

UN warns of Yemen ‘death sentence’ as donor pledges fall short

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Malnourished boy Hassan Merzam Muhammad lies on a bed at his house in the Abs district of Hajjah province, Yemen. (Photo: Eissa Alragehi/Reuters)

United Nations, March 1 (RHC)-- The United Nations chief has warned of a “death sentence” for Yemen as an international donor conference yielded less than half the funds needed to fund urgently needed humanitarian programmes and prevent a devastating famine in the war-ravaged country.

The UN had appealed for \$3.85 billion at Monday’s virtual pledging event that was co-hosted by Sweden and Switzerland, but just \$1.7 billion was offered.

“Millions of Yemeni children, women and men desperately need aid to live. Cutting aid is a death sentence,” UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said in a statement, describing the outcome as “disappointing-”

“The best that can be said about today is that it represents a down payment. I thank those who did pledge generously, and I ask others to consider again what they can do to help stave off the worst famine the world has seen in decades,” Guterres said.

Last year’s humanitarian funding had dropped to half of what was needed and half of what was received the year before, according to the United Nations.

More than 100 governments and donors took part on Monday’s conference. Some of the headline pledges, including \$191 million from the U.S. and Saudi Arabia’s \$430 million, were smaller than last year’s donations. However, Germany offered 200 million euros (\$241 million), compared to \$138 million last year.

Shrinking humanitarian budgets last year forced the closure of many programmes including health services and food distribution, heaping hardship on a country where some two-thirds of the population relies on some form of aid to survive.

According to the latest UN data, more than 16 million Yemenis – about half the population – will face hunger this year. Nearly 50,000 are already starving to death in famine-like conditions. The world body has warned that 400,000 Yemeni children under the age of five could die from acute malnutrition.

Houthi spokesman Mohammed Abdul Salam hit out at the pledges, saying it was a whitewashing attempt for those countries involved in the conflict. “The conference ... does not help Yemen as much as it helps the aggressor nations by giving them the opportunity to cleanse their record and present themselves as donor countries,” he said in a tweet.

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