

April 6, 2021

Dear Mr. President:

We thank you for taking critical first steps toward peace and food security in Yemen, including an [announced end](#) to offensive U.S. military participation in Saudi- and Emirati-led coalition actions; a [review](#) of weapons sales to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates for use in their six-year air war in Yemen; and a [revocation](#) of President Trump's terrorism designations against the Houthis, with the [express purpose](#) of averting a hunger crisis.

In light of an explosive March 10th [news report](#), "CNN investigation finds the U.S.-backed Saudi blockade is leading to deadly fuel & food shortages in Yemen, where hospitals are full of starving children," we urge you now to use U.S. leverage with the Saudi regime to demand an immediate and unconditional end to its blockade on Yemen, which threatens the lives of [16 million](#) malnourished Yemenis living on the edge of famine.

CNN [found](#) that Yemen's major port of Hodeidah, controlled by Yemen's Houthi rebels, "is now a ghost town," as "hundreds of food aid trucks sit parked in a line stretching for miles," without fuel, as their cargo spoils. "Saudi warships have not allowed any oil tankers to berth at Hodeidah since the start of the year," CNN reporter Nima Elbagir [observed](#), citing the World Food Programme, which [documented](#) that over a dozen ships carrying 350,000 metric tons of commercial fuel have been prevented from entering Yemen for over two months.

We are deeply concerned that prior to the CNN report, no U.S. official in the new administration had explicitly publicly acknowledged the six-year-old, Saudi-imposed blockade—much less criticized it. U.S. special envoy for Yemen, Tim Lenderking, declined to adequately respond to Elbagir's on-the-ground reporting and direct questions, referring to Yemen's hunger crisis simply as "complex," while denying evidence of the blockade shown in CNN's report, and, per Elbagir's [account](#), falsely claiming that "food continues to flow through Hodeidah unimpeded." Elbagir [concluded](#): "How is [peace] possible when you are not acknowledging the full impact of that U.S.-backed Saudi embargo on the people of Yemen?"

According to the UN, [400,000 children under the age of 5](#) could perish from hunger this year without urgent action. For years, the Saudi blockade has been [a leading driver](#) of Yemen's humanitarian catastrophe. The recent fuel shortages triggered by the blockade are quickly [accelerating](#) major reductions in access to affordable food, clean water, electricity, and basic movement across Yemen. The blockade also threatens to shut down, [within weeks](#), the hospitals reliant on power generators to tend to victims of famine, while making even emergency travel to hospitals prohibitively expensive for Yemeni families, condemning untold numbers of children to certain death at home.

On March 11th, addressing the UN Security Council, World Food Programme Executive Director David Beasley [corroborated](#) CNN's reporting on the Saudi fuel blockade, noting "most hospitals only have electricity in their intensive care units because fuel reserves are so low. I know this firsthand because I walked in the hospital and the lights were off." He pleaded: "It is hell on earth in many places in Yemen right now," and concluded, "That blockade must be lifted, as a humanitarian act. Otherwise, millions more will spiral into crisis." In light of the Houthis' longstanding obstructionism of humanitarian assistance, Beasley's recent [assessment](#) that "we've turned a corner with the Houthis...in terms of cooperation, collaboration" is a promising sign that unilaterally ending the blockade, paired with increased financial assistance, can save millions of innocent lives.

Brookings Senior Fellow Bruce Riedel describes the ongoing Saudi blockade as "an offensive military operation that kills civilians." Given the continued imposition of the blockade, the administration's [portrayal](#) of Saudi Arabia as "committed and eager to find a solution to the conflict" is troubling. Lenderking's [argument](#) to CNN's Elbagir that the Saudis "are ready to sit down to negotiate an end to the conflict" with the Houthis, "during which access to ports and other issues could be addressed and resolved," could mean tens of thousands more people may die before negotiations over the blockade even begin.

We strongly support a comprehensive political settlement that addresses the conflict's myriad issues, including a nationwide ceasefire, currency stabilization, and payment of government salaries. But a U.S. effort to wield its unique political leverage over Saudi Arabia to demand the blockade's end must occur independently of negotiations between the warring parties. This is particularly necessary in light of the highly uncertain outcome of peace talks, as Saudi warplanes have freshly launched [repeated bombings](#) of the capital city of Sana'a and the Houthis have launched an [offensive](#) on the city of Marib. Riedel [warns](#) that "linking lifting the blockade to a ceasefire is a recipe for prolonging the suffering of the Yemeni people. The two issues need to be decoupled."

This moral imperative requires the United States to pressure Saudi Arabia to lift this blockade immediately, unilaterally, and comprehensively. This means ending the Saudi naval blockade and allowing humanitarian and commercial imports to freely enter into Yemen; entrusting security oversight to the United Nations Verification and Inspection Mechanism for Yemen (UNVIM); fully permitting commercial and medical flights in and out of Sana'a airport; and reopening land crossings to importers, exporters and civilian traffic.

Thank you again for your previous actions to end U.S. complicity in the war in Yemen and ease the country's humanitarian crisis. We now ask you to acknowledge the severity of the Saudi blockade; call for Saudi Arabia to lift it immediately; and terminate any U.S. political, military,

operational or diplomatic support for the blockade that may exist in order for food, fuel and medicine to reach millions of Yemenis in desperate need.

Thank you for your consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,

**Organizations**

Action Corps

American Friends Service Committee

American Muslim Empowerment Network (AMEN)

Antiwar.com

Arabian Rights Watch Association (ARWA)

Avaaz

Bread for the World

Campaign for Peace, Disarmament and Common Security

Center for Economic Policy and Research (CEPR)

Center for International Policy

Charity & Security Network

Church of the Brethren, Office of Peacebuilding and Policy

Church World Service

Churches for Middle East Peace

Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES)

CODEPINK

Committee for Responsible Foreign Policy

Common Defense

Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)

Demand Progress Education Fund

Democracy for the Arab World Now (DAWN)

EIHR: The Educators' Institute for Human Rights

Environmentalists Against War

Episcopal Peace Fellowship

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Foreign Policy for America

Freedom Forward

Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL)

Global Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Health Alliance international

Historians for Peace and Democracy

ICNA Council for Social Justice

Indivisible  
Interfaith Community Sanctuary  
Just Foreign Policy  
Justice Democrats  
Justice Is Global  
MADRE  
MoveOn  
National Council of Churches  
National Iranian American Council  
Neighbors for Peace  
Pax Christi USA  
+Peace  
Peace Action  
Peace Direct  
Presbyterian Church (USA) Office of Public Witness  
Progressive Democrats of America  
Public Citizen  
Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft  
Raytheon Anti-war Campaign  
Refugees International  
Rethinking Foreign Policy  
Revolutionary Love Project  
RootsAction.org  
Saudi American Justice Project  
Secure Justice  
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas - Justice Team  
Spin Film  
Students for Yemen  
The Episcopal Church  
The United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and Society  
To End All Wars  
Union of Arab Women  
United Church of Christ  
United for Peace and Justice  
Veterans For Peace  
Win Without War  
Women Against Military Madness  
Women International League for Peace and Freedom- US Section  
World BEYOND War  
Yemen Freedom Council

Yemen Relief and Reconstruction Foundation  
Yemeni Alliance Committee  
Yemeni Liberation Movement

***Individuals*** (titles for identification purposes only)

Mark Ruffalo – Actor, director, activist  
Skye Fitzgerald – Director, HUNGER WARD, 2021 Oscar Nominated Documentary Short  
Michael Scheuerman – Producer, HUNGER WARD, 2021 Oscar Nominated Documentary Short  
Shireen Al-Adeimi – Yemen-born activist and professor at Michigan State University  
The Phoenix family (Joaquin, Liberty, Summer, Rain)  
Orlando Bloom – Actor  
Amy Schumer – Comedian  
Aisha Jumaan – President of Yemen Relief and Reconstruction Foundation  
Alyssa Milano – Actor, writer, activist  
Sarah Silverman – Comedian, actor  
Leopoldo Gout – Film director  
Andy Richter – Actor and comedian  
Jehan Hakim – Chair of Yemeni Alliance Committee  
Aleen Keshishian – Film producer  
Rebecca Chaiklin – Film director  
Bruce Ackerman – Sterling Professor of Law and Political Science Yale University  
Kathryn Everett – Head of Film, XTR  
Marianne Williamson – Author, inspirational speaker