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War and its Serious Unforeseen Effects on Health and Humanitarian Action

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Opinion

The war in my country, Yemen, since March 2015, has greatly affected the humanitarian and medical community. Everything has changed, even professional ethics are no longer what they were before the war.

This was evident in the high prices of medical services provided, especially by the private sector.

This directly affected the patients, especially from the vulnerable and marginalized groups of children and women, as well as those with limited income, so the numbers of infected cases doubled, and the spread of diseases and epidemics increased in large numbers. The Ministry of Public Health alone is not concerned with all of this, as there are other influential players in health work and its outputs. Hence the importance of institutional and sectoral coordination between the concerned ministries, starting with the Ministry of Education, passing through the Ministry of Water and Sanitation, then the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Trade and Industry.....eats. The war doubled the health problems and increased them many times more than they were. Targeting water and sewage tanks and hitting the infrastructure had a major role in the spread of cholera in 2016-2018 in Yemen.

This is a clear example that war has significant and dangerous health consequences even in places far from the battlefields of confrontation. I was at the head of an epidemiological investigation team during my work as the executive director of a local humanitarian organization at that time 2017, and we carried out a survey, treatment and health education for the targeted areas in Dhamar Governorate - Haran region, with the support from World Health Organization. That area was the first focus of the spread of the disease in the city, as it is near the collection of sewage water, and near it are vegetable farms. The water networks that feed the region have been damaged, and sewage has leaked into that network, which has helped spread diarrheal diseases. Because of the presence of some cases of cholera in the region, cholera has spread rapidly if the groundwater becomes contaminated, and the water sales centers do not fully sterilize and chlorinate the water.

The absence of the government water project, which requires the presence of diesel and its derivatives to operate the pumps and the water purification plant, all of this affected the exacerbation of the problem.

Therefore, the places of selling water from the groundwater source and through the water ditches became a source of cholera transmission in the region and distributed it among the houses. Therefore, the process of providing chlorine for chlorination, carrying out awareness and health education campaigns, opening treatment centers and units, and sanitary isolation procedures was a necessary thing to stop the spread of cholera. During the epidemiological

investigation, it became clear to us that farmers, due to the high price of petroleum products and the high price of water, use sewage water directly to irrigate vegetable farms, which helped spread the disease.

Here, the lack of awareness of the importance of cleaning and washing vegetables before eating them was important in reducing disease and using safe and clean water for drinking. It also seemed clear to us the importance of sectoral coordination between all partners from government ministries and partners in human development to limit this epidemic. Real humanitarian action requires the concerted efforts of all in an intensive, real and sincere manner, and that these efforts are in the interest of citizens in general and the targeted patients in particular. And that attention is paid during the development of plans to the marginalized and vulnerable groups that do not find shelter and do not find clean water or clean and healthy food. Humanitarian action must be fast and effective and does not accept procrastination or delay for whatever reason. When we were delayed for days only, the losses were very great and cannot be compensated at any cost, because here we lose the most important thing in life, which is the human lives that were destined for survival and life, and the loss is greater when the family loses mother, wife or young child.

The delay in the arrival of medical aid due to the blockade and war exacerbated the problem and increased its seriousness

and complications. The delay in taking the decision from the organizations on the need for rapid and immediate intervention and besieging the epidemic in the foci in which it appeared contributed to the increase in cases. The lack of real awareness of the disaster among the decision-maker and the excessive centralization in some parts of the health system in decision-making contributed to the spread of the disease. The economic situation and its repercussions on the lives of citizens contributed to the spread of the epidemic, as prices increased, especially in private health facilities, which cover nearly half of those targeted in the health sector. The high prices of oil and oil derivatives due to the blockade contributed to paralyzing movement and the difficulty of transporting patients to receive treatment, as well as raising the cost of all foodstuffs, medicines and medical supplies, which helped to increase cases.

The destruction of more than half of the governmental medical health facilities due to the war was a major reason for the increase in cases and the spread of the epidemic. All of these reasons worked together like a snowball and contributed directly and some indirectly to the cholera disease claiming tens of thousands of lives during that period. I hope with all my heart that this scenario will not be repeated in any country in the world. Here the voice is raised loudly, and in all parts of the world, stop the war on my country, Yemen, and everywhere in this small world.