

## **Unprecedented spread of cholera in Yemen as health workers race against time to save children**

*Statement by UNICEF Regional Director, Geert Cappelaere, following his visit to the war-torn country*

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**SANAA/DJIBOUTI/AMMAN, 2 June, 2017** – “I have just concluded a trip to Yemen to oversee UNICEF’s response to the unprecedented cholera outbreak that is gripping the country.

“Cholera is spreading incredibly fast in Yemen, turning an already dire situation for children into a disaster. In just over one month, close to 70,000 cholera cases were reported with nearly 600 fatalities. The number of suspected cases is expected to reach 130,000 within the next two weeks.

“Cholera doesn’t need a permit to cross a checkpoint or a border, nor does it differentiate between areas of political control.

“At the triage in one of the few functioning hospitals I visited, I witnessed harrowing scenes of children who were barely alive - tiny babies weighing less than two kilos - fighting for their lives.

“I fear that some of them must have died overnight.

“Many families could barely afford the cost of bringing their children to hospital.

“But they are the lucky ones. Countless children around Yemen die every day in silence from causes that can easily be prevented or treated like cholera, diarrhoea or malnutrition.

“I met health workers racing against time to prevent cholera from killing more children. They are dedicated and committed, despite not receiving their salaries in almost nine months. They are Yemen’s unsung heroes and we have to do everything possible to provide them with the medical supplies and the support they desperately need. All authorities in Yemen must come together to start paying the country’s civil servants again.

“Since the start of this outbreak four weeks ago, UNICEF has been working with partners to respond. Our teams on the ground have provided safe water to over 1 million people across Yemen and delivered over 40 tonnes of lifesaving medical equipment – including medicine, oral rehydration salts, intravenous fluids and diarrhoea disease kits.

“But the international community needs to do more to provide immediate support to relief efforts in health, water and sanitation, nutrition and community mobilization. UNICEF urgently requires US\$16 million to prevent the outbreak from spreading further.

“But most importantly, it is time for parties to the conflict to prioritise the boys and girls of Yemen and put an end to the fighting through a peaceful political agreement. This is the ultimate way to save the lives of children in Yemen, and to help them thrive.”

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**For more information**

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