

Yemen's blood bank faces threat of closure within days

August 12 2017

Yemen's blood bank has sent out an urgent appeal to anyone who will listen, as war and a blockade on the capital may force the centre to close within a week.

"We appeal to all humanitarian organisations in the international community and all financial donors to support the centre, as our medical supplies have nearly run out," said Adnan al-Hakimi, director of the National Blood Transfusion and Research Center in Sanaa.

"We will only be able to work for one more week, and after that if the humanitarian organisations don't mobilise to support the national centre, it will shut down."

The [blood](#) bank says it treats some 3,000 Yemenis a month who suffer from cancer, kidney failure and thalassaemia, an inherited blood disorder which causes severe anaemia.

But a trifecta of war, disease and famine has left the bank struggling to keep up with spiralling demand, with basic supplies all but impossible to secure in a country locked in by port and airport blockades.

"We've been impacted by the overall situation in Yemen, including the economic collapse," Hakimi said.

Less than half of Yemen's hospitals are still up and running two years into a war between Iran-backed Shiite Huthi rebels, who control Sanaa,

and a government allied with a Sunni Arab military coalition led by Saudi Arabia.

The country's main international airport in Sanaa is also blockaded, with access limited to a select few UN aid flights by the Saudi-led coalition, which controls the airspace.

The war has destroyed much of Yemen's infrastructure and pushed the country—long the Arab world's poorest state—to the brink of official famine.

More than 8,300 people have died in the conflict, with another 47,700 injured and millions displaced, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

A cholera outbreak has also claimed the lives of some 2,000 Yemenis in less than four months.

'Switch support to other priorities'

Amina Ali, whose young son has a condition that requires blood transfusions, makes the trip to the centre regularly for blood and platelets.

Now, she says, she fears those trips are numbered.

"I order blood and platelets for my son every 10 days from the centre," she told AFP.

"What if it shuts down? Many children will get worse, including my son."

Hakimi said the international medical charity Doctors Without Borders

(MSF) had been providing supplies to the bank since 2015 but "surprisingly suddenly stopped" in June.

In a statement emailed to AFP, MSF confirmed it has been supporting the blood bank for two years and only handed over the activity to the UN's WHO in June 2017.

"As health needs have been increasing in Yemen, MSF chose to switch its support to other health priorities," the group said.

"The last donation MSF gave to the blood bank was in June 2017. That donation was to support the running of its activities for 2 months, giving the time for WHO to start its support."

Like MSF, the United Nations has warned it has been forced to divert resources from one community to aid another—most recently, from food programmes to handle the escalating [cholera outbreak](#).

The United Nations has said that less than half of the \$2.1 billion pledged this year to Yemen by the international community has been disbursed.

But despite the dwindling hope, Yemenis refuse to give up on others in need.

"I am here to donate blood as an act of charity and for my country," said Abdullah Farei, one of a handful of citizens who turned up at the centre to donate blood.

"We ask God that the citizens respond to the call of the [blood bank](#) and donate blood and money."

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