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#ChildrenUnderAttack

# BORN INTO WAR

1,000 DAYS OF LOST CHILDHOOD

Yemen is one of the  
**worst** places  
in the world to be a child

unicef  | for every child



# A tragedy for children

More than 3 million children have been born in Yemen since the escalation in violence in March 2015.

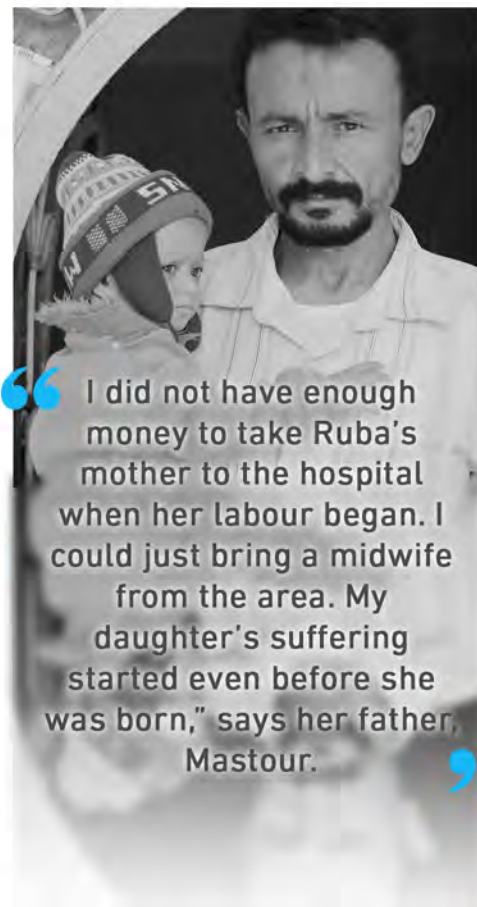
Two year old Ruba Mastour is a symbol of children's suffering in the first 1,000 days of Yemen's brutal war. Conceived just after the conflict escalated in March 2015, Ruba was born a frail and under-weight baby in Zabid City, Hodeidah, the poorest governorate in Yemen. Since then, Ruba has only known war, deprivation and illness.

In the last 1000 days, Yemen has collapsed into the world's largest humanitarian crisis. But for young children like Ruba, the situation is likely to spiral to even lower depths.

## Yemen is one of the worst places in the world to be a child

For the 3 million children born since the conflict intensified, their first 1,000 days of life have been marred by violence, displacement, disease, poverty and a lack of access to the basics of life such as food, clean water, medicine, education and safety.

When Ruba was born 1,000 days ago, her mother, Fawzia, was already sick and malnourished. The war had destroyed the family's livelihood and her father, Mastour, was struggling to make ends meet. The chances of Ruba being born healthy and well were slim.



“ I did not have enough money to take Ruba's mother to the hospital when her labour began. I could just bring a midwife from the area. My daughter's suffering started even before she was born,” says her father, Mastour. ”

# The extent of children's suffering

The depths of children's suffering in Yemen's 1,000 days of war is staggering



An average of five children have been killed or injured every day since the conflict escalated in March 2015



11.3 million children need humanitarian assistance to survive – nearly every single child in Yemen.



Children under five account for over a quarter of suspected cholera cases.



1.8 million children are acutely malnourished: of these nearly 400,000 children suffer from severe acute malnutrition.



Half of all children are stunted



More than half of the 2.9 million displaced people are children.



Nearly 2 million children are out of school, including half a million who dropped out since the conflict escalated in March 2015.



An average, 70% of children and their families live below the poverty line.



72% of girls are married off before they turn 18.



Nearly 16 million Yemenis need humanitarian assistance for access to safe drinking water, basic sanitation and hygiene facilities.

# Early childhood in conflict

Not only are children the immediate casualties of the war in Yemen, they are also hit hardest by its indirect results. Young children under the age of 5 are especially vulnerable in times of crises. They risk physical harm, psychological trauma and crippling delays in their social, emotional and cognitive development.

In Yemen, women who became pregnant during the first 1,000 days of war have given birth in deplorable conditions, without access to proper medical care, clean water and or a hygienic environment for delivery. Many mothers are malnourished and ill themselves, increasing their risk of dying or giving birth to premature and malnourished babies who do not make it beyond their first month of life.

Though two-year old Ruba has survived her first two years, her life hangs by a thread as she fights multiple diseases, including malaria and typhoid. She also had thalassemia, an inherited blood disorder that leads to anaemia.

Only 45 per cent of all health facilities are fully functional<sup>1</sup> and more than half of the country's children don't have access to safe drinking water or adequate sanitation. An acute watery diarrhea and cholera epidemic has affected over 1 million people<sup>2</sup>. Children under 5 years old account for more than a quarter of all suspected cases<sup>3</sup>.

The country's economy is devastated and poverty is increasing. The number of poor Yemenis in 2016 was at least 4 million higher than in 2014<sup>4</sup> just before the conflict escalated. Two-fifths of the population now lives in poverty, and children have lost opportunities to grow, learn and fulfill their potential.



1- UNOCHA, Periodic Monitoring Review, January – April 2017, April 2017.

2- 1,001,428 suspected cases of acute watery diarrhea/cholera by December 22nd 2017 as per the WHO's Daily Epidemiological Update dated 22 December 2017.

3- Ibid.

4- World Bank, Poverty Notes on the 2014 Household Budget Survey, 2017.

Mastour's financial situation deteriorated in the months following Ruba's birth. Ruba soon became severe acutely malnourished and needed immediate medical treatment. Her father had to borrow money to rush his baby daughter to the hospital and pay for the rising costs of medicine.

Ruba was born in a bad situation and so far, she has never known comfort," says Mastour with resignation. "Nothing is worse than becoming a father of a sick child, especially during the war.

Families are resorting to extreme measures just to survive, often at the expense of their children's wellbeing. Around 80 per cent of families are in debt and 60 per cent<sup>5</sup> are eating less or poor quality food.

Some families have no other choice than to send their children to battlefields, to beg or work, or to marry their daughters off at a very young age. Child marriage and early pregnancy are devastating for teenage girls, damaging their physical and emotional health and their ability to continue their education or find employment.

Ruba's family now survives through donations from generous neighbours. Mastour still goes out with his wheelbarrow filled with a handful of items for sale but often returns empty-handed. His stock is low and he doesn't have enough capital to replenish his wheelbarrow with the kind of basic goods people in the neighbourhood would buy. He also owes many people money and avoids them because he cannot pay off his debts.



Sixty per cent of the total Yemeni population is food insecure and needs urgent food assistance.

Around 1.8 million children under 5 are acutely malnourished. Of these, nearly 400,000 suffer from severe acute malnutrition, a life-threatening condition. The chances of death for moderately malnourished children are four times higher than those of healthy children. Severely malnourished children are 11 times more likely to die if not treated on time.



Stressed families are struggling to care for their young children and early childhood learning programmes are almost non-existent. The education system is buckling under the pressure of war, and nearly 2 million children – more than a quarter of all school-aged children – were not in school during the 2016/2017 school year. At least 4.5 million children or 78 per cent of all students living in 13 governorates are at risk of missing a year of school due to teachers not being paid their salaries. A total of 429 schools<sup>6</sup> have been damaged in the war, are hosting IDPs or are occupied by armed forces or armed groups.

Our financial situation was bad to begin with but it has become worse since the conflict began," says Mastour.



While little Ruba is still not old enough to go to school, 12 year-old Mohammed is, but school is no longer a safe place of learning and play. He narrowly escaped an attack on his school in Serwah city in Ma'reb governorate north-east of Yemen and has been traumatized to the extent that he had forgotten everything including the alphabet he had learned in school.

“The only thing I remembered was the sound of a blast that hit the school...The explosion was so terrifying and I shook with fear. I ran out of the school to a nearby mountain to seek shelter there. I remember that I was standing on the mountain but I don't remember how I got there,” says Mohammed.

This is the last that Mohammed recalls and now he has joined first grade again.



In the 1,000 days of fighting, at least 5,000 children have been killed or injured. This means that on average, at least five children are killed or injured every day in Yemen; some of these children are now living with permanent disabilities. These are verified figures and the actual numbers are likely to be much higher.

Beyond the immediate threat to their lives, children who face war from such close quarters are prone to post traumatic stress disorder, which can affect their overall development and growth.



If left untreated, her condition can lead to more severe and lifelong mental illness. The sounds of war will ring in their ears for a long time.

# Lost opportunities

In the turmoil of the past 1000 days, children like Ruba are losing a critical window of opportunity to survive, thrive, learn and reach their full potential.

What should happen in the first 1,000 days of life for a child to survive and thrive?

And what happened to Ruba because of the 1,000 days of war...

## During pregnancy

Healthy pregnancy for the mother, including good antenatal care and nutrition.



No access to four antenatal care visits; family livelihood destroyed; not enough food at home; Ruba's mother is sick and malnourished.

Good parental knowledge of safe motherhood

Ruba's parents don't have the knowledge or ability to ensure that the pregnancy is safe and that Ruba is born healthy

## During childbirth

Skilled care at birth, facility-based delivery, emergency obstetric and newborn care



Ruba's father can't afford a hospital delivery; Ruba's mother gives birth at home with a midwife. Ruba is born with a low-birth weight.

## After birth

Emergency care for small and sick babies



Ruba is a sick baby and because she doesn't get medical care, her health quickly worsens.

Postnatal home visits by health worker

Ruba's father borrows money, putting the family further into debt, and rushes Ruba to hospital to be treated for severe acute malnutrition.

## During early childhood

Integrated management of early childhood illness (IMCI), including management of malnutrition



Ruba's weak immunity and her lack of access to health care make her prone to diseases such as malaria and typhoid.

Good nutrition

Ruba's nutritional status deteriorates

Access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation

Drinking contaminated water puts Ruba at risk of cholera.

Access to early learning and play

Ruba's cognitive development becomes stunted due to lack of adequate stimulation and play.

Protection from violence

Ruba's emotional development is stunted by the effects of fear, anxiety and trauma.

Access to social protection

Ruba's impoverished family cannot make ends meet due to the lack of social protection; and Ruba's older siblings are at risk of child labour and child marriage.

## Ruba's future

Ruba faces stunted cognitive, physical and emotional growth and increased risk of injury, trauma, disease and death. Her family's negative coping mechanisms may eventually push her into child marriage and early pregnancy when she reaches puberty.

# UNICEF IN ACTION

"The situation is very difficult and the health system remains under attack but donor support, partners' dedication and the resilience of the Yemeni people are working to save as many children's lives as possible. In the last 1000 days, 167,338 children with severe acute malnutrition under 5 years old were admitted to therapeutic feeding and care with support from UNICEF. Another 4.8 million children under 5 were vaccinated against polio."

**Dr. Fouzia Shafique, Chief of Health & Nutrition**



"Together with our partners, we are doing our utmost to fulfil people's basic right to clean and safe water.

Nearly 6 million people were reached with clean water with UNICEF support for the operation, maintenance and rehabilitation of public water systems."

**Anes Al-Arashi, WASH Officer, Sa'ada**



"Even if schools are damaged and children are displaced, education cannot wait. With UNICEF's support, more than 380,000 children were able to learn thanks to temporary learning spaces, school rehabilitation, cash grants and school furniture."

**Tahani Saeed, Education Officer, Ibb**



"Even in wartime, we help provide children with the protection they need. Every year, with UNICEF support, 400,000 people (80 per cent are children) receive psychosocial support; at least 300,000 marginalized, displaced and conflict-affected children are provided with birth certificates; and more than 800,000 conflict affected people are made aware of child recruitment, child marriage, birth registration and other child protection issues."

**Noor Alkasadi, Child Protection Specialist, Sana'a**



"UNICEF is always at the forefront of supporting the poorest and most vulnerable children and their families. Since the conflict escalated in 2015, UNICEF has provided humanitarian cash assistance to 110,000 people, including more than 61,000 children, in both Sana'a city and a war-torn Taiz."

**Faniya Mussayeva, Chief of Social Policy, Sana'a**



From all our interactions managing the emergency cash transfer project for Yemen, most striking for me is how resilient the people of Yemen are. Thanks to generous funding from the World Bank Group, 8.66 million Yemenis have benefitted from the August to November 2017 payment cycle. They are former beneficiaries of the Social Welfare Fund; and for almost 3 years, they received no benefit. They have suffered multiple shocks, but yet they have lined up day after day, trusting new systems and new people. That for me is a testimony to the strength and resolve of the people of Yemen!"

**Sara Beysolow Nyanti, Team Leader - Yemen Emergency Cash Transfer Project, Amman**



"Even in war, we cannot underestimate the power of the community in making a great difference and saving lives. With UNICEF support, more than 17 million people in Yemen were reached with key messages on cholera prevention in 2017, and 4 million cholera prevention brochures were distributed during a house-to-house awareness campaign in August."

**Ansar Rashid, C4D Officer, Aden**







## The Next 1000 days

In Alsabeen hospital in Sana'a, Baby Hasan was born 1000 days after the country saw the worst escalation in fighting. Will baby Hasan face the same misery, poor health and suffering that two year old Ruba has experienced? Will the world turn a blind eye to his suffering as it did to the first 1,000 days of conflict that Ruba faced?

On behalf of one day-old Hasan, UNICEF is asking the all parties to the conflict and the international community to:



Immediately reaching a peaceful political solution and putting an end to the violence.



Abiding by their obligations under international humanitarian law to protect children unconditionally during conflict.



Providing sustainable and unconditional access to deliver assistance to every child in need in Yemen. Restrictions on imports of goods into Yemen must be lifted. Food and fuel are essential to counter the threat of famine and to power hospitals and vital water systems.



Preventing the total collapse of public social services including health care, water systems and education. Salaries for health workers and teachers need to be paid.



Providing sufficient funds for assistance to be sustained. In 2018, UNICEF is appealing for US\$ 312 million to continue responding to the urgent needs of children in the country.

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