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PRESS RELEASE

11th April 2021

FOSY appeals to the international community for assistance as COVID cases increase significantly in southern governorates

FOSY appeals to the international community for urgent assistance due to a significant increase in COVID cases in the southern governorates of Aden, Lahij, Shabwah and Dhala.

Yemen is now in the grip of a second wave of COVID infections. On April 9th the health minister announced that occupancy in intensive care units in quarantine centers has reached maximum capacity because of a sharp increase in the number of cases in recent days.

Oxfam reported a 22-fold increase in recorded cases in recent weeks. Yemen's health system is estimated to be operating at half of its pre-war capacity despite the massively increased need for it. Many healthcare staff have been unpaid for months while there are just 700 ICU beds and 500 ventilators for a population of 30 million. The latest statistics indicate there are 5276 cases in the country, 1031 deaths and 2027 recoveries but an absence of adequate testing suggests the real figures are a lot higher.

During the first COVID outbreak in April -May 2020 the United Nations estimated that a quarter of the population of Aden could be infected, and hospitals had to turn away patients with symptoms.

There is a dire shortage of treatment facilities. When the virus first reached Yemen in April 2020 there was only one dedicated COVID centre in Aden that served the entire south.

On 23rd September 2020, The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Finnish Red Cross and the Norwegian Red Cross opened a second coronavirus treatment centre, providing free care to all in Aden in collaboration with the Yemen Red Crescent Society.

'Many hospitals in Aden closed their doors when the first wave of coronavirus hit. People must have treatment options available in case they become ill. The new treatment centre and effective preventive work conducted by the Red Cross amongst communities are vital for controlling the spread of the illness,' said Tiina Saarikoski, Head of International Disaster Management in the Finnish Red Cross.

A previously unused military hospital in Al-Qatn, Hadramaut has been opened and prepared by the Ministry of Health to receive and isolate COVID patients from outlying areas and towns but it is in need of CT scans, diagnostic machines and PPI.

On 10 April 2020, Yemen recorded its first laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 case in the Southern governorate of Hadhramut. By the end of May, cases and deaths had been reported in the governorates of Aden, Taiz, Lahj and Sanaa

In her documentary *Yemen: Coronavirus in a War Zone* BBC correspondent Nawal Al-Maghafi described her visit to Radwan cemetery in Aden. It opened in April, 2020. By August, it was full. "There were so many deaths, there was not even time to eat", recalled the gravedigger, Ghassan. "It was worse than the war."

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) took over Aden's sole COVID treatment centre in Al Amal Hospital during the first COVID outbreak. On 1st September 2020 with declining daily cases, the charity said local authorities it had trained could manage the pandemic.

But the virus has now returned and South Yemen urgently needs the assistance of the international community to treat those affected and provide much-needed education programmes to help stop it spreading. Many people don't go to hospital when they have symptoms – even where treatment is available they cannot afford medical bills. There is a shortage of intensive care equipment and oxygen tubes to treat patients.

Muhsin Siddiquey, Oxfam's Country Director in Yemen said: "Yemen is at a tipping point – millions of people are already teetering at the edge of a precipice, now Covid, cholera and an intensification of the conflict threatens to push them over."