Crisis in Yemen

Introduction

‘Two in three Yemenis do not know where their next meal will come from’

Yemen, located on the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula, has experienced almost continual crises and violence since the uprising against British colonial rule in Aden during the early 1960s. Following the unification of North and South Yemen in 1994, the new Democratic Republic of Yemen plunged into civil war. Guerrilla warfare continued into the 2000s and popular protests spread during the ‘Arab Spring’ of 2011. Armed conflict then intensified in March 2015, and now involves a number of factions including the military forces of neighbouring Saudi Arabia. All sides in the conflict stand accused of violating international humanitarian law.

Sana’a, the capital city of Yemen Photo: Chris Worrall/Oxfam (2004)

The combination of intense conflict and fragile governance has forced 3 million people to flee their homes and has placed 22.2 million people - 81% of the population – in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. Food production and trade have collapsed under the strain of conflict. In January 2018 five out of Yemen’s 22 governorates had acute malnutrition rates above the emergency threshold set by the World Health Organisation. Spikes in the violence, such as the blockade of Hudaydah port in

November 2017, street fighting in Sana’a in December 2017 and the Hudaydah offensive of June 2018, mean that the humanitarian emergency intensifies even further.

The paradox of the Yemen crisis is that, while UK humanitarian aid to Yemen has been generous, the British government has also supplied weapons to Saudi Arabia, an active combatant in Yemen’s conflict. For example, between January and March 2015 the UK approved two arms contracts for Saudi Arabia worth £17 million. Campaigners are clear that Arms Trade Treaty prohibits these sales of weapons to a government involved in a conflict where international humanitarian law is being violated by all sides. In September 2016, Oxfam CEO Mark Goldring stated "For the sake of civilians in Yemen, the UK government should pay heed, do the right thing and immediately stop all arms sales to Saudi Arabia."


The UK Government has continued to deflect this criticism and insists that its arms sales to Saudi Arabia do not contravene the Arms Trade Treaty and international humanitarian law. Campaigners have continued to challenge these arms sales in the UK courts. In April 2018, the Court of Appeal granted campaigners permission to appeal a High Court judgement which had permitted the UK Government to continue selling arms to Saudi Arabia.

In June 2018, the Saudi-led coalition launched a land offensive on the port of Hudaydah. The impacts of this serious intensification of the conflict are dire. Civilians are in the direct line of attack and over 30,000 thousand families fled their homes in the period up to late July 2018. Many could only escape to areas where they still face significant danger. Airstrikes on water and electricity facilities threaten triggering an unstoppable cholera epidemic. And beyond the immediate conflict area, the attack on Hudaydah port threatens food and essential supplies for 20 million Yemenis across the country.
Oxfam and its partners are calling on Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt to do his utmost to push for an immediate ceasefire in Yemen and take forward the UK's responsibility at the UN to find a lasting peace agreement to protect millions of vulnerable families. The impact of further attacks will be catastrophic.

Using this resource

This resource consists of the following sections

1. This introduction.
2. A PowerPoint presentation introducing the Yemen crisis. This may be presented either by teachers or young people and the script may be amended accordingly.
3. A brief ‘Opinion Continuum’ workshop activity to encourage critical thinking about the Yemen crisis.
4. An action guide with links to the Yemen Crisis appeal and Oxfam Schools’ Red Line action.

Yemen is both a complex emergency and a controversial issue. Here are some questions raised by the crisis that could be discussed with young people. There are no straightforward answers. Oxfam’s Teaching Controversial Issues guide supports teachers to raise these types of challenging questions in classroom work

- How effective is humanitarian aid during an armed conflict?
- What should the priorities be for meeting the needs of Yemen’s people?
- How can Yemen’s infrastructure and public services be improved? Is this possible while the conflict continues?
- How can conflict be brought to an end?
- Is there a relationship between humanitarian aid and peace?
- How can the parties in a conflict be held to account for observing international humanitarian law?
- What should the rules governing the sale of arms from one state to another be?
- Should Britain supply arms to Saudi Arabia? What are the pros and cons?
- How can a long-lasting peace be built in a region which has experienced prolonged conflict?
- What is the most appropriate response to the crisis for young people to make?

Using this resource in primary schools

The Yemen crisis raises challenging moral issues and judgments, and the resource should therefore be adapted to make it accessible at KS2.

- The PowerPoint presentation provides a comprehensive introduction to the Yemen crisis. However additional time should be allocated to ensure that younger children fully understand its content.
- An ‘opinion continuum’ activity works well with young people of all ages. However, the statements may need to be simplified and then explained to younger children in greater detail.
- It may be more straightforward for the teacher to suggest that younger children either fundraise for the Yemen crisis appeal or participate in the ‘red line’ action.
Background reading

References
Statistics and information about the crisis in Yemen go out of date very quickly. This resource was updated in late July 2018 and was accurate at that time. The OCHA Yemen website is a useful source for regularly updated information - [https://www.unocha.org/yemen](https://www.unocha.org/yemen)

Oxfam (2018): The World Must Back Peace, Not War, To Put An End to Civilian Suffering in Yemen
Oxfam (2015): British Aid and British Arms: A Coherent Approach To Yemen
Oxfam (2018): Yemen’s Invisible Food Crisis
Oxfam Yemen Crisis Appeal
Control Arms: The Arms Trade Treaty
Wikipedia: Modern History of Yemen
Oxfam (2018): Teaching Controversial Issues

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