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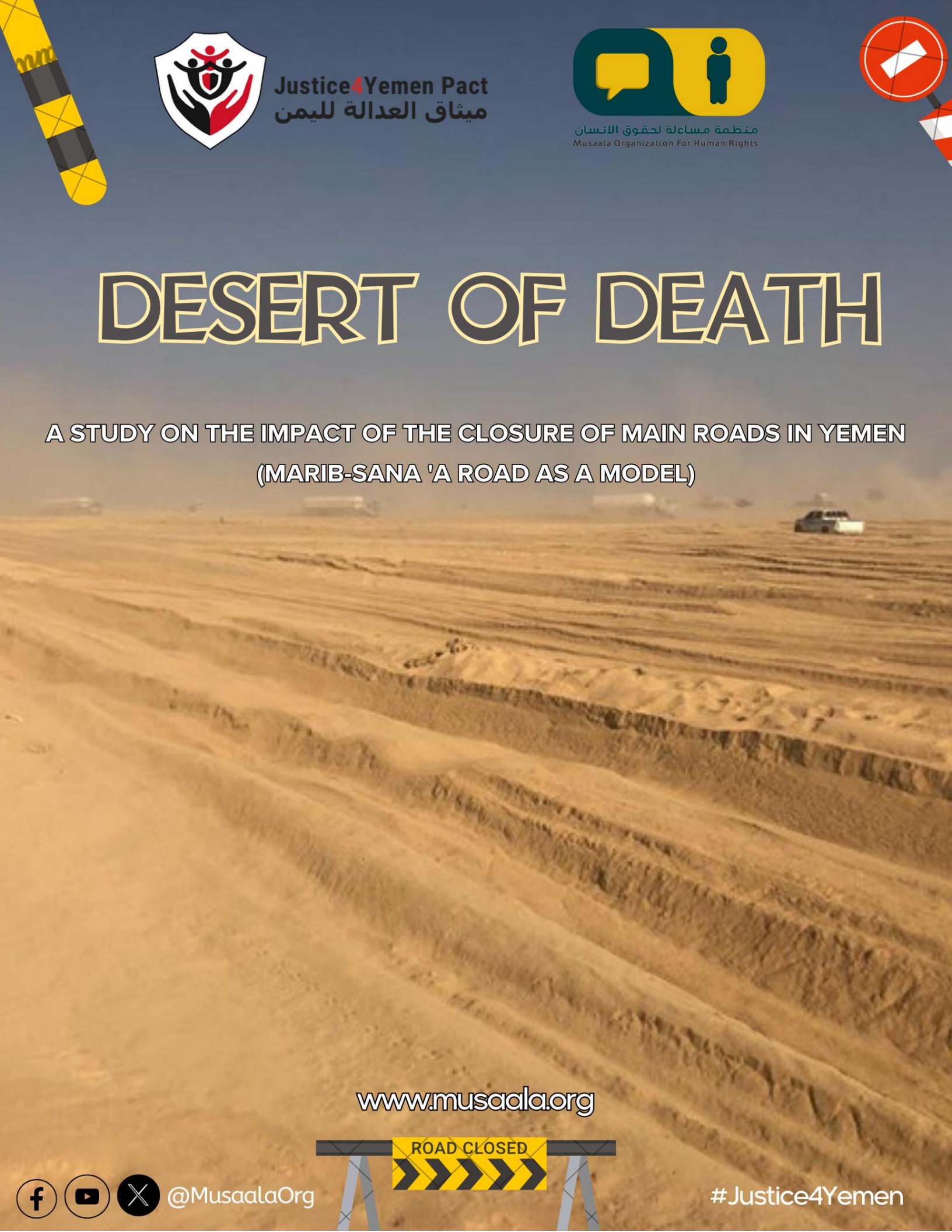
Musaala Organization For Human Rights

# DESERT OF DEATH

## A STUDY ON THE IMPACT OF THE CLOSURE OF MAIN ROADS IN YEMEN (MARIB-SANA 'A ROAD AS A MODEL)

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## Musaala for Human Rights Organization

is a Yemeni non-governmental non-profit organization working in the field of defending and protecting human rights, by monitoring and documenting human rights violations, supporting and redressing their victims, and holding accountable those responsible for these violations in order to stop these violations and ensure that they do not recur.

The organization was established on 10 December 2017 and holds a license No. 275 to practice civil activity. The license was issued by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor Office in Marib Governorate on 10 April 2018 and its headquarters is in Marib Governorate.

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An Investigative Study that summarizes the effects of the blockade of the main roads connecting Marib Governorate with its geographical surroundings and the dangers of alternative roads on the lives and rights of civilians and IDPs

**The study report was prepared by journalist and researcher: Mohammed Hafeez**

Mr. Hafeez is a Yemeni researcher and journalist who prepared (alone or in partnership with other journalists and researchers) survey studies, journalistic investigations, and qualitative reports in various fields, the most important of which are human rights, societal accountability, economics, and social life.

Mr. Hafeez also published dozens of reports and press materials in Yemeni and Arab newspapers, magazines, websites and channels since 2020.

He also assisted journalists **Ammar Zaabel** and **Malak Rashad** in conducting the field study and interviews related to this study and editing and drafting the study.

**February 2024**

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## Executive Summary

Musaala for Human Rights Organization is a Yemeni non-governmental non-profit organization working in the field of defending and protecting human rights, by monitoring and documenting human rights violations, supporting, and redressing their victims, and holding accountable those responsible for these violations in order to stop these violations and ensure that they do not recur. The organization was established on 10 December 2017and holds a license No. 275 to practice civil activity. The license was issued by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor Office in Marib Governorate on 10 April 2018 and its headquarters is in Marib Governorate.

As part of the Yemen Human Rights Forensic Lab Program (YHRFL +) and within the Justice Charter for Yemen Coalition, which aims to increase the recognition and protection of human rights in Yemen by empowering Yemeni civil society to advocate for justice and accountability through documenting human rights and strengthening advocacy efforts.

This program works to systematically collect, retain, corroborate, analyze and report on evidence obtained from a variety of sources regarding human rights violations committed by the parties to the conflict in Yemen.

The results of this investigative report are summarized and presented in a set of investigative reports focusing on specific incidents of human rights violations. This program also supports the efforts of Yemeni CSO partners to carry out strategic advocacy and community awareness at the local and international levels.

This investigative report tracks the locations and types of the impact, explores its risks, and develops conclusions and recommendations with regard to addressing those effects, which were caused by the interruption of roads, their destruction, and the suspension of some of them. Marib Governorate had six main outlets or roads, other than those paved roads or offroads, which entered service during the raging battles which caused the road working to cease. Therefore, the entrance and exit from the hot desert province turned into one desert road, mostly sandy, which is in the direction of the capital Sana 'a through Al-Jawf Governorate, and another international road - to and from - neighboring Hadramawt Governorate.

As a result, the report demonstrated the overall consequences on the movement of citizens and commodities, as well as another issue that should not be overlooked: the condition of division in Marabi society, which has become divided into two sides, making communication impossible. This challenge was imposed by the disruption of roadways; also, the war caused a schism in the family structure, resulting in child labor or homelessness, while women must deal with a new reality and an environment rife with violations.

Based on a comprehensive analysis of the impact of the closure of the Marib-Sana'a Road in Yemen, this action appears to have had a tangible influence on the movement of commodities and citizens, with a profound impact on the social structure. As a result, the report suggested multiple recommendations to work on, the most important of which are:

- **Peaceful and political solution**: The parties to the conflict and the international community should work in coordination to find peaceful and political solutions to the conflict, with a focus on human rights and the protection of civilians.
- **Opening the main roads:** The UN envoy and local and international mediators should push to open the main roads in Yemen, including the roads of Marib - Nihm - Sana 'a, and Marib - Sirwah – Sana 'a.
- **Neutralization of roads and public services:** Parties to the conflict must neutralize roads and public services from the conflict, while facilitating citizens' access to health and education services.
- **Collaborate to clear roads:** The Houthis and the Yemeni government should cooperate with the UN and mine action agencies to clear roads of mines and explosives.
- **Stopping illegal royalties:** The competent authorities should stop illegal royalties and find an effective mechanism for collecting legal fees.
- **Sustainable projects:** Supportive and humanitarian organizations should move from emergency projects to implementing sustainable projects in health, education, sanitation and entrepreneurship.
- **Enhanced humanitarian cooperation:** Cooperation between parties to the conflict in the field of transport, movement of commodities and civilians should be strengthened, including support for the rehabilitation of damaged infrastructure and roads.
- **Providing humanitarian assistance:** Parties to the conflict and humanitarian organizations should provide humanitarian assistance to affected civilians and facilitate the delivery of food and medical supplies to the affected areas.

In this report, we have tried to highlight the urgent need for joint action and ongoing efforts to mitigate the impact of road closures and to stabilize and restore a normal life for Yemeni society. It clearly shows that the closure of roads in Yemen, especially the Marib-Sana 'a road, has radically affected daily life and social interactions. The conclusions and recommendations of the report can serve as a basis to guide efforts towards addressing these challenges.

## The Context

After nine years of conflict, which began in late 2014, its winds arrived early in the governorate of Marib (northeast Yemen) and had a significant impact on its demographic structure, with the governorate seeing the largest internal displacement that Yemen has ever seen. This has affected other aspects in varying proportions, from humanitarian, economic, social, and even cultural, so that the governorate, which has economic weight as an oil and gas producer, turns into a somewhat military and political influence, which some call the last stronghold of the Yemeni government, although what is controlled by the internationally recognized government does not exceed a third of the area of the governorate, which are four directorates (Marib City, Marib Al-Wadi, Raghwan , and Harib) out of fourteen directorates, most of which have been under the control of Ansar Allah (Houthis) since 2021, which have kept parts of Sarawah district.

However, the advantage of government control is that oil and gas production sites are still under its authority, and the largest human mass is located in Marib City and the Valley Directorate, which is estimated to exceed two million people.[1] However, this huge human mass has become without routes to supply food, medicine and other needs, so access to services has become difficult, as is the case in the rest of the governorate's districts, which Ansar Allah controls, especially education and health services.

This investigative report coincides with initiatives made to open the Marib-Niham Road in Sana 'a. One of the local mediators revealed that there are mediation efforts that have been underway for months, expecting that they may soon result in the opening of a number of closed main roads linking Marib Governorate (under government control) and areas under the control of Ansar Allah (Houthis), pointing out that the roads are (Marib al-Bayda, Marib Sana 'a, and Marib – Sirwah - Sana 'a). [2] The member of the Presidential Command Council, Governor of Marib Governorate, Major General Sultan al-Arada, announced on Thursday, February 22, 2024, the opening of the road between Marib and Sana 'a through Fardat Nehm, demanding *"the other party to take a similar step to facilitate the movement of citizens,"* during an inspection of the road linking with Sana 'a. He explained that he had consulted with the political and military leadership, and a security checkpoint was established in preparation for its unilateral opening.[3] However, there is no noticeable response by Ansar Allah (the Houthis), which they continue to obstruct these initiatives to open the roads, and has set some conditions in exchange for opening the Sana 'a - Marib road form their side,[4] although one of the local mediators confirmed the approval of the Houthis and there is a wait for the formation of committees to start the process of opening roads, pointing to the fears expressed by the parties of any upcoming military exploitation, stressing that local mediation intensifies the meeting between the two parties to the war, which may succeed the task smoothly and quickly in the coming days. [5]

In Yemen, road closures are a frequent and erratic problem. Reports suggest that the continuous conflict and political tensions are the cause of many road closures. Examples are varied and involve multiple sectors in different regions. One of the concrete examples is the closure of the Marib-Sanaa Road, which is regarded as a symbol of the national problem, as it is one of the main roads connecting northern Yemen to its east and south, as well as Yemen to neighboring countries such as Saudi Arabia and the Sultanate of Oman. The transportation of people and products between the governorates is thought to depend heavily on this road. Closing it puts the economy at risk of failing and has a detrimental impact on the lives of civilians.

[1]Study (Marib: Houthi advance threatens the last stronghold of the government in the north) Sana 'a Center for Strategic Studies: https://sanaacenter.org/ar/publications-all/analysis-ar/11793
[2]Interview with Local Broker – February 2024
[3](Member of the Leadership Council Al-Arada announces the opening of (Marib - Fardat Nahm Road) Yemen News Agency Saba - https://rb.gy/ekenbv
[4]The Houthi group sets conditions to open the road between Marib and Sana'a – Al Jazeera: https://rb.gy/hk2zq6
[5]Interview with Local Broker – February 2024

Since this investigative report is concerned with the Marib-Sanaa Road as a model of the main closed roads in Yemen, the Marib Governorate previously had four vital routes extending to the capital, Sana'a, through which fairly densely populated districts were concentrated, such as "Sirwah, Majzar, Madghal, and the southern districts." As the first road: from Sana 'a through the area of Nihm and Marib, with a length of about 173 kilometers, which was closed in mid-2016, after the battles intensified between the government forces and Ansar Allah (Houthi) fighters, which made a large part of the road under the line of fire.

The second road: It was also closed in mid-2015 due to the battles were closing in to the center of the Directorate of Sirwah and the progress of the Houthis and the intensification of battles and aerial and ground bombardment on the Directorate of Sirwah, so that the alternative route at the time and the third is: Sana 'a - Dhamar - Bayda - Marib line with a length of 418 km, and a time of nine hours, but it was closed during the escalation and the progress of the Houthis south of the province in September 2021, the night of the closure of an alternative road after three months, in which travelers by land incurred higher costs as well as longer hours, and the last road is the alternative road that It passes through a remote desert area in Al Jawf and northern Marib and lacks any kind of services.[6]

[6] The Burdens of War on the Roads of Yemen - Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies: https://rb.gy/tapaxr

Over two million and two hundred thousand individuals are reported to be residing in the Marib governorate today, where there is still a constant influx of displaced persons. As of the most recent census, there were 2274453 internally displaced persons, or 73.67% of all internally displaced people in the governorates ruled by the internationally recognized government.[7] This made these huge numbers face great challenges, such as the difficulty of doing business normally, and the difficulty of accessing basic services or humanitarian aid, which has become an indispensable need. In other words, the warring parties' destruction of infrastructure and closure of paved roads had an impact on commercial traffic and humanitarian relief efforts by making it harder to transport commodities and humanitarian aid to their intended destinations.

[7]IDP Needs Report 2023: Findings and Recommendations – Executive Unit for the IDP Camp Management in Marib Governorate: https://www.exuye.org/1220

The UN Panel of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen, which monitors and reports on the human rights situation in Yemen, stated that the closure of roads by parties to the conflict constitutes a violation of the right to freedom of movement, and the right to an adequate standard of living. The Expert Group also noted that road closures impede the access and delivery of humanitarian assistance, which is essential for the realization of other human rights, such as the right to life, the right to health, and the right to food.[8]

In this context, these roads remained closed, despite the country's entry into a ceasefire truce concluded under UN auspices in April 2022, where the terms of the truce included opening the roads of Taiz Governorate, and the rest of the Yemeni governorates where the roads were closed, but the Houthi authorities refused to deal with these proposals. None of the provisions of the truce related to opening roads were implemented.

## Methodology

This study comes within the activities of Musaala organization in mobilizing and advocating for human rights issues, the most important of which is freedom of movement. This study summarizes the effects of the main roads closure which link Marib Governorate to its geographical surroundings and the dangers of alternative routes on the lives and rights of civilians and displaced people. The survey report relied on conducting personal interviews with citizens and IDPs from other directorates of Marib Governorate, and IDPs from other governorates. In addition, the preparer of the report spoke to local officials in the relevant authorities, such as transport and health offices, and others. In order to understand the impact of roadblocks more, other interviews were conducted with employees of the ICRC and the Yemeni Red Crescent, other monitors and humanitarian activists, and with managers of humanitarian organizations working within the governorate and relief and aid workers.

Similarly, we met and listened to the suffering of numerous citizen groups. We also documented the experiences of drivers, including those who operate relief trucks or vehicles that carry passengers, as well as a number of drivers who operate trucks that carry goods for traders with a variety of commercial backgrounds.

There were 24 interviewees, and the interviews focused on specific questionnaires and questions for each person based on his/her work or experience on the road and the interactions with people from different groups—such as women, children, and individuals with special needs—who were impacted by road blockades. It should be noted that the report's interview questions focused on the effects on humanitarian, economic, security, social, health, and educational aspects, as well as how the roads pose a threat to citizens and internally displaced persons in the governorate.

[8]Report of the UN Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen (A Forgotten Nation: A Call for Humanity to End Yemen's Suffering): https://rb.gy/kzvzo3

Musaala Organization for Human Rights would like to express its gratitude to everyone who participated in the creation, editing, and evaluation of the study report as well as to everyone who provided testimony from those interviewed for this purpose.

## Risks and a Large "Open-Air" Prison

Marib has been under siege since 2021, when Ansar Allah (the Houthis) advanced and took control of the mountain chain towards the desert, including directorates of "Rahba, Mahliya, Abdiya, Jabal Murad, Jubbah, and Harib." Marib lost its roads on its northeastern, western, northwest, and southern sides. Traveling to and from the city of Marib became challenging, as the normal ease of travel between the governorate's directorates is no longer available. Movement is restricted to the desert road from Al- Ruwaik desert to Al-Jawf, which is fraught with dangers such as minefields, clashes, and disruptions. There is also another desert route from the city of Marib to Harib in the south , which is also fraught with dangers such as mine explosions, disruptions, and a part of alternate roads are conflict zones, putting civilians at risk of harm or death from fighter bullets.[9] The (Al-Abr-Safer) line has become the vital strategic artery for Marib and the link between it and the southern governorates and border crossings, as it is a transit line for trucks transporting goods coming from land ports such as Al-Wadiah and Shihn and from the sea ports in Aden and Mukalla.[10]

While the Yemeni government is trying to put an end to the misery of Yemenis, most of the accusations regarding the roadblock lead to the Ansar Allah group, or the Houthis. They continue to refuse to settle this problem. The recent initiative by Major General Sultan Al-Arada, a member of the Presidential Leadership Council, this initiative included the unilateral opening of the Marib-Nahm Sana 'a road. Here we can confirm that the closure of roads resulted in a humanitarian crisis for the residents of Marib city, which has turned into a "large open-air prison". Citizens' suffering has gotten worse, and the number[11] of displaced persons from different groups—particularly women, children, and the "Marginalized"—has increased. The humanitarian crisis pertaining to living, health, and education has worsened. As a result, the cost of living has increased, and transportation prices have doubled. The roads have become a source of taxes and royalties.

This concludes the impacts that have taken place. For instance, the time spent travelling has increased from three hours to exceed twelve hours, which is four times more than time before. Additionally, vehicles and passenger buses cannot travel on the alternate route, which results in delays that exceed 69 hours for those who are delivering humanitarian supplies.

The reality is that this period of time is four and ten times longer than it used to be and this will surely have an impact on the ability to obtain aid and the increase in costs.

[9]Interview with a human rights monitor in Marib Governorate – February 2024.
[10]Obstacles to the Flow of Goods to Marib Governorate- Study Causes and Solutions- Economic Media Center: https://economicmedia.net/?p=4219
[11]Interview with the head of Hemaya Organization for Civic Orientation in Marib Governorate – February 2024

In this regard, the United Nations Office's quarterly review of food security in Yemen indicates that in March 2022, food commodity prices increased to their highest level in 23 years, fertilizer prices increased to their highest level in 14 years, and the prices of gasoline and diesel increased to their highest level in 10 years to 78% and 90%, respectively during the same period compared to the last quarter of the year that preceded 2021.[12]

## Humanitarian Impacts

### Food aid, another war

The first problem that emerged after the blocking of roads is that aid could not get into the hands of those who need it, and sometimes even its complete interruption. It can be described as another war added to the suffering of people. After Marib was enjoying the flow of relief aid as one batch which it all arrived to the center of the governorate, and then distributed to all districts and camps, but now relief supplies are facing difficulties in reaching those who are eligible, as they relief aids firstly pass through areas under the control of the Ansar Allah group (Houthis) in Sanaa, then pass through the governorates of Dhamar and Al Bayda, before finally reaching the southern regions of Marib. In the city center, supplies arrive at an extra expense since they must travel great distances from border crossings, like the one in temporary capital of Aden, and pass through numerous security checkpoints. As a result, supplies are occasionally held for extended periods of time. All these obstacles increase the psychological pressure on the beneficiaries, who are impatiently waiting for additional time on the scheduled dates for the delivery of aid.[13]

At the beginning of 2021, aid workers suffered from the difficulty of delivering aid to the Directorate of Al-Abdiyah, one of the southern directorates of Marib, which the workers considered a challenge to their humanitarian work, so that they could not reach those in need of relief, and this was the same thing that happened later in the directorates of Al-Jubah and Harib, which cut off access to families who were not displaced from their homes, and the interruption of roads was a main reason for this.[14]

In this regard, a report on the humanitarian needs in the Marib Governorate stated that the delivery of humanitarian aid to Marib has been significantly impacted by the lack of security along the front lines, and access for humanitarian organizations to some of the most vulnerable communities remains restricted or impossible, making it challenging to provide aid.

[12]Food prices in Yemen reach the highest level in 32 years- Asharq Al-Awsat - https://rb.gy/5ya3wd
[13]Interview with a manager in a relief coalition in Marib Governorate – February 2024.
[14]Interview with a worker in a relief organization working in Marib Governorate – February 2024.

### Difficulty in Accessing Aid, Additional Burden:

One of the challenges with other routes is that relief vehicles now require "guides," or what the locals refer to as "Moarifeen," who serve as guides in the desert and receive extra payment from truck drivers, to help them avoid the risks of traveling on the roads by themselves. The absence of a guide increases the risk of becoming lost for a lot of people in the desert.

The driver of an aid truck says that while carrying supplies, they encounter bandits in the Ramla region, which links Al-Jawf and Marib. Because this area is unprotected by any forces which forces them to hire guides, who spread in this area, and if the driver does not hire a guide, he would be mistreated by other guides who work in this profession.[15]

In a related context, another driver stated that while transporting aid, it is not disclosed as "aid" going to Marib Governorate. When passing through the checkpoints of the "Houthis", he is forced to say that they are commercial goods belonging to a merchant in Hadramawt or elsewhere, in order not to obstruct their arrival, and he must carry documents showing this. [16]

Some areas in a number of districts in the south and northwest of Marib Governorate have been deprived of aid because of the inability of aid workers to reach them, and this was confirmed by one of the workers who said: If he could not disburse the "aid" allocated to the districts in conflict and cut off their roads, workers are forced to disburse aid to other areas far from the hotbeds of conflict such as the city of Marib or the Valley Directorate, and here the impact lies, pointing out that the roads are the artery from which anyone breathes, and when the main roads were cut, and only the secondary and desert roads remained, which are crossed only by trucks or four-wheel-drive vehicles, which affected the equitable distribution of aid.[17]

## Health Impacts

The first effect of the road closures on the health sector in Marib Governorate was the interruption of the medical or pharmaceutical supplies (aid), making it more difficult for thousands of residents and displaced people to access healthcare.

When looking at the numbers of displaced people in Marib governorate, the large number of those were deprived of aid and education, as well as health services. According to the Executive Unit for the Management of IDP Camps, (17,883) IDPs suffer from infectious diseases (not in Marib alone). It was also found that (597) camps do not have a fixed clinic[18], and after the arrival of health aid from Sana'a and Aden, it was cut off from Sanaa, as a local official says, who reported that aid no longer comes from the capital Sana 'a, which is under the control of Ansar Allah (Houthis), any health support. He said that the Health Office tried to deliver support

[15] Interview with a driver of a truck transporting relief aid coming from Hodeidah to Marib – February 2024.
[16] Interview with an aid truck driver
[17] Interview with the Coordinator of the Yemeni Red Crescent Society in Marib Governorate – February 2024.
[18] IDP Needs Report 2023: Findings and Recommendations – Executive Unit for the IDP Camp Management in Marib Governorate: https://www.exuye.org/1220

(medical equipment and medicines) provided by international organizations from Sana 'a, but it was cut off and confiscated by the Houthis, regretting that health aid should have been neutralized from the conflict.[19]

According to a local official, the incident occurred multiple times. Other quantities of relief health goods were confiscated by the Houthis in an area known as "Najd al-Majmah" on its route to communities in the Al-Abdiyah district, which was under a suffocating siege.
In this context, health assistance is subject to delays in arriving on time, as a result of the fact that trucks come via alternative and remote roads, which also affect medicines and health equipment where shipments are damaged, which prompted the competent authorities to require that transport trucks contain air-conditioned refrigerators "frozen" in order to maintain the quality of medicines, which is required of organizations working in this field.[20]

## The sick and injured are closer to death:

Regarding the effect of the road blockade on the patients themselves, the International Committee of the Red Cross representative in Yemen affirms that travel restrictions throughout the country—including Marib—present a difficulty that impedes civilians' access to necessities like water, sanitation, health care, and education. He draws attention to the fact that vulnerable groups, such the ill and the displaced, are impacted and may have to travel through areas contaminated by explosives or endure lengthy travels in order to receive emergency medical care.

Women, particularly those who are sick in the southern regions, such as Harib, are compelled to cross dangerous mountainous roads, which are fraught with obstacles, and violations. Those violations sometime happen at checkpoints, which amounts to kidnapping. According to testimonies, pregnant ladies miscarried on certain roadways, and some even witnessed the deaths of mothers or the fetus. A number of women were afflicted with eclampsia and had to travel from Al-Juba and Harib districts, and underwent treatment in the Intensive Care Unit in Dhamar hospitals, where they arrived hours later when they could have been treated sooner either in the Marib governorate center or in one of the government hospitals in The city of Al-Juba (September 26 Hospital), which has come under Houthi management, and the hospital there lacks the ICU and there are no services for women and childbirth, nor cardiac and dialysis services.[21] What prevented women from going to the governorate center for treatment was the blockade of roads, and the distance and danger of alternative routes.

The facts obtained by the study confirm that injured and sick people died because of the hardship of roads. There are those who were exposed to mine explosions in the southern directorates, and the fact that they did not receive life-saving medical services in the governorate of Al-Bayda, where they arrived, and then Sana 'a despite communicating with international organizations concerned with the matter, which is a complex violation according

[19] Interview with the Director General of the Public Health and Population Office in Marib Governorate – February 2024.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Interview with the head of Hemaya Organization for Civil Orientation in Marib Governorate – February 2024.

to human rights defenders. Heart patients, pregnant women, and premature infants were among those who did not receive medical care, and many of them died as a result. Premature children die because they were not placed in incubators, and there are no medical facilities that offer these services. In addition, the roads to Al Bayda Governorate are difficult, and there are no prepared hospitals.[22]

### People with Special Needs, Severe Suffering

Road difficulties affect this group (disabled people) more than others, especially when traveling for treatment, because they remain in the desert after their automobiles become stuck in the sand. Desert routes are barren of restaurants and other facilities. Furthermore, transportation fees are high, therefore some people choose not to travel for treatment because they cannot afford it. On the other hand, disabled persons are more likely to develop issues such as body ulcers, particularly youngsters who spend lengthy periods of time in their mothers' arms and in the same position.[23]

According to humanitarian monitors, children, women, and individuals with special needs suffer from a lack of access to medical care. According to a specialist, this group (disabled individuals) faces significant challenges in reaching places of care because travel has become difficult and takes days instead of hours. Certain cases need continuous medications which puts them at risk.[24]

## Social Impacts

Yemeni families remained interconnected even during totalitarian rule which is before the Yemeni Unity was restored on May 22, 1990, Yemen before that was divided into two nations in the north and south. Thousands of families are now separated between the de facto authorities, whether in Ansar Allah (Houthi) -controlled territories or the internationally recognized government territories. Among those locations, obstacles and challenges have been placed in front of the people and the displaced who are prevented from freedom of movement or returning to their homes and communities, causing various social concerns.

### Family Disintegration

Road blockades in Yemen have greatly contributed to families and relatives' disintegration as geographical isolation caused by roadblocks has restricted the possibility of family gathering. Mobility and travel between Yemeni governorates, as well as between directorates within one governorate, have become difficult or expensive, making it impossible for families and relatives to share their joys and sorrows and limiting opportunities for direct connection.

[22] Ibid.
[23] Interview with the head of Elaf Organization for People with Special Needs in Marib Governorate – February 2024.
[24] Ibid.

The Maribi community is one of the most cohesive communities, but the ongoing war has impeded this. Families, particularly men, have been compelled to flee, with many men leaving without the rest of their families. Furthermore, Marib governorate has been home to a huge number of displaced persons from other governorates in the Republic, resulting in divorce or women themselves asking for divorce. In addition, the condition of division that has occurred in society as a result of parts of the community living under different authorities than other. Divorce or annulment has a major impact because each divorce initiates a new path of separation and diaspora for the children, which will affect their future as well as the future of their community and country.

The second factor affecting Yemeni families in Marib is an increase in homeless children. According to the Executive Unit for the Management of IDP Camps, there are 2,743 unaccompanied children (those who do not live with their families) due to the country's complete absence of shelters for homeless children.[25]

There are also children who work as breadwinners, and the Department of Displaced Persons in Yemen (government) states in a recent report on the needs of IDPs that about 9,240 IDP families are led by children, while 17,492 families are led by women in IDP camps.[26]

## Educational Impacts

With the outbreak of the conflict in Yemen, education in Marib Governorate, like other civilian sectors, was subjected to a variety of consequences, including the destruction or closure of educational structures, making it difficult or even impossible for students to access, as occurred in the district of Sirwah early on and then in other directorates later. Thousands of displaced persons were unable to enroll due to a lack of educational aid, existing or newly built institutions were overcrowded.

Marib also recorded other educational issues caused by road blockades, such as children dropping out of school or being unable to access educational services due to a lack of documents or the ability to return or travel to bring those personal and basic documents to join schools or universities. Because of the conflict, hundreds of families fled their homes without bringing these personal documents with them, along with the need for children to work after losing their parents which forced them to become responsible for their families.[27]

In another related context, road closures hindered the return of many displaced families to their governorates, putting a significant burden on educational facilities in Marib Governorate.

[25] Ibid.
[26] (Displaced students in Yemen face difficulties due to overcrowded classrooms and poor capabilities) - Arab World News Agency: https://rb.gy/t5kn9e
[27] Marib Area File, Understanding Humanitarian Needs (Objective Report): https://rb.gy/id6ca5

According to government statistics, the governorate's 386 schools, including 55 schools in IDP camps, received 134,821 students in government schools this year (2023/2024) with an increase of 9,000 from the previous year.[28]

The educational infrastructure has not kept pace with the influx of IDPs, as many schools established during the conflict have been converted into temporary housing for IDPs, and schools that are still operating lack basic supplies such as books, equipment, and teachers.

## Economic Impacts

On the economic side, road closures have impacted citizens (consumers) by boosting costs. It has also hindered citizens' access to services and marketplaces, forcing hundreds to go to distant governorates (Al-Bayda and Shabwa) to shop and meet their requirements, while road closures have also had an impact on the (business sector) by causing damage to traders, suppliers, and farmers. Incoming goods and commodities to Marib governorate took compulsory alternative routes as known, resulting in a high cost of transportation, which adds to the total value of goods, all of which falls on the shoulders of citizens. According to a local authority,[29] a merchant (wholesaler) verified that goods are transported to Marib from Mukalla, the capital of Hadramout Governorate, via Sayoun, or from Saudi Arabia and Oman. Some items also come from the United Arab Emirates, indicating that perishable goods, such as eggs and yogurt, are shipped from Sana'a to Hodeidah, exposing them to quick damage due to the alternative desert roads.[30] He pointed out that alternative or even long routes from Mukalla and Mahra have significantly increased transportation costs.[31]

The high cost of transporting goods has increased four times reaching 208% by the end of 2020 compared to December 2013. The cost increase is due to insecurity, road deterioration and blockades, unofficial payments at checkpoints, and using longer alternative routes.[32]

This effect is made clear by what is happening in the Harib district, south of the governorate, as a Yemeni Red Crescent employee says that commercial activity has been affected in general, in Harib, food and other supplies were arriving from the city of Marib, in a time of up to one hour, and now small merchants are forced to currently forced to get their supplies from Ataq, the capital of Shabwa Governorate, which is more than 7 hours trip.[33] The Directorate also witnesses military conflicts on occasionally as a result of the ongoing battle between the Internationally Recognized Government's forces and the Houthis, all of which affects food, medication, and assistance imports.

[28] Ibid.
[29] Interview with the Director General of the Office of the Ministry of Transport in Marib Governorate – February 2024.
[30] Interview with a wholesaler in Marib Governorate – February 2024.
[31] Interview with a truck driver transporting goods across the Aden-Marib line, and Aden-Mukalla-Mahra, February 2024.
[32] Yemen Land Transportation Service: https://rb.gy/v2by6q
[33] Interview with the Coordinator of the Yemeni Red Crescent Society in Marib Governorate – February 2024.

A civilian stated that transportation expenses for travelers -to and from the Harib District -had increased by 300%, which is the same as moving products over the desert road that connects the district to the city of Marib. This road also presents numerous hurdles and difficulties, making the residents' travel along it tough and exhausting.[34]

## Checkpoints, Weighbridges and Price Increases

Checkpoints are a major problem that undermines the ease and smoothness of the transportation process, and they also contribute to high prices. According to reports, security checkpoints and barriers force trucks to wait for long time to be inspected, indicating that the total time a driver spends on inspection at all checkpoints may reach two to three days, in addition to collecting illegal amounts of money ranging from 20 to 60 thousand Yemeni riyals ($20-60$) at every checkpoint.[35]

Truck scales (weighbridges) are another issue, as witnesses confirm that the scales of trucks on one route can reach five scales, collecting total illegal royalties on each truck of 250 thousand Yemeni riyals, and all of that money is paid by merchants and added to commercial goods, while the truck owners incur a continuous repair process in transport trucks, resulting in large transportation costs.[36]

According to the statement of a wholesaler, the goods that used to arrive from Sana'a to Marib through the Sana'a-Nahm-Marib road, with a transportation cost of up to 100,000 riyals, are now reaching 500 thousand riyals, through the road of Sana'a – Dhamar - Al-Bayda - Shabwa - Harib – Marib A truck driver who was interviewed stated that this increase is due to royalties collected on the roadways, at security checkpoints, and at so-called weighbridges. He claims that when moving from Aden to Marib, he spends approximately one million and two hundred thousand Yemeni riyals, which are paid by the merchant so that he can pay at municipal points and checkpoints. Not to mention that the merchant will also pay the transportation fees.[37]

Through this study and interviews with drivers of heavy transport trucks transporting foodstuffs, one from Aden to Marib and the other from Hodeidah to Marib, you will find a simple and real example showing the time of travel of two trucks transporting goods coming to Marib from Aden and Hodeidah, as well as the costs incurred on the road to Marib:

| Route | Levies | Truck scales Nos. | Scale Fees | Overweight fines on every truck | Time spent | Transportation Cost | Authority | Exchange Rate 1USD/YER |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Aden-Marib | 782,000 | 6 | 10,000 | 10,000 | 14 days | 1,200,000 | Internationally recognized Gov. | 1500 |
| Hodeida-Marib | 130,000 | 1 | 10,000 | 5,000 | 4 days | 3,200,000 | Houthis | 530 |

[34] Interview with a citizen of the Directorate of Harib in Marib Governorate – February 2024.
[35] Interview with a truck driver transporting vegetables and fruits from Marib to Sana 'a, February 2024.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.

## Marketing Decrease

Because Ma'rib Governorate has one of the greatest agricultural production levels (vegetables and fruits), roadblocks have hindered selling to other governorates, while the local market has declined. According to one agricultural marketing professional, the impact is significant because the transportation process takes a long time, exposing the vegetables and fruits to damage while in transit in the desert.

For example, the costs of the commodities available vary and are determined by the market where vegetables from different governorates come. The driver also mentions that there are other issues such as the double cost of transportation and the pricing differences between the Sanaa and Marib currencies.[38]

When it comes to vegetable pricing, the governorate of Marib ranks first among Yemeni governorates, with prices skyrocketing, aggravating people' hardship. A driver working with a vegetable supplier pointed out that the biggest problems in supplying vegetables from Sana'a to Marib is that time spent was an hour and a half, now drivers have to spend days through the desert road (through the Al-Jawf desert), which in turn raises transportation costs. Diesel prices reach 26,000 thousand riyals for 20 liters, suggesting that transport trucks need 400 liters throughout the trip with possible delays in the desert which may last from two to three days and could last up to a week due to truck malfunctions or getting stuck in the sands of the desert.[39]

Furthermore, the prices of vegetables and fruits from farmers or wholesalers were affected depending on currency rates. Merchants and large fruit and vegetable markets in areas controlled by the Ansar Allah group (Houthis) are the ones who control the prices. A driver for a vegetable supplier says that the roadblocks have affected everyone, including the merchants and farmers who are having problems obtaining petroleum products, as a result this has raised vegetable prices in Marib.

## Security Impacts

Restrictions on movement and the closure of major roads have hindered citizens' and displaced persons' freedom of movement and exposed everyone to numerous security risks, as people with various needs are forced to pass through areas abundant with weapons, mines, and explosive devices, not to mention becoming lost on alternative and unmarked roads, being exposed to bandits, extortion, theft, or even murder.

Furthermore, security has become a crucial priority in mobility planning. There are a number of precautionary measures in place to avoid arrest, detention, or even arrest for political reasons, such as deleting any sensitive information from mobile phones and not disclosing the true

[38]Ibid.
[39]The burdens of war on Yemen's roads - Sana 'a Center for Strategic Studies: https://sanaacenter.org/ar/publications-all/main-publications-ar/19410

destination of soldiers stationed at checkpoints or the area from which they came, their political and regional affiliations, or the nature of the profession practiced.

Alternative routes to and from Marib have become increasingly risky as a result of increased crime and banditry. For example, the Al-Ruwaik Desert, through which the desert line runs, has become a sanctuary for criminals who blackmail and steal from travelers and plunder their properties. Previously, human rights activists shared photos of masked individuals forcing tourists to hand over their belongings, as well as images of travelers being murdered next to their cars and trucks in the middle of the desert.[40]

The presence of mines and IEDs positioned along desert lines adds to the risk and menace. Hundreds of travelers were killed or injured by these explosive devices as they entered minefields. Many of the looting and plunder activities carried out by armed gangs were recorded on the desert and dirt roads connecting Al-Abr, Marib, and Al-Jawf.

Testimonies show that relief and goods truck drivers, as well as taxi drivers, were robbed and looted. Travelers were robbed and their valuables stolen on the desert line connecting Ma'rib, Al-Jawf[41], and Sana'a. Similar incidents occurred on the Harib-Marib Road. Witnesses stated that travelers on these roads risk being lost in the desert and being attacked by robbers.[42]

At the beginning of 2023, the government and security authorities of the Internationally Recognized Government announced the permanent closure of the Ruwaik-Jawf desert road to travelers, especially Yemeni expatriates in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which is the main route for them to enter Yemen and travel to the Kingdom, and transfer it through (Al-Samada road- the new airport through the city of Marib), because the desert road has caused suffering and risk for the citizens through the past years, and it also makes an ongoing concern for the security authorities.[43]

## Conclusion

We strongly urge for expediting the opening of the main roads in light of the significant challenges Yemen faces as a result of the closure of roads, particularly the Marib-Sanaa Road. Public infrastructure and services affected by the conflict must be neutralized, and citizens' access to essential services must be facilitated. We must also look for practical and long-lasting solutions to the problem of road closures and the deprived people of their freedom to move, and travel safely inside and outside of their homeland.

[40] Yemen News platform (cutting, looting and levies) The specter of death is chasing returnees to Yemen in the desert of Al-Jawf and Marib):
https://newsyemen.news/new/91435
[41] Interview with a human rights monitor in Marib Governorate – February 2024.
[42] Interview with a heavy truck driver across the Sana 'a-Marib line, February 2024.
[43] Closing desert roads and opening other safe outlets in order to facilitate the movement of citizens: https://almasdaronline.com/articles/266475

## Conclusions and Recommendations

- The parties to the conflict and the international community must work together to find peaceful and political solutions to the conflict. The protection of civilians and human rights must be a top priority, and action must be taken to secure roads and provide security.
- Calling on the UN envoy and all local and international mediators to exert more efforts and pressure on the parties to the conflict to accelerate the opening of the main roads in Yemen, the first of which is the road of Marib - Nahm - Sana'a, and Marib - Sirwah – Sana'a.
- All parties to the conflict in Yemen should work to neutralize roads and public services from the conflict and work to facilitate citizens' access to health and education services.
- The parties to the conflict and the international community must work together to find peaceful and political solutions to the conflict. The protection of civilians and human rights must be a top priority, and action must be taken to secure roads and provide security.
- The Houthis and the Yemeni government should cooperate with the UN and humanitarian mine action agencies to clear the road of landmines and explosive remnants of war, which pose a serious threat to people's lives and their livelihoods.
- The competent authorities shall stop illegal royalties and find a clear mechanism for paying the legally approved fees and organize the collection of taxes and improvement fees imposed on vehicles and trucks transporting goods and basic materials.
- UN and aid organizations must move from rapid and emergency response projects to sustainable projects in health, education and sanitation, as well as economic empowerment and entrepreneurship projects for displaced persons and vulnerable groups affected by conflict.
- It is also necessary to strengthen cooperation between the parties to the conflict with regard to transport, the movement of goods and civilians, by providing the necessary support for the rehabilitation of damaged infrastructure and the rehabilitation of damaged roads, in addition to strengthening efforts to secure border areas and economic joints.
- On the humanitarian level, the parties to the conflict and all humanitarian agencies and organizations operating in Yemen must provide the necessary humanitarian assistance to the affected civilians, and food supplies, medical materials and other assistance must be facilitated to reach the affected areas.