8 June 2017 | SANA'A - The number of suspected cholera cases in Yemen continues to rise, reaching 101 820 with 791 deaths as of 7 June 2017. Worst affected are the country's most vulnerable: children under the age of 15 account for 46% of cases, and those aged over 60 represent 33% of fatalities.

WHO and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) are honing in on areas reporting the highest number of cases to stop the disease from spreading further.

"These cholera 'hot spots' are the source of much of the country's cholera transmission," said Dr Nevio Zagaria, the head of WHO's office in Yemen. "Stamp out cholera in these places and we can slow the spread of the disease and save lives. At the same time, we're continuing to support early and proper treatment for the sick and conducting prevention activities across the country."

The race to contain the cholera outbreak will not be won easily. The country's health system has been nearly destroyed by more than two years of intense conflict. Less than half of the country's health centres are fully functional. Medical supplies are flowing into the country at a third of the rate that they were entering Yemen before March 2015. Important infrastructure has been damaged by the violence, cutting 14.5 million people off from regular access to clean water and sanitation. Health and sanitation workers have not received their salaries in more than eight months.

"The cholera outbreak is making a bad situation for children drastically worse. Many of the children who have died from the disease were also acutely malnourished", said Dr Meritxell Relano, UNICEF's Representative in Yemen. "Today, life for children in Yemen is a desperate struggle for survival, with cholera, malnutrition and the relentless violence constantly sounding a death knell at their doorsteps," she said.

UNICEF, WHO, along with their partners, are working on a war footing to respond to this latest outbreak. Nearly 3.5 million people across the country have been reached by disinfecting water tanker filling stations, chlorinating drinking water, restoration of water treatment plants, rehabilitation of water supply systems, providing household water treatments and distributing

hygiene kits (soaps and washing powders). UNICEF and WHO are both providing support and medical supplies to Oral Rehydration Centres and Diarrheal treatment centres across the country where patients are being screened and provided immediate medical support. All this is done along with disseminating hygiene awareness to the affected populations.

The total funding needed for the joint response activities of health, water and sanitation partners comes to US$ 66.7 million for six months. While donors have been generous to date, more funding is still required, particularly for water and sanitation interventions. The biggest need, however, is for an increased number of partners in the field across the country, including in areas with poor access due to conflict.