). It is estimated that over 50,000 IDPs returned from Sa'ada city to their places of origin following the ceasefire, though an estimated ten per cent of them quickly went back to their place of displacement (IDMC interview, May 2009).

Information on conditions in areas of origin is limited due to lack of access. Damage to people's homes, continuing insecurity, fear of reprisals, and the lack of livelihood opportunities and basic services have all presented obstacles to return. IDPs seeking to return to Huthi-controlled areas reportedly have to give an oath of loyalty and allegiance (IDMC interview, April 2009). IDPs who have been unable to return have spoken of expropriation of property, including housing, land and belongings. In certain cases land has been allegedly redistributed or cultivated by other residents, and the produce sold in local markets (IDMC interview, May 2009). Meanwhile, IDPs who returned to Razih, Ghamar, Saqayen, and Haydan have reportedly experienced or risked secondary displacement due to clashes there.

The government assessment following the conflict revealed extensive damage to infrastructure. The Sa'ada Reconstruction

Fund (SRF) assessed affected areas in Sa'ada, Sana'a and Amran governorates from August to December 2008 and identified over 10,000 buildings destroyed, including over 8,280 houses, 1,440 farms, 102 schools, 295 mosques, and scores of other private and public buildings (SRF GoY, April 2009; IRIN, April 2009).

Access of humanitarian agencies

Humanitarian agencies have faced a range of challenges in gaining access to IDPs and other civilians. In the fourth and fifth rounds of the conflict, the government imposed a total information blackout on Sa'ada governorate, while checkpoints set up along the main access routes and fighting in Harf Sufian restricted movement in and out of the governorate and other affected areas. During the nine-month interval between the fourth and fifth rounds, humanitarian agencies also found it impossible to access most parts of Saa'da governorate, and were confined mainly to Sa'ada city. When the conflict reached Bani Hushaish district, 20 kilometres away from the capital, the government imposed a blockade on the entire district (HRW, November 2008).

Most humanitarian agencies first began working in Sa'ada after the end of the fourth round of conflict in 2007, with the UN undertaking its first rapid assessment in Sa'ada city in May (HRW, November 2008; UN Inter-Agency Report, May 2007). Few organisations other than WFP, ICRC and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) maintained a presence in Sa'ada during the fifth round, and MSF temporarily withdrew its international staff in June 2008 (MSF, June 2008).

Following the end of hostilities and protracted negotiations, access gradually improved, but as of July 2009 it remained limited and sporadic due to bureaucratic controls and restrictive government, tribal and Huthi checkpoints as well as increasing insecurity and intermittent fighting. Though ICRC, MSF, Médecins du Monde and YRCS operated with more flexibility, undertaking assessments or distributions in Al Razih, Haydan, Dahyan, Majz, Sahar and Al Safra, such obstacles continued to impede access and limit capacity of interventions. National and international humanitarian agencies have faced security incidents including diversion and targeting of convoys, hijacking of vehicles, and recently kidnappings (HRW, November 2008; ICRC, March 2007 and May 2007; IRIN, June 2009). In June 2009, after a series of kidnappings, three humanitarian workers were found killed (IRIN, June 2009) and several were still missing as of July.

National and international responses

There is no national policy on IDPs or returnees, nor is there a ministry or government body specifically mandated to address IDPs or returnees, though various ministries such as the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health address issues relevant to IDPs and returnees within their mandates. The Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation coordinates the activities of humanitarian agencies. The lack of a national institution with a specific mandate to address the situation of the displaced, and the ongoing tensions between the government, tribal elements and Huthi, continues to render any response vulnerable to an array of competing interests.

As part of reconciliation efforts, the government established inclusive national committees for mediation and reconstruction in July and August 2008, to resolve disputes and to assess and allocate funds for reconstruction and compensation in war-affected areas (ICG, May 2009; SRF GoY, April 2009). However, reconciliation efforts have since been strained by the slow pace of reconstruction, continuing tensions in Sa'ada and the shortfall in funds.

The government from the onset placed considerable emphasis and pressure on return, while providing incentives and promising rapid reconstruction. It has provided compensation and technical support for reconstruction through the Sa'ada Reconstruction Fund (SRF), which had reportedly completed 960 homes by April 2009 (SRF GoY, April 2009). The SRF has faced numerous difficulties, including insecurity and also Huthi criticism for the lack of impartiality of its assessments and for having begun construction in government-controlled areas (ICG, May 2009). The reconstruction committee faces a considerable shortfall in funds, with only an estimated 50 per cent of the funding required to address the needs of all those affected (IRIN, April 2009; IDMC interview, May 2009).

In September 2008, the government called on the humanitarian community to undertake a comprehensive assessment of the needs of war-affected areas and appealed to the international community for funds (IRIN, September 2008; IDMC interview, May 2009). The government has regularly appealed to humanitarian actors to continue to provide assistance to IDPs, and undertake projects in war-affected

areas. However, as of June 2009, the inter-agency assessment group had still not been granted access.

The active involvement of states in the region has contrasted with the broad silence of the wider international community. For example, Qatar mediated a joint ceasefire in June 2007 which led to a peace accord in February 2008, while only in July 2008 did the United States and European Union call for improved humanitarian access, a call which may have contributed to the subsequent ceasefire (ICG, May 2009; HRW, November 2008; EU, June 2008; ECHO July 2008; US EoY, June 2008). Though the diplomatic and humanitarian communities have advocated directly with the Yemeni government, the lack of public advocacy at the international level is regrettable in view of the influence it may have had on reconciliation efforts (ICG, May 2009; IDMC interview, July 2009).

The lack of international involvement is reflected in the limited funding available for Sa'ada compared to the other humanitarian concerns which Yemen faces (OCHA Financial Tracking, June 2009). International and regional donors are reportedly wary of funding the response due to the political sensitivity surrounding Sa'ada and the risk of further conflict (ICG, May 2009). There is no consolidated appeal for Sa'ada, and the separate WFP (2007-2009) and UNHCR (2009) appeals face shortfalls of 32 per cent and 80 per cent respectively (WFP, June 2009; UNHCR, April 2009).

The UN and humanitarian community have avoided public advocacy which might put at risk their already limited access or ability to address sensitive issues.

The UN has coordinated the humanitarian response through its Emergency Response and Preparedness Team (EPRT) in Sana'a, in which UN agencies and NGOs are represented (there is a parallel NGO forum). WFP chairs the EPRT and is the de facto lead agency for the IDP response. UNHCR as protection lead also chairs a protection working group which was established in late 2008 and brings together various NGOs and UN agencies in Sana'a; and UNICEF in June 2009 established a child protection network among several agencies in Sa'ada.

The UN agencies in Sa'ada – WFP, UNHCR and UNICEF – have found their movements limited due to insecurity and UN security rules requiring military escort, and apart from WFP, mainly operate through national implementing partners. Several international agencies are present, including Islamic Relief, MSF, and ICRC, and national agencies including YRCS, Al-Amel Association, and Sa'adah Women Charitable Association, many of which require resources and capacity building to adequately address protection and humanitarian needs. YRCS has had a significant role in providing assistance in Sa'ada city and other districts affected by conflict, though its close association with the government has had an impact on its perceived neutrality (News Yemen, April 2009; Yemen Times, January 2009; IDMC interview, May 2009).

Humanitarian agencies working in consultation with government ministries have targeted IDPs, returnees and war-affected communities where accessible. The humanitarian assistance has included the provision of food, non-food items, temporary shelter, response to water and

sanitation needs in IDP camps and in Mahaleet and other accessible areas; psycho-social support for IDP women and children, improving access to education, particularly for children in Sa'ada without documents, and medical assistance to IDPs in the camps and other people affected by the conflict (WFP, June 2009;

ICRC, May 2009; UNICEF, January 2009; UNHCR, July 2008; MSF June 2009).

Note: This is a summary of the IDMC's Internal Displacement profile. The full profile is available online [here](#).

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About the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, established in 1998 by the Norwegian Refugee Council, is the leading international body monitoring conflict-induced internal displacement worldwide.

Through its work, the Centre contributes to improving national and international capacities to protect and assist the millions of people around the globe who have been displaced within their own country as a result of conflicts or human rights violations.

At the request of the United Nations, the Geneva-based Centre runs an online database providing comprehensive information and analysis on internal displacement in some 50 countries.

Based on its monitoring and data collection activities, the Centre advocates for durable solutions to the plight of the internally displaced in line with international standards.

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre also carries out training activities to enhance the capacity of local actors to respond to the needs of internally displaced people. In its work, the Centre cooperates with and provides support to local and national civil society initiatives.

For more information, visit the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre website and the database at www.internal-displacement.org.

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