

Briefing to the United Nations Security Council
UN Special Envoy for Yemen – Mr. Martin Griffiths

16 March 2021

(As delivered)

Madam President, unfortunately I am returning to this Council, yet again, to report a deterioration of the conflict in Yemen. This time, it is quite a dramatic deterioration. Ansar Allah's offensive on Marib governorate continues, putting civilians, including an estimated one million internally displaced persons, at risk. Fighting forces on both sides have suffered heavy losses. I see shocking reports of children increasingly getting drawn into the war effort and deprived of their future.

Cross-border attacks have also increased significantly in recent weeks. I am concerned by the intensification of missiles and drone strikes, including ones that have targeted civilian and commercial infrastructure in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Subsequently, airstrikes took place within the confines of Sana'a city, endangering civilians there as well.

We are also seeing other fronts in Yemen opening, including with military escalations in Hajjah and Taiz.

In Hudaydah, there has been a troubling continuation of violence causing civilian deaths and injuries, including women and children. I join General Guha, head of the UN Mission to Support the Hudaydah Agreement, in condemning attacks that endanger civilians. UNMHA continues its efforts to reactivate the Redeployment Coordination Committee and its subsidiary joint mechanisms, and to achieve a more balanced mission footprint across the territory of Hudaydah. I encourage the parties to work constructively with the Mission to make progress in these regards.

Madam President, even as the conflict intensifies, acute fuel shortages for civilians persist in Sana'a and the surrounding governorates. Fuel imports have not been permitted to enter Hudaydah since January. This has contributed to the increase in cost of basic commodities and put hospitals and services at risk. This is simply unacceptable on humanitarian grounds, and the United Nations has consistently drawn the attention of this Council to these issues. It is vital that obstacles to imports and domestic distribution of fuel for civilian use are removed. I call on the parties to prioritize civilian needs above all else and not to weaponize the economy.

As a result, I call here on the Government of Yemen to urgently permit the entry of fuel ships to Hudaydah. There should be no further delay. The revenues stemming from the fees and taxes of the oil ships should be exclusively used for the payment of the salaries of civil servants based on the 2014 payroll database. I hope the parties will engage constructively with UN efforts to find a sustainable solution to this critical humanitarian issue.

The situation in Aden and the surrounding governorates remains difficult. It is encouraging that the new Cabinet continues to execute its functions from inside Yemen. This is good for

state institutions and the overall prospects of peace in Yemen. But it is clear that improving basic services, including access to electricity, making sure that salaries will be paid to government employees without further delay, ensuring security and stabilizing the economy will require more resources. Such resources are currently in short supply.

Madam President, it is not only Yemenis who are suffering in Yemen. The world was reminded of the plight of the migrant community last week when a horrific fire broke out at a detention facility in Sana'a holding predominantly Ethiopian migrants. Dozens were killed in the fire and over 170 seriously injured. There must be an independent investigation into the cause of the fire. All people in Yemen, regardless of nationality, must be afforded protection and kept safe.

Madam President allow me to turn to the proposed way forward. There have been many reports and much public commentary of late on the efforts being made to bring an end to the fighting and to the need for the launch of the political process. I would like here to clarify for this Council my own appreciation of the situation. We are often and rightly reminded that Yemen is the world's largest humanitarian disaster, and that famine has now arrived to add to the tragedy of Yemen. In this connection, Mark often reminds us of the link between the incidence of famine and the places where the war is hottest. So, it has been incumbent upon the parties for a long time, and now more than ever, to agree to stop the fighting, to silence the guns. A nationwide ceasefire, along with opening Sana'a airport and ensuring the unhindered flow of fuel and other commodities into Yemen through Hudaydah ports, are urgent humanitarian imperatives. These measures will ease the impact of the conflict on civilians and facilitate Yemenis' right to freedom of movement. We must do all we can to allow Yemen to breathe.

In addition to these humanitarian considerations, my particular task, **Madam President**, is to help the parties to end the conflict and that can only come through resolving their differences through negotiation. This is my focus, and this is why I include the resumption of an inclusive political process to the three humanitarian priorities listed above. Hence the urgent agenda of the United Nations for negotiations are four issues, three of them are humanitarian and one the launch of the much-delayed political process.

Madam President, I must however clarify that there can be no preconditions for resuming the political process. Resuming the process, and engaging seriously in it, is an obligation upon the warring parties. And they must engage constantly and seriously at all stages with the United Nations to make this happen. They owe it to the Yemeni people to provide hope that there is an end in sight to this conflict. I am alarmed that the mere fact of meeting across the table to discuss the contours of ending the war is being framed as a concession rather than an obligation.

Madam President, we have been pursuing this agenda with renewed vigour these past weeks. We are fortunate to work closely with key member states on these issues, and their engagement gives us all more energy and a great deal more hope. I want to particularly

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Office of the Special Envoy
of the Secretary-General for Yemen

thank you **Madam President** and your government for your support in recent weeks, and for the tireless efforts of your envoy Tim Lenderking.

I wish that today I could bear glad tidings. But we aren't there yet. We know what this Council wants. We know what the international community wants. We know what the people of Yemen want. An end to all this misery, to the lives thrown away for illusory military gains, to the tragedy of Yemen's families desperate for that end and a way out of this misery. To them, to us all, we say those glad tidings cannot come a day too soon.