Crisis in Yemen

Introduction

On 13 December 2016 the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) launched a crisis appeal for Yemen. The DEC is an umbrella group representing the UK’s leading humanitarian charities, including Oxfam. The DEC only launches an appeal in response to a severe crisis, and the money raised is pooled between the member organisations. The most recent DEC appeal prior to the Yemen crisis appeal was the Nepal earthquake appeal of April 2015 which raised £85 million.

It came as no surprise that the DEC launched the Yemen appeal. The region, 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, the new Democratic Republic of Yemen plunged into civil war in 1994. Guerrilla warfare continued into the 2000s and popular protests spread during the ‘Arab Spring’ of 2011. More recently, armed conflict 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 2.4 million people to flee their homes and has placed 21.2 million people (82% of the population) in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. Food production and trade have collapsed under the strain of conflict. In June 2015, 10 out of Yemen's 22 governorates were described as 'one step away' from famine. The position has deteriorated even further since then.

A paradox of the Yemen crisis is that, whilst UK humanitarian aid to Yemen has been generous, the British Government has continued to supply 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 the Arms Trade Treaty prohibits the 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 criticism and insists that its arms sales to Saudi Arabia do not contravene the Arms Trade Treaty and international humanitarian law. However, campaigners have won a judicial review of UK arms sales to Saudi Arabia which is due to take place in the High Court in February 2017. Oxfam’s Red Line for Yemen campaign asks the public to put pressure on MPs to help stop the UK from crossing the ‘red line’ and breaking the Arms Trade Treaty, an internationally-binding agreement. This will result in an end to British weapons being placed in the hands of armed forces accused of using them against civilians.
Using this resource

This resource consists of the following sections:

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

Yemen is a 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.

- 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 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?

**Oxfam’s Red Line for Yemen campaign website**

Oxfam’s Red Line for Yemen campaign website is at [oxfamapps.org/redline/](http://oxfamapps.org/redline/)

The site contains an online tool for identifying the user’s Member of Parliament and producing a letter template along with the MP’s address. Please note that personal contact information which users enter on this page is collected by Oxfam. This may not be compliant with schools’ safeguarding and data privacy policies. Therefore, please review this page before using it with young people and ensure that young people do not enter their personal information on the page. The information on the webpage to help users write a letter to their MP is reproduced in this resource, in the Red Line for Yemen information sheet. The guidance about contacting MPs in the Action Guide links to Parliament’s website which does not collect data.

The Twitter hashtag for this campaign is #RedLineForYemen. Please use the hashtag to connect with other campaigners and if your school promotes their action on social media.
Using this resource in primary schools

The Yemen crisis raises challenging moral issues and judgments, and this resource should therefore be adapted to make it accessible for younger learners.

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

Background reading

References
Oxfam (2015): British Aid and British Arms: A Coherent Approach To Yemen
Oxfam (2016): Yemen’s Invisible Food Crisis
Disasters Emergency Committee Yemen Appeal
Oxfam Red Line for Yemen Campaign
Control Arms: The Arms Trade Treaty
Wikipedia: Modern History of Yemen
Oxfam (2006): Teaching Controversial Issues

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