

Briefing to United Nations Security Council

Special Envoy for Yemen – Mr. Martin Griffiths

12 May 2021

Thank you, **Mr. President**. I would of course like to begin by extending my warmest best wishes to Yemenis and to Muslims around the world on the occasion of Eid al Fitr, which is I think today or tomorrow.

Mr. President, despite redoubled efforts in recent months to reach a peaceful resolution to the Yemen conflict, I am unfortunately not here today to report that the parties are closing in on a deal. Instead, I must report relentless military escalation by Ansar Allah in Marib; continued restrictions on imports through Hudaydah contributing to severe fuel shortages and price increases; restrictions of freedom of movement across the country, including, of course, the continued closure of Sana'a airport; and finally absence of a political process thus depriving Yemenis of some hope that an end to the conflict is near.

I cannot re-emphasize enough, and I know I've done it often before in this Chamber what is at stake in Marib. Ansar Allah's offensive, which has been ongoing for more than a year, has caused an astonishing loss of life, including children who have been mercilessly thrown into the battle. Internally displaced persons who have sought refuge in Marib continue to live in fear for their lives and further displacement. Indeed, civilians have been displaced multiple times. And the offensive has been continuously and is still now disrupting our efforts to end this war and bring the chance of peace. So, of course, I once again, and this is my message of the day Mr. President, call on Ansar Allah to immediately stop its attack on Marib.

The longer the Marib offensive goes on, the greater the risks to Yemen's broader stability and social cohesion. And indeed, it has every chance, of leading to the transfer of conflict to other areas of Yemen, including those which have remained mercifully far from the main theaters of conflict. Yemen is an unstable country, easily destabilized.

The continued assault on Marib is indeed unjustifiable. There are options on the table, as we know, that would allow for the peaceful and durable resolution of key issues. These include lifting the restrictions on the flow of commercial goods, especially fuel, through the ports of Hudaydah and the re-opening of Sanaa airport to commercial traffic.

I fear that the Marib offensive may suggest to some, only to some, a belief that the war can be won outright militarily. But military conquest will not decisively end this war. It will only inevitable and certainly invite further cycles of violence and unrest. Yemen cannot be governed effectively except through inclusive partnerships of various, different political forces and components. And, as, Mr. President, the members of this Council have reiterated time and again, the way to end the conflict is through such an inclusive negotiated political settlement, not through battle and not through military gain and not through a senseless loss of life.

Mr. President, since March 2020, as you know, I have been engaging the parties on the terms of a clear alternative to these cycles of violence and acute humanitarian suffering. I have conducted multiple rounds of intensive and complex negotiations with each side. The terms of the deal have undergone many revisions. But all proposals that have been on the table would have achieved the following crucial points for reminder.

First, a commitment to a nationwide ceasefire that would provide immense humanitarian relief. It would allow for the opening of roads in many parts of the country, including in Taiz, Hudaydah and Marib itself. It would allow for children to safely go to school, and for civilians to

have a moment to live in relative calm across Yemen for the first time in many years. That is one of the aspirations that we have been putting to the parties these many months.

Second, re-opening Sana'a Airport to commercial air traffic, ensuring the uninterrupted flow of fuel and other commodities into Yemen through Hudaydah ports. These measures are also imperative for the welfare of the people of Yemen. Civilians of course suffer the most from the weaponization of the economy in Yemen as in any such conflict. We see this very clearly today in areas under the control of Ansar Allah, where severe fuel shortages due to the issue that I have referred to of the entry of ships into Hudaydah, these severe fuel shortages are impacting primarily hospitals, essential services, food supply and pushing up prices beyond a level that most households can afford. And of course, civilian needs must be prioritized above all else.

Third, a commitment to resume that political process to find that elusive political settlement.

Mr. President, I am here to say today that a deal is still very much possible. There is strong, as we discussed last time, international backing and there is regional momentum for the UN's efforts. I can refer to the Saudi initiative, I can refer to the tireless travel of the US Special Envoy Tim Lenderking, and I can refer to the extraordinary efforts being put forward to resolve the conflict by the Sultanate of Oman, including His Majesty, the Sultan, himself. We are working together. We are working closely together. And we are working without differences between us.

In addition, the differences between the parties on the issues under negotiation – those I've just described - are not unbridgeable. The solution is not the problem, as it is often the case. A deal can be achieved easily, very quickly, if the key political leaders heed the calls of Yemenis and ourselves to make that right decision; if the will is there, the words will soon follow.

The parties need to demonstrate to the Yemeni people and to the international community their commitment to peaceful negotiations. And I wish to state here, Mr. President, that on several occasions during these negotiations, Ansar Allah has declined to meet me, including recently. To say this sends the wrong signal is an understatement. As I've said in my last briefing to this Council, to turn attendance of meetings into transactions is simply unacceptable and forfeit the opportunity to the international community to speak to the prospects of peace is a dereliction of duty.

Taking the decision to end the conflict and open the door to peace is of course, the most consequential decision any party can make. The most consequential choice. The opportunity is there Time still of the essence due to the loss of life and the suffering of families in the humanitarian strictures that follow this war. And indeed, what is currently on the table might not be there indefinitely. Stalling negotiations serves no one.

I wanted to note, Mr. President, that cooperation with the Government of Yemen on these negotiations has been excellent. I want to make that clear.

In the coming weeks, looking ahead, in the short- to near-term, my aim is to work with the parties to conclude the negotiations - to use the language that we know is appropriate for that- deal and put it in front of them so that fighting is stopped and the various benefits that I have been outlining may be obtained. I ask for help from all. We have active, vigorous assistance from those member states I have already listed but so do we from so many others and it is essential that all of us in different ways push the parties, and Ansar Allah, perhaps, in particular, to support this endeavor. And if needed, I will of course, call on the parties to meet face-to-face, finally, to take their chances with what is in front of them and to be accountable for the decisions that they will

make in such a meeting. And I would like to be able to resolve that before we meet again.

Mr. President, finally, what I have described very simply and not for the first time, is simply the duty of the mediator. But the mediator cannot force the parties to negotiate. That is their obligation. That is their responsibility. And frankly, **Mr. President**, that is their duty to the people of Yemen.

Thank you very much.