WHO EMRO | Internally displaced persons from Hudaydah endure harsh circumstances in Sana’a

Dissipated sense of security

With the recent escalation of conflict in the port town of Al-Hudaydah, thousands of people were forced to flee to the capital city Sana’a to escape the insecurity and increasing poverty, malnutrition and disease outbreaks. These displaced people include Yemen’s most vulnerable: the elderly, pregnant women, people who carry the burden of chronic illnesses, and caregivers who bear the responsibility of providing for their children.

Abu Bakr school in Sana’a serves as a transit facility for many displaced families from Al-Hudaydah who have nowhere else to go. Through its partnership with the World Bank under the Emergency Health and Nutrition Project (EHNP), WHO has provided the transit facility with emergency medicines and health supplies for 1000 medical consultations. Support from the Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) also enabled WHO to provide medicines for 200 patients suffering from hypertension, diabetes and psychosis.

Weighed down by harsh circumstances and forced displacement

Being from Al-Hudaydah, many displaced families are not used to the colder weather in Sana’a and have not yet acclimated to it. Their living space is crowded, with several families often living together in one classroom. Their main concern is the safety and well-being of the children.

Many of the displaced families are headed by women, some of whom are weighed down by old age, chronic illnesses, children to care for, and empty stomachs to feed. Many are sitting on the ground in the schoolyard. They look tired. They have been all been faced with unique circumstances during their displacement, but they all have one thing in common: uncertainty of the future.

There are children playing in the schoolyard, oblivious to the fact that they are far from home. They run around giggling and playing as children usually do. They look joyful, but beneath the surface lingers untold trauma. Memories still seared in their minds, and the perplexing reality they are now forced to live. No child is supposed to face violence of such magnitude at such a tender age, yet displaced children in Yemen experience this daily.
Sama finally got a classroom to rest and take her medication. She has a brain tumor and needs proper medical care she can’t afford. Her medication is provided by charitable donors. Sama has been in Abu Bakr school since last June. She had to sleep on the floor before being assigned a classroom. She lays on a thin mattress with a welcoming smile on her face. Her sister and mother are the only family she has got and they have no support. “We ran away with nothing but our purses and the clothes on our backs,” Sama’s sister says. Sama needs all the quiet she can get because she suffers from a brain tumor. “She keeps losing consciousness, if not for the help of charitable donors, she wouldn’t be able to get her daily dose of medicine” adds Sama’s mother.

Nada is a mother of four and was displaced from Al Mina district in Al-Hudayah. She took an overcrowded bus to Sana’a. Upon her arrival, she had nowhere to go. Prior to the conflict, Nada had nothing and was hardly able to provide the day to day necessities for her family. “We heard the sounds of aircrafts and missiles hitting the city, and the battle tanks were already in the neighborhoods. I was terrified for my family and I had to leave,” says Nada while describing the situation after the armed conflict had gripped the city.
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Nada’s daughter is sick and lays on this mattress which she shares with her 3 brothers and sisters and mother. They have to sleep in the school corridor until they get a classroom. "Hospitals and pharmacies were closed; people didn’t know where to go. It was a ghost town. All you could hear was the shelling," she added. Nada does not have a room, so she sits on one of the school corridors where her 2-year-old lies sick on a mattress they all share. "I don’t know what she is sick with, and I can’t afford medical care."

"We have nothing; we are not part of this. Yet we bear the burdens of this war."

Ahmed fled his home when shelling started in his neighbourhood in Al-Hali district. His fear for the safety of his family of eight forced him to leave everything behind and flee to Sana’a. Khaled arrived in Sana’a with no place to stay. Him and his family were led to AbuBakr school for shelter.
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Ahmed fled his home during the shelling in Al Hudaydah in fear for his family’s safety. Arriving in Sana’a, he had no one and didn’t know where to go. We have nothing; we are not part of this. Yet we bear the burdens of this war, said Ahmed.

Murad came with his family and two extended families. “I don’t know how many we are. There are a lot of us.”

In her heavy winter clothes, the youngest in the family – a two month old – is coughing and has a cold. As the weather in the northern city of Sana’a is something they are not used to, the entire family was wearing winter clothes. There is a lot of readjusting for these families to do, and the uncertainty of their situation continues to increase their vulnerability.