

## Another Yemen update

I'm finding it more and more difficult to track news media coverage of the fighting in Yemen these days. Unfortunately, I believe that is because the ongoing devastation and killing is no longer 'news' on the world scene. Indeed there is little change to the political situation, with peace talks at a stalemate and the two(?) sides both claiming to be winning. One wonders what would constitute a *win* in this sad and convoluted disaster.

Media coverage of the Yemen conflict these days can only be meaningful for those who are very familiar with place names and aware of traditional tribal loyalties. The only measurable evaluation seems to be the body counts, and even that quantifier is mind-numbing. The problems of deprivation and food shortage are mitigated only by the fact that some food is entering the country through the relatively safe port of Aden - but the rest of the country continues to teeter on the edge of massive starvation because food and medical supplies cannot be moved easily through the large areas where fighting continues. The ebb and flow of military movement, areas captured and lost, is measured more in civilian casualties than in territories changing hands.

The legitimate government is essentially absent. Even in the 'liberated' areas there is no functional civil authority; the militias continue to manage civil matters like crime, distribution of electricity and water amidst the shortages, and movement of people and trade. The vacuum of authority is being challenged by Islamic extremists claiming affiliation with either Al Qaeda or Da'esh, promising that they are the ones best suited to bring order through establishment of an Islamic State. On the ground the 'common' people view it all as turf wars between urban gangs. Yemenis are still fleeing the country to places like Ethiopia and Somalia, where there is no prospect except waiting until they can return to damaged lives, homes, and a country more in need than ever before for international aid for reconstruction.

The Anglican ministry in Aden has survived the war. We are extremely grateful to God's mercy that none of our staff were injured in the collateral damage of the fighting, and the continuing menace of mines that are still exploding around the city. We took the decision to close the church and clinic when the fighting got serious, aware that it would be dangerous for people to gather at the church property. There were faithful Yemeni staff on site all the time, and there were multiple instances where they were able to turn away looters. Unfortunately, the buildings suffered extensive damage from nearby explosions; virtually all of the windows and doors were blown out. The roofs of two of the buildings were seriously damaged as well. So far we are estimating that it will cost \$25,000 to repair all of the damage. Thankfully, repairs have begun.

Even during the fighting, our medical staff were visited in their homes by patients familiar with the clinic, and some who were injured in the fighting. As soon as the shooting and bombing in Aden stopped in August our able and faithful administrator got busy right away repairing doors and windows for the clinic section of the property. The reception and examination areas were re-opened in mid-September. We were able to repair the rest of the medical wing and resumed performing eye surgeries in mid-October. Aside from our

traditional patient load our staff has now begun treating many injured in the fighting. As far as we can determine ours is the only eye clinic functioning in Aden at present. Even MSF is referring all eye injuries to our clinic. Water supply has been restored and electricity is available, though there are frequent daily power cuts. Thankfully, the generator continues to function well and the doctors are able to continue even when power fails.

Repairs at the property continue. The next priority is roofs and weather-proofing of all of the buildings. The church building itself will need extensive repair to the roof and cracks to the supporting walls. Because our parish ministry has always necessarily focused on expatriates living in Aden we are not in any rush to re-start parish ministry until there is an expatriate presence returns again in the city. Right now, extremist groups are assassinating foreigners, even Muslims from the Gulf countries who have come with the Red Crescent Society to provide food and medical care for Yemenis. It looks like there will be some delay before aid and development NGO staff will be able to return to the city. However, it is our hope that we will be able to establish a clergy couple in Aden as soon as it is safe for them to be there. Those who come to work with NGOs to assist in rebuilding the country will need ministry and pastoral care for sure.

As an addendum I am sad to say that the Catholic Church properties in Aden have been severely damaged. A residential building in one of their churches was damaged by shelling. Two properties were subsequently vandalised and one of those is burned out with the roof and interior destroyed. We give thanks that none of the Catholic clergy or sisters have been injured. There is continued prayer and sacramental ministry among the staff, but not at the church compounds.

Unfortunately I am not in a position to write about the rest of Yemen. My information is almost exclusively relevant to Aden only because that is where my contacts are located. I would urge that we do all we can to influence a negotiated ceasefire, but also to support urgent and long-term relief and development work to rebuild Yemen. It will take years to replace the damaged homes and businesses that support the daily life of the people. Who can begin to imagine how much financial commitment will be needed for the restoration of life - even to the pre-war poverty levels!?! Let all who care for Yemen and its people continue to pray and urge others to pray, and find ways to encourage holistic Christian ministry there.

respectfully submitted

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