

**Report on**

**The Joint UN  
Emergency Needs Assessment Mission**

**To  
Sa'ada governorate**

**19 May 2007**

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# Report on The Joint UN Emergency Needs Assessment mission To Sa'ada governorate, 19 May 2007

## Mission members

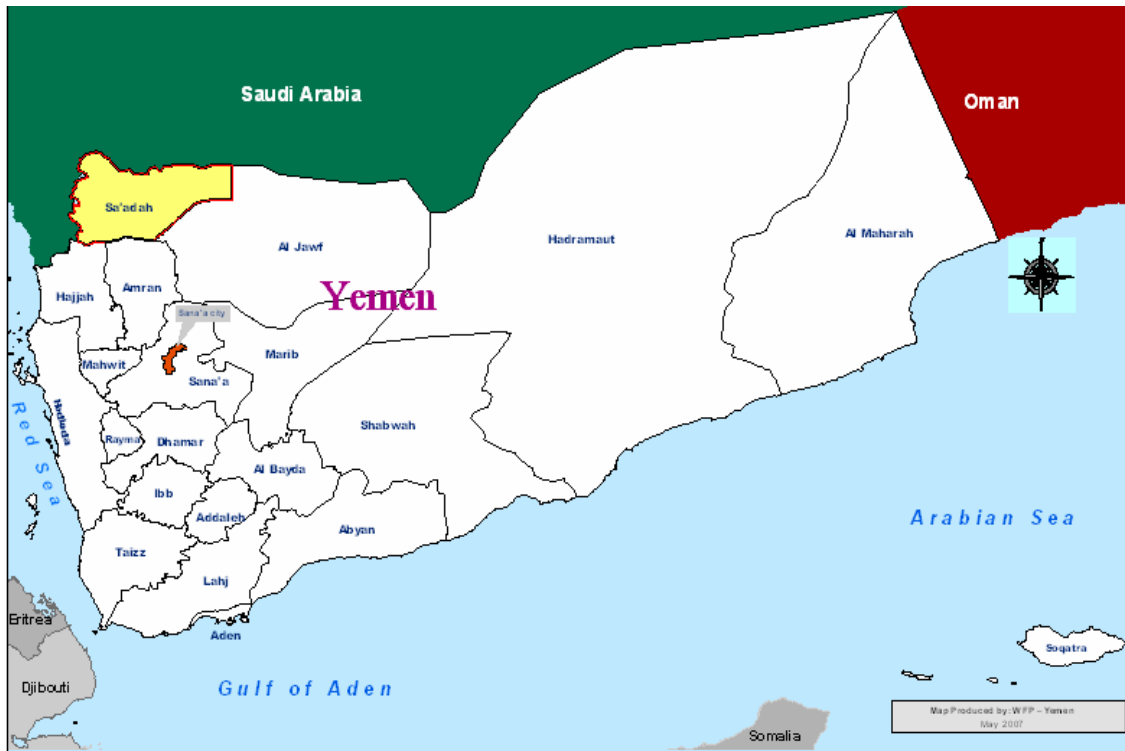
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## Introduction

### A. Location and Population:

Sa'ada governorate in the North of Yemen is one of 21 governorates that bordered with Al Jawf governorate in the East and Southeast, with Amran and Hajjah governorates in the South and Saudi Arabia in the North and West sides. It is comprised of 15 districts including the capital city with a total population of 695,033 people<sup>1</sup>. The capital city of Sa'ada is linked to Sana'a City by a 240 km asphalted road passing through the districts of Raida, Khamar, Houth and Harf Sufyan of Amran governorate.

*Map of Yemen: Location of Sa'ada governorate highlighted as yellow.*



<sup>1</sup> According to population census, 2004

## **B. Background**

The conflict in Sa'ada started in 2004 after Bader Aldin Al-Houthi, a local religious leader from Sa'ada governorate, created a group called Al-Shabab Al-Momen (The faithful youth) to fight for their rights against the government.

After the military action in 2004 which resulted in the death of Bader Aldin Al-Houthi, it was thought that the struggle will come to an end, but later in 2005 the father of the deceased leader started a guerilla war against the government.

However in 2006, the government found that the Houthi group was involved in incidents of bomb explosion, which happened in other parts of the country including the Capital Sana'a. The government planed a military operation in a limited scale in the governorate. The skirmishes between the government forces and the rebellions continued during 2006 and could not be fully controlled.

In January 2007, the government started full scale military operations in different parts of the governorate. This resulted in a mass exodus of the civilian to seek shelter in safe areas in Sa'ada City and its surrounding areas. Most of the affected families moved with their relatives and friends. However, families without any shelter had to be accommodated in camps created by the ICRC in Sa'ada city and it surrounding areas. These displaced families had very little to eat and were dependent on irregular aid being received from different Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Yemeni Red Crescent Society supported by ICRC. There were reports that with the passage of time the families were selling their assets to buy food. The host families also can no longer shoulder the load of their guests unless urgent assistance is provided.

Since the beginning of the full scale operation by the military in Sa'ada, the UNCT through the United Nations Emergency Preparedness and Response Team (UNEPRT) was trying to send a mission to the area to assess the situation. After continued persuasion and meetings with the government authorities, an assessment mission was finally permitted on 19 May 2007 to assess the humanitarian needs of the IDPs and look into different possible means and ways for responding to emergency needs.

The mission comprised the representatives from UNICEF, WFP and WHO. It was supported by UNDSS.

### **Objectives of the mission**

The assessment mission was assigned the task of achieving the following objectives:

- Identify those needs of the affected population that requires immediate response and possible humanitarian intervention,
- Determine the number of those affected by the conflict and identify their locations,
- Determine if external assistance is needed and if so what food items and non-food items are needed,
- Identify mechanism for interventions to support livelihoods as well as lives,
- Determine the level and duration of possible assistance to different groups and geographic areas/camps,
- Identify logistical means and capacity and institutional means to support appropriate intervention strategies,

- Complete a data analysis of all data collected and generate a comprehensive report,
- Review security conditions for possible UN presence in the area and operational activities,
- Brief/debrief Government, donor representatives and international agencies on the findings and recommendations of the Mission,
- Report writing.

### **Officials and other individuals met**

Government officials, other agencies and individuals who were met in Sa'ada governorate for the purpose of obtaining data for the assessment included:

1. Mr. Motahar Rashad Al Masri, Governor of Sa'ada
2. Mr. Salem Mohamed Al Wahaishi, Deputy Governor
3. Dr. Hanbush Hussein, Deputy Director Health
4. Mr. Michael Vettiger, ICRC Delegate
5. Dr. Abdalbaki Ali Shaweet, Director of Sa'ada branch of Yemen Red Crescent Society (YRCS)
6. Mr. Abdullah Rajeh, Director of Agriculture Department
7. Residents (several) of Al-Anad tented IDPs camp.

### **Major findings**

#### **1. General situations**

Generally, the situation seems volatile, but vague to determine the real scope of the problem. Lack of proper statistics on casualties, and the number of affected and displaced people make it difficult to measure the current humanitarian needs of the population concerned. The mission, however, tried to collect data from different sources including interviews with different people as well as personal observation and the subsequent inferences on the needs and possible interventions are likely to be close to the reality.

Although the security situation in the city of Sa'ada appeared to be calm, tension prevails in the city due to the numbers of check points and random searches.

Concerning the total number of Internally Displaced People (IDPs), different sources put the figure differently and it was difficult to be verified independently, as the IDP families are scattered in and around the City of Sa'ada, some with friends and relatives, others in small settlements and IDP camps.

According to H. E. Motahar Rashad Al Masri, the Governor of Sa'ada, the total number of displaced people in the entire Sa,ada governorate is 35,000 people. However, ICRC estimates that it could be around 55,000 to 60,000 people. At one point in the beginning, ICRC provided assistance to about 6,000 families (around 42,000 people). But now due to security reasons, many of the areas are inaccessible. During April 2007, ICRC was able to deliver assistance to 22,750 individuals (3,312 families) as per Table.1.

Table:1

Area	Locality	No. of Families	No. of people (estimates)
Al Saifi	Mahjar Achmaas	78	546
Al Saifi	Al Masaiba	18	126
Al Saifi	Al Daria	21	147
Al Saifi	Al Nawaz	16	112
Al Saifi	Al Daquaeq	12	84
Al Ammar	Al Ammar	381	2,667
Al Ammar	Al Mahadir	81	567
Al Salem	Al Salem	59	413
Akwan	Akwan	43	301
Bani Oer	Bani Oer	130	910
Damaj	Damaj	76	532
Mandaba	Mandaba	44	308
Saa'da	Al Asghool	111	787
Saa'da	City & surrounds	1992	14,000
Saa'da	Al Annad	250	1,250
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>3,312</b>	<b>22,750</b>

During the visit, the mission was informed by ICRC that due to security reasons, only about 2,353 families (16,037 people) living in Sa'ada city and its surrounding areas within seven kilometers are accessible. (See table 2)

As an additional number of families have arrived in Sa'ada during the month of May 2007, the mission recommends the planning figure of 20,000 individuals for immediate emergency response. It should also be noted that the Governor expressed the need for establishing an additional camp of 500 tents (3,500 people) for those families who are not settled yet and also those who are likely to come in the near future.

Table: 2

Area	Place	Households	Estimated Individuals
Saa'da City	Al Asqool	111	787
Saa'da City	City & surrounds	1992	14,000
Saa'da City	Al- Annad	250	1,250
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>2,353</b>	<b>16,037</b>

The ICRC assistance, which is delivered through YRCS, includes shelter and housing materials. So far they have distributed 1,000 tents, out of which 250 tents were erected in Al Anad IDP camp that was established in February this year. According to YRCS register, which manage the camp, there are 1,250 people living there at present.

The area of Al Anad IDP camp was basically an agriculture nursery farm and is the property of the Department of Agriculture. The camp area is protected by an about 2.5 meter high muddy surrounding wall and proper entrance. Almost half of the compound area is still empty and ICRC/YRCS plan to extend the camp by about 200 more tents. The requirements for extension part of the camp including the shelter, housing material, water and sanitation facilities will be met by ICRC similar to the existing part.

Although, record on age and sex breakdown of the IDPs was not available, it was obvious that there were many vulnerable people including women, children and elderly persons.

According to ICRC, there are 800 IDP families in Baqim district near the border of Saudi Arabia, which is about 90 km to the North of Sa'ada city. One of the ICRC people had gone to the area some time back and could assist and enumerate the needs of 560 families. ICRC attempted to send a convoy of assistance to Baqim but the convoy was attacked by some gun men.



Scattered IDPs in Sa'ada

The Sa'ada branch Director of YRCS is of the opinion that the number of IDP families is likely to increase, so long term plan should be made to meet the humanitarian needs of about 8,000 to 10,000 families.

## 2. Food Situation

Food stuff, according to different people as well personal observation, is the most critical need of the IDP families. Most of those people were coming from poor working class background in their original places of living. So they already had a kind of hand-to-mouth living. Now, with no work and no income facilities, they have no purchasing power. Therefore, they have started selling their assets to buy food for survival.

ICRC is not in the business of food distribution. Other charity organizations, local and international, are not there at present. According to ICRC and the IDPs in the camp, a number of organizations including ADRA, Islamic Relief and Care International had a one time distribution of food items (wheat flour, edible oil, rice and sugar) two months ago.

The situation is quite critical, as some of the IDPs had already sold their personal assets such as TVs, radios, etc, to buy food.

Borrowing food from each other and skipping some daily meals among the adults in the camp were the main coping mechanisms for survival, which was not even successful with some households who left the camp to unknown direction.

The situation is reportedly the same for the IDPs who are settled with their relatives and now becoming a heavy burden on them.

## 3. Health and Nutrition

The biggest load of health services for the war wounded as well as for the IDPs, according to the Deputy Director of Health, is on the Republican General Hospital and Al Salam Hospital.

There is a serious shortage of medicine in the public health facilities. People, especially the IDPs, can hardly afford to buy medicine from the private pharmacies. WHO through the Ministry of Public Health and Population (MoPH&P) had sent in March 07 one Emergency Medical Kit that is sufficient for 10,000 people for three months. The Kit has already been exhausted as it was distributed to different health facility in the City.

Al Anad IDP camp is served by a Government health clinic, which is staffed by 1-doctor, 2-midwives, 1-nurse and 1-pharmacist. The services provided by the clinic include OPD, Immunization, minor surgeries and dressing. There are no lab facilities in the clinic and it faces shortage of medicine, similar as other public health facilities.

An ICRC medical team is expected to arrive soon and will strengthen the existing health facility in the IDP camp.

Though no statistics were available on malnutrition in the area and in particular amongst the children, the mission observed that some children were looking very weak and show some sign of malnutrition. We were informed that ICRC is already planning to send a nutritionist to assess the situation.

In the short period in the IDP camp, in addition to observing several cases of malnutrition in children, the Mission noticed two children with fresh scars of leishmaniasis. A number of people were complaining of eye infections in children.

#### **4. Water and Sanitation**

Water was regularly pumped through pipes extended from a tube well in a corner of the IDP compound to four water tanks, each of 2,000 liter capacity. A number of faucets were fitted in each tank for collecting water by families in plastic jerry-cans. There was enough water for drinking and household use.

Also, there were 24 pour flash latrines; 12 for the use of men and 12 for the use of women, divided on the number of families in the camp. At the moment, every latrine is serving 52 people. There is a need to increase the number of latrines to have 20 persons per latrine in the future, according to UNICEF emergency field manual, to reduce the existing competition.

A proper system was established for solid waste management as the garbage from the tents were kept in plastic bags near the tents and whenever needed, loaded in a truck and disposed outside the IDP compound.

#### **5. Education**

According to a telephone conversation with the General Director of Education of Sa'ada Governorate, Mr. Naji Al-Ghaithi, the education has been stopped in the districts of Razeh, Ghamr, Qataber, Magz, Sahar and Safra since January 2007. The school buildings were ruined and the furniture was destroyed due to the fighting. Small numbers of the IDP families, who have relatives in Sa'ada town, moved their children to Sa'ada town schools. The rest of the children did not get any education since January 2007.

There is no specific information on the status of education services for the IDP children who reside in different part of Sa'ada City. But for children in Al Annad IDP camp, there is no school facility at all. When we asked if the children were going to schools outside the IDP compound, they said only two children.



## Recommendations

1. From our meeting with the Governor, we felt that there is little understanding of the joint responsibilities of government authorities and other humanitarian organizations, particularly of the UN Agencies, in addressing the humanitarian needs of the displaced people and also the role that collaborative efforts can play in easing the situations. As a result of the deliberation, there was, however, an assurance from the Governor to support any efforts of the UN related to humanitarian assistance including establishing office. He also appointed Mr. Salem Al Wahaishi, one of his deputies, as the contact person to facilitate the work of the UN.

It is, therefore, recommended that through the appointed contact person, better communication should be fostered with the government authorities, possibly by establishing an immediate nucleus UN presence for liaising humanitarian efforts.

2. Since food items are the most urgent needs of the IDPs, as was expressed by everyone, it is recommended that WFP arrange as soon as possible for food distribution, according to its standards, for 20,000 people including all the accessible IDPs in Sa'ada city who are about 16,000, plus 4,000 projected incoming IDPs to Sa'ada city or foreseen accessible IDPs in very near future.

The governor office has agreed to provide storage facility, but the distribution process of the food items should be closely monitored by WFP.

3. For addressing the immediate shortage of medicine for the IDPs, WHO may liaise with the Health Office of Sa'ada and send some Emergency Medical Kits. For other health needs of IDPs, the existing health facilities should be strengthened with additional health services including preventive, diagnostic and therapeutic services. Establishing of Early Warning System (EWS) for certain health problems including measles, diarrhea, malaria, etc., is highly recommend. The Health Office in the governorate can be used as the implementing partner.

Outreach EPI services should be arranged for the IDP children in the Camp area and other settlements in Sa'ada City and also efforts should be made to support and enhance EPI services in the affected districts.

Organizing health education sessions, particularly in the IDP camps, are very important for addressing health and hygiene related issues and raising people awareness.

A nutrition survey of U5 children is recommended in the IDP camp for determining the right course of action, either therapeutic feeding center or supplementary feeding.

4. UNICEF should coordinate with the Ministry of Education and address the issue of education for children, at least for the IDP camp for the time being. The existing level of water and sanitation for the IDP camp is satisfactory. ICRC should be assisted for maintaining the current level and also when the camp is extended. Decrease the number of people per latrine to 20 people would help in reducing the level of suffering of people, especially among women and children.
5. It was difficult to assess the needs of IDPs who are located outside Sa'ada city. To reach those people, the possibilities of channeling assistance through those who can reach, preferably ICRC, should be sought.
6. While the assessment conducted by the mission is sufficient to respond to the immediate needs, further assessments should be carried out, in and outside Saada, as soon as circumstances permit.

## Location of different IDP settlements in Sa'ada governorates



(Source of picture: local newspaper)