

## Fourth anniversary of Yemen conflict HI takes a stand against indiscriminate warfare and its devastating impact on civilians

Montreal, 22 March 2019. On its [Indiscriminate Warfare](#) website published today to mark four years of conflict in Yemen, HI paints a disastrous picture of the humanitarian crisis in Yemen. The organisation points to the indiscriminate use of explosive weapons and their devastating impact on civilians. It also condemns the widespread bombing of populated areas and the use of anti-personnel mines on a scale not seen since the Mine Ban Treaty came into force in 1999. HI has helped to set up an emergency rehabilitation service for the war-wounded in Yemen, where it has treated some 2,500 victims of explosive weapons since 2015. Of these, 300 were mine casualties. Almost all now have a disability due to their injuries and will need special care for the rest of their lives.

- HI's **Indiscriminate Warfare** website takes stock of the **humanitarian crisis in Yemen**, humanitarian needs and its response in terms of rehabilitation and psychological support. The organisation underlines the specific need for emergency rehabilitation - an essential complement to surgery, particularly war surgery - and psychological support for people traumatised by four years of armed violence.
- Testimonies reveal the unacceptably high proportion of civilians killed or maimed by bombing, explosive remnants of war, mines, cluster munitions, etc. ACLED has recorded **18,000 airstrikes since March 2015**. Observers report the **systematic and widespread use of anti-personnel mines** in several of the country's regions. Yemen is now **one of the countries most heavily contaminated** by explosive remnants of war, mines, improvised explosive devices and other weapons that constantly threaten the lives of civilians caught in the crossfire.
- Working in the governorates of Sana'a and Amanat Al Asima, HI has treated **4,500 casualties of the conflict since it launched its operations** in 2015 - one third of people assisted by the organisation. Of these, **more than 2,500 are casualties of explosive weapons including bombs, explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices**.
- **A significant and unprecedented proportion of people treated by HI in Yemen are mine casualties:** in four years, the organisation has cared for **300 casualties of these weapons** banned under the Ottawa Treaty since 1999.

- Action on Armed Violence (AOAV) recorded **14,000 deaths and injuries as a result of explosive violence between 2015 and 2017. Of these 76% were civilians. Of civilian deaths and injuries, 72% were caused by air-launched weapons.**
- As mine casualties often require lower-limb amputation, **to meet the specific needs of casualties** HI helped **set up an emergency rehabilitation service for the war-wounded in Yemen.** Bombing casualties suffer complex injuries such as open wounds, fractures, burns, loss of muscle mass and damaged nervous systems. If they fail to start rehabilitation the day after surgery, they risk serious mobility loss, often resulting in disability and **social and professional marginalisation, reduced income and family impoverishment.**
- The **widespread and repeated use of explosive weapons** has had a domino effect. In four years, the country has collapsed into chaos: 600 infrastructures are destroyed or damaged per month, particularly health services (50% of medical facilities no longer function, while demand has surged), the weakening of the economic fabric leading to inflation and shortages, particularly of food, and population displacement. **80% of the population now need some form of humanitarian assistance.**
- **Maud Bellon, HI's Head of Mission in Yemen:** "The casualties we care for are traumatised by armed violence. They are disoriented, shocked or depressed. Physical rehabilitation, which may end with patients being fitted with a prosthesis, is provided alongside psychological support to help them accept their new situation: people suffer shock when they lose a limb, and don't always find it easy to accept their prosthesis. We always combine rehabilitation with psychological support - an activity often neglected in a crisis."
- **Maud Bellon, HI's Head of Mission in Yemen:** "As assistance is now centralised in Sana'a, thousands of civilians need to travel long distances. It takes four hours to travel by road from Al Hudaydah to Sana'a, without counting checkpoints and the risks associated with crossing the front lines. Sometimes it is impossible for people to access services."
- **Maud Bellon, HI's Head of Mission in Yemen:** "This is an asymmetric conflict in which a sophisticated army that massively and indiscriminately bombs urban areas is fighting an armed group that resorts to the use of mines, the poor man's weapon. Civilians caught in the middle pay a heavy price."
- **Maud Bellon, HI's Head of Mission in Yemen:** "The contamination is complex and extremely varied and includes old mines made in Belgium, China and East Germany, improvised mines, some produced in series, and remnants of missiles, shells and cluster munitions – a panoply of weapons banned under international law."
- **Thomas Hugonnier, HI's director of operations in the Middle East:** "Four years of armed conflict have given rise to a complex crisis with devastating consequences. Some 80% of the population need humanitarian assistance. Armed violence that has destroyed the country's economic channels and the blockade imposed since 2017 – despite the fact that Yemen depends heavily on imports – have increased the likelihood of famine. Shortages and inflation have made it almost impossible for people to get hold of basic necessities. The Humanitarian crisis has been worsened by an economic crisis, turning Yemen into the world's biggest humanitarian emergency."
- **Some one hundred makeshift camps, in Hajjah and Al Hudaydah but also in the south of the country appear and disappear with the fighting.** Three million people are displaced inside

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Yemen and there are an estimated one million 'returnees'. "People are moving around all the time and we need to adapt to that. The problem is that, in Yemen, unlike in Iraq, for example, the vast majority are makeshift camps that can disappear almost overnight."

- Alongside complex population movements, NGOs face major security and administrative obstacles that considerably limit their scope of action. "It's vitally important to ensure the safe and neutral transportation of aid to those in need. NGOs are working very closely together to tackle the administrative assault course we all face, daily negotiations with the authorities, and so on, but that's not going to be enough."
- HI works in the governorates of Sana'a and Amanat al Asima, in two rehabilitation centres and six of Yemen's largest hospitals, treating patients from across the country. It has assisted more than **20,000 people in four years**, of whom 13,000 have received rehabilitation care or advice. The organisation has given out more than **21,000 crutches, walking frame, wheelchairs, etc.** More than **20,000 people** have been given psychological support. HI has fitted 200 people with prostheses and orthoses through its work with the rehabilitation and orthopaedic-fitting centre in Sana'a. More than 500 Yemeni health workers in Sana'a and other governorates have been sensitized and trained in early trauma response. We are starting similar activities in Aden and will soon be working in the governorate of Taizz, Hajjah and in the city of Hodeida.
- Through its **"Stop Bombing Civilians" international campaign, launched in March 2016**, HI calls on governments to develop a political declaration against the use of explosive weapons in populated areas in order to better protect civilians in conflict areas and assist casualties. The organisation is asking the general public to sign its [international petition](#). This petition has already been signed by 463,000 people.

#### **About HI**

HI is an independent international aid organisation. It has been working in situations of poverty and exclusion, conflict and disaster for 35 years. Working alongside people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups, our action and testimony are focused on responding to their essential needs, improving their living conditions, and promoting respect for their dignity and basic rights. Since it was founded in 1982, Handicap International has set up development programmes in more than 60 countries and intervenes in numerous emergency situations. The network of eight national associations (Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States) works constantly to mobilise resources, jointly manage projects and to increase the impact of the organisation's principles and actions. Handicap International is one of six founding organisations of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), the co-winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1997 and the winner of the Conrad N. Hilton Award in 2011. HI takes action and campaigns in places where "living in dignity" is no easy task.