

# OUR YEMENI NEIGHBORS ARE STILL IN CRISIS



In April, Yemenis marked the end of their daylight fasting throughout the month of Ramadan<sup>1</sup> by celebrating Eid Al-Fitr, observing the holiday as a nation at war for the eighth year in a row. This year, however, the holiday was accompanied by signs that the international parties involved in the conflict no longer have the will to fight, including a large-scale, multi-day prisoner swap involving nearly 900 detainees. The exchange, which was completed on April 16th, is being touted as a confidence-building measure coinciding with an intense diplomatic push to negotiate an end to hostilities between the Iran-backed Houthis and the Saudi-led coalition that has battled them since March of 2015.<sup>2</sup>

However, as international actors look for a quick exit from their costly intervention, many Yemeni grievances are being sidelined. Deep enmities remain unreconciled and little effort is being made to mend the social fabric of a nation shredded by years of bloodshed, violence, and famine. One researcher warned that the Houthis are unwilling to share political power and that Saudi Arabia's direct negotiations with the group have come at the expense of all other Yemeni parties. He also doubts that the Houthis will gain international legitimacy as a governmental body, which will continue to deter international investment in Yemen, and could slow down any reconstruction efforts. "The current talks may even increase the risk of a disintegration of the state, as other parties will not agree to live under Houthi control," he said.<sup>3</sup>

A pending agreement between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis is expected to include a six-month ceasefire, a reopening of borders and ports, payments of salaries for Yemenis across the country, reparation and compensation measures, and a withdrawal of all foreign forces from Yemen.<sup>4</sup> However, political commentator Sami Hamdi insists that while vulnerable Yemenis may experience some relief from these measures, the Yemeni people have no real stake in the negotiations. "It's about a settlement in which Saudis get the Houthis to stop firing missiles at them, and Houthis say, 'We defeated the Saudis; now let's subjugate the Yemenis.'"<sup>5</sup>

Regardless of the outcomes of the current peace talks, millions of Yemeni girls, boys, women, and men will remain in crisis without additional assistance. Released on March 25th to mark the eighth anniversary of the Saudi-led military intervention, the report [Inside Yemen: The Forgotten War](#), is difficult to watch. Yet it serves as an important reminder of the devastating realities faced by vulnerable Yemenis fighting for survival today. It is a fight that many may continue to lose as existing humanitarian interventions scale back programming due to funding cuts.

In 2022, local non-profits in Yemen were able to assist fathers like Marwan. Marwan is a 38-year-old fisherman who was displaced with his family five years ago. While fleeing to a camp for Internally Displaced People (IDPs), Marwan stepped on a landmine and lost a leg. Since then, Marwan, his wife, and their son and daughter have lived in a small tent set up near the seacoast—barely surviving as conditions in the country have continued to deteriorate. When a team from a local non-profit met Marwan while registering beneficiaries for a food distribution, he told them, “God sent you to help me. I have nothing to feed myself and my family and I don’t even have a wheelchair to go out and seek help.”

In addition to registering the family for the food distribution, this local team provided them with a shelter box—and even a wheelchair for Marwan. The relief this family experienced was made possible through the generosity of international partners supporting the initiatives of local non-profits with both financial and in-kind contributions. “You saved our lives,” Marwan told the team as he thanked them. “I know that God won’t abandon us.”

In 2023, with peace talks dominating headlines about Yemen, some international partners—fatigued by their tireless efforts to respond to the protracted crisis to date—are welcoming the opportunity to turn their attention and resources elsewhere. However, for fathers like Marwan, whose meager coping strategies were exhausted long ago, the consequences could be catastrophic if local non-profits no longer have the resources required to meet these families’ most urgent needs.

Long ago, Jesus told a story about a traveler who was robbed and beaten nearly unconscious. As the traveler lay by the roadside, left for dead, two different men passed him by. These men looked like him and they spoke like him. They worshipped God the same way he did—in fact they were experts in theology and models for moral living. They shared the same worldview and the same cultural and religious blind spots as the traveler—but they did not stop to help. Eventually, a third man did stop to help. He tended the traveler’s wounds, took him to a safe place, and paid for his care—but this man wasn’t like the traveler. He didn’t worship God the same way. His worldview was different and most men like the traveler wouldn’t have even spoken to this man. He probably hadn’t studied a lot of theology and he may not have been moral according to the traveler’s standards. Still, he acted in mercy—mercy that was not attached to another motive or a larger strategy. It was just mercy. This man, Jesus said, had counted the traveler as his neighbor and fulfilled the command of love.

Today, let’s ask God to continue using His children to fulfill His command of love in Yemen—drawing diverse partners to work together to show mercy without distinction in what remains among the world’s largest humanitarian crises. Let’s pray also that their initiatives will lay a foundation for reconciliation in a nation torn by eight years of war as they stand together as peacemakers, aware of their own blind spots, limitations, and need for mercy.

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1 For devout Muslims, the month of Ramadan is a season to pray, fast, reflect, and seek God’s forgiveness for their sins. Muhammad reported receiving the initial revelations of the Qur’an during the month of Ramadan, and fasting during the month is one of the five pillars of Islamic practice.

2 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/4/15/dozens-of-yemeni-rebels-fly-from-saudi-arabia-in-prisoner-swap>

3 <https://www.dw.com/en/despite-hope-yemen-peace-talks-are-oversold-experts-say/a-65296492>

4 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/4/12/is-omans-hard-work-with-yemen-and-saudi-arabia-paying-off>

5 <https://twitter.com/salhachimi/status/1645558695877652483?s=24&t=f-RYCo5M2YLYWhK662a7oQ>