27 March 2016, Sana'a, Yemen – This week marks one year since the escalation of the conflict in Yemen, where the violence has had a devastating impact on millions of innocent civilians, causing immeasurable suffering. Since March 2015, more than 6200 people have been killed and 30 000 injured. More than 21 million people – 82% of the total population – are in need of humanitarian aid, including almost 2.5 million people who have been internally displaced. More than one third of people in need live in inaccessible or hard-to-reach areas.

Even before the current conflict, the health system in Yemen had been facing some challenges, and ongoing violence has led to further deterioration of the health situation. Almost 19 million people lack access to clean water and sanitation, placing them at risk of infectious diseases such as dengue fever, malaria and cholera. More than 14 million Yemenis are in need of urgent health services, including more than 2 million acutely malnourished children and pregnant or lactating women requiring treatment. Yet despite these critical needs, 25% of all health facilities have shut down due to damages or shortages in staff, medicines and other resources.

"Health needs in Yemen are vast, but operating in a conflict context is never an easy task. Over the past year, WHO has had to find solutions to reach people in need. We sent life-saving medicines and supplies via boat when roads were blocked, and we transported safe water to health facilities by animals due to lack of fuel. Since March 2015, WHO has reached millions of people with 450 tonnes of life-saving medicines and supplies; delivered integrated primary health care services, including mental health services, through mobile medical teams and mobile clinics; and provided more than 150 000 vials of insulin," said Dr Ala Alwan, WHO's Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean. "5 million children under the age of 5 were vaccinated against polio and 2.4 million children under the age of 15 were vaccinated against measles and rubella by WHO and partners." WHO also provided one million litres of fuel to hospitals and 20 million litres of safe water to health facilities and camps hosting internally displaced persons.

"Despite our efforts so far, much more needs to be done to respond to the health needs of people in Yemen. I am extremely concerned about the limited funding for the health sector, which has so far only received 6% of its requirements for 2016. As we enter the second year of this conflict, I also remind all parties of their obligations under international humanitarian law to facilitate humanitarian access to all areas of Yemen, and respect the safety of health workers and health facilities already working under extremely challenging conditions," said Dr Alwan.