

Humanitarian crisis in Yemen exacerbated by COVID-19



Sanaa, May 22 (RHC)-- The international aid group Doctors Without Borders (Medecins Sans Frontieres, or MSF) said the virus-related death toll at a medical center it runs in southern Yemen attests to "a wider catastrophe" in the country, where a five-year civil war had already caused the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

The facility in Aden admitted 173 patients between April 30 and May 17, at least 68 of whom have died, the group said in a statement. The United Nations-recognized Yemeni government in the south has confirmed 193 cases, with 33 fatalities.

"What we are seeing in our treatment center is just the tip of the iceberg, in terms of the number of people infected and dying in the city," said Caroline Seguin, MSF's operations manager for Yemen. "People are coming to us too late to save, and we know that many more people are not coming at all: they are just dying at home."

The World Health Organization says its models suggest that, under some scenarios, half of Yemen's population of 30 million could be infected with the virus and more than 40,000 could die.

Yemen's health facilities are severely strained and 18 percent of the country's 333 districts have no doctors. Water and sanitation systems have collapsed. Many families can barely afford one meal a day.

"The high level of mortality we are seeing among our patients is equivalent to those of intensive care units in Europe, but the people we see dying are much younger than in France or Italy: mostly men between 40 and 60 years old," Seguin said.

The war in Yemen has killed more than 100,000 people and left millions suffering from food and medical shortages.

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