

From [Democracy Now](#) | Original Article

In Yemen, a civilian is dying nearly every hour from a massive cholera outbreak, as the ongoing U.S.-backed, Saudi-led bombing campaign and naval blockade has devastated the country's health, sanitation and water systems. The World Health Organization says the number of suspected cholera cases in Yemen has now reached 101,820 and continues to rise, accounting for 859 deaths. Yemen's healthcare system is also on the verge of collapse as many hospitals have shut down because of the ongoing U.S.-backed Saudi war. Only 45 percent of Yemen's hospitals are still operational. We speak to guests Dr. Mariam Aldogani and Anas Shahari of Save the Children Yemen.

**JUAN GONZÁLEZ:** In Yemen, medical groups are warning an outbreak of cholera has infected more than 116,000 people. The World Health Organization says the water-borne illness has claimed the lives of at least 859, and Oxfam estimates cholera is claiming one life every hour in Yemen. Children under the age of 15 account for 46 percent of the cases. The WHO says the number of cases could reach 300,000, as the outbreak has now spread to 20 of Yemen's 22 provinces. Yemen's healthcare system is also on the verge of collapse, as many hospitals have shut down because of the ongoing U.S.-backed Saudi war. Only 45 percent of Yemen's hospitals are still operational. This is Dr. Hussein El Haddad, the director of one of the few hospitals in Sana'a that is still functioning.

**DR. HUSSEIN EL HADDAD:** [translated] The situation is very bad. The children that are suffering from cholera are countless, and there aren't enough beds. The technical know-how in the hospital is also insufficient to deal with the situation we are facing.

**AMY GOODMAN:** The cholera epidemic comes amidst a U.S.-backed, Saudi-led bombing campaign in Yemen and naval blockade that's left Yemen's sanitation, water and health infrastructure in shambles. The United Nations warns some 19 million of Yemen's 28 million people need some form of aid, with many of them at risk of famine. This is U.N. Emergency Relief Coordinator Stephen O'Brien addressing the United Nations Security Council late last month.

**STEPHEN O'BRIEN:** Yemen now has the ignominy of being the world's largest food security crisis, with more than 17 million people who are food-insecure, 6.8 million of whom are one step away from famine. Crisis is not coming. It is not even looming. It is here today, on our watch, and ordinary people are paying the price. ... It is important to bear in mind that malnutrition and cholera are interconnected. Weakened and hungry people are more likely to contract cholera and less able to survive it. According to estimates, 150,000 cases are projected for the next six months, in addition to the broadly 60,000 current suspected cases since last April with 500 associated deaths. The scale of this latest outbreak is, as well as being depressingly predictable, a direct consequence of the conflict. And had the parties to the conflict cared, the outbreak was avoidable.

**JUAN GONZÁLEZ:** That was U.N. Emergency Relief Coordinator Stephen O'Brien addressing the U.N. Security Council last month. President Donald Trump signed a series of arms deals with Saudi Arabia totaling a record \$110 billion during a visit to the Saudi capital. The arms deal includes tanks, artillery, ships, helicopters, missile defense systems and cybersecurity technology. United Nations monitors have warned previous Saudi-led attacks on Yemen could constitute crimes against humanity. Over 10,000 people have died since the Saudi bombing campaign began in 2015.

**AMY GOODMAN:** For more, we go to Sana'a, Yemen, where we're joined by Anas Shahari of Save the Children Yemen. He joins us from the capital.

Welcome to *Democracy Now!* Thanks so much for joining us. Tell us the scope of the problem.

**ANAS SHAHARI:** The problem is very massive—excuse me. The problem is very massive. It's like we are facing a very critical situation here. A lot of people are suffering from cholera. I just received an SMS from one friend in a village just before this interview. He's telling me that the cholera is spreading in Hajjah governorate, and people are struggling to get medications. And you can imagine, every day the numbers are increasing. The upsurge is very scary. We have to deal with all of these cases as Yemenis and humanitarian organizations are struggling to respond to the needs of those people with very short funding. You know that Yemen is facing a hard economic situation. The health system is collapsing. We have a lot of social services that are not available. I can give you examples. For example, just a month or more than a month ago, garbage collectors were on strike because they were not paid their salaries. And it was rainy. And this was one of the reasons that contributed to the cholera outbreak, which is the second outbreak, and it's three times more horrific than the previous one.

**JUAN GONZÁLEZ:** And how are medical personnel able to function, given the continuing air war of Saudi Arabia as well as the armed conflicts within the country?

**ANAS SHAHARI:** You know, people in cities where armed conflict is now ongoing are suffering the most, because they don't have hospitals to go to. There are no medical staff. And generally, people in Yemen are suffering because salaries have not been paid to the public servants for about nine months. This gives doctors, nurses, everybody a hard time, because they cannot go to hospitals. They cannot afford anything. I can give you an example. For example, now children in Yemen—8.1 million children—cannot afford healthcare services, cannot afford water to drink or sanitation services. This number is very, very large, if we are talking about the health system and the water—the water grip in the country. Every time I go to a hospital, I keep hearing doctors complaining because they haven't received their salaries to come to the hospital. And you can imagine a doctor can barely afford transportation to go to a hospital to save lives. And recently, when I was in a hospital, I saw a lot of people lying on the ground, because the outbreak happened suddenly. And people went to a hospital here in Sana'a, and they were lying on the ground. They were staying in tents in an isolation unit in a civilian hospital here. It was a very horrific situation. And everybody was suspecting cholera in their houses. For example, I always—I am always suspicious after I come back from a hospital, like maybe I will eat something that will infect my body with cholera, then I'll need to deal with it just like everybody else. So it's a whole package of hardship that we're facing in Yemen.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Anas Shahari, we have just reached one of your colleagues, Dr. Mariam Aldogani with Save the Children in Yemen. Right now she's joining us in the field from Hudaydah governorate in Yemen, where she's treating cholera patients. The phone connection is not very good, so, folks, listen carefully. Dr. Aldogani, thank you so much for joining us. Explain what you're seeing where you are.

**DR. MARIAM ALDOGANI:** Welcome. Yes, I'm in Hudaydah governorate, one of the affected governorates suffering from cholera.

**AMY GOODMAN:** And what do you see? You're treating people with cholera now?

**DR. MARIAM ALDOGANI:** We [inaudible] treated people of cholera. We see a lot of case—we saw a lot of cases in a diarrhea treatment center, which is—I am in Hudaydah. There is two

main hospital centers for treating cholera, a lot of cases there. There's a problem that the [inaudible] and with very hot weather. And even the fuel is very expensive. And because there is no electricity, so imagine, with cholera and the very harsh weather, the situation has become worse. Due to the shortage of medical supply and treatment, we try to do the best. And also, as my colleague Anas mentioned, the health system collapsed. There is no salary, no [inaudible] of the hospitals or health centers. This has made—the situation is very bad.

**JUAN GONZÁLEZ:** And what are you calling—

**DR. MARIAM ALDOGANI:** And, by the way, most of the cases, they are children. For example, I can give you a data. Since the middle of May to now, [inaudible] hospital received more than 1,700 cases and four death case reported.

**JUAN GONZÁLEZ:** We're trying to go back to Anas Shahari. What do you think the world needs to do, or what are you calling for in terms of assistance to the people of Yemen at this time?

**ANAS SHAHARI:** Well, Save the Children and the wider humanitarian community are urgently requiring more funds to expand the response and to manage and mitigate and prevent this outbreak. And we need also the international community to contribute to this crisis, which is considered the biggest crisis in the world, and increase the funding here. We also have a message to the U.N. and to the conflicting parties to facilitate and resume the public-sector salaries, like to put pressures on whoever is concerned and just to resume the public-sector salaries so that people can go back to work in hospitals and other governmental institutions. We also ask all conflicting parties to facilitate our access to the areas where we need to go and save lives.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Earlier this month, Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei accused President Trump of double standards, saying his administration turned a blind eye to Saudi Arabia's bombing of Yemen while claiming to promote human rights around the world.

**AYATOLLAH ALI KHAMENEI:** [translated] It's almost two-and-a-half years since they, the Saudis, have been bombing Yemen, not military installations, but streets, markets, mosques,

hospitals and civilian houses, killing innocent people—women, children, adults. They're killing everyone. And then they—the U.S. president goes to them, Saudi Arabia, and stands by their side, and they chat with each other, they dance with each other, and they speak of human rights. And then they place sanctions against the Islamic establishment of Iran because of human rights.

**AMY GOODMAN:** So, Anas Shahari, can you talk about the connection between war and cholera?

**ANAS SHAHARI:** Well, the war—the war has destroyed all the—like most of the infrastructure we have here in the country. We don't have any sanitation system. The water network is destroyed. We don't have electricity. People who need to boil water before drinking it do not have the cooking gas. Fuel is very expensive, as Dr. Mariam said. The economy of the country is collapsed, has already collapsed. The health system has collapsed. I mean, the war has destroyed everything in this country. And as a Yemeni person, what I am looking for here is to stop this war, to find peaceful solutions between the parties in order for the children, who are paying the heaviest price, to continue their lives and to see brighter futures.

**JUAN GONZÁLEZ:** And in terms of the refugees, people fleeing Yemen to escape the violence and the bombing and the collapse of the—basically, of the total infrastructure of the country, are people continuing to flee the country?

**ANAS SHAHARI:** In the beginning, large numbers of people were fleeing, and about 3 million people fled their houses. But now this number has decreased. But people are moving from place to place, because the conflict sometimes arises in some areas. For example, in an area in Taiz, al-Mokha, there was a conflict that erupted, and people had to leave their homes. And this is also leading to other problems like children dropping classes, not going to school anymore. And now we are left with children that are abandoned behind, and they don't know what their future holds.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Last month, thousands of Yemenis rallied in the capital Sana'a to protest the U.S. arms deal with Saudi Arabia and President Trump's visit to Riyadh. This is the Yemeni journalist Nasser Al-Rabeey.

**NASSER AL-RABEEY:** We are here today to say no for terrorism, no for American terrorism. And we are here to say to Trump: "You kill Yemenis with Saudi hands. You support Qaeda/ISIS by supporting the Saudi Wahhabi regime."

**AMY GOODMAN:** Anas, can you respond, as we wrap up?

**ANAS SHAHARI:** Well, I am a Yemeni person, and I can tell you what we need in this country. We need, number one, peace. And then, number two, we need increasing funds to respond to the humanitarian need. We don't need any more weapons to come to this country. We don't need any more war. We need to live in peace. We need to respond to the needs of those outside who are starving, who are dying because of cholera, who do not find the most basic services and needs in life.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Anas Shahari, we thank you for being with us, media officer for Save the Children, speaking to us from Sana'a, Yemen. We wish you the very best yourself, as well, and for your protection.

**ANAS SHAHARI:** Thank you.