

## **BRIEFING OF THE UN SPECIAL ENVOY FOR YEMEN TO THE OPEN SESSION OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL**

**10 October 2017**

Mr. President,

The parties to the conflict in Yemen are pursuing a futile and cruel military conflict, which is eroding the path to peace. At the same time, the people of Yemen are suffering from an entirely man-made humanitarian catastrophe.

Clashes and exchanges of heavy fire have continued on all major frontlines, including Taiz, Marib, al-Jawf, al Bayda, Hajjah and Sa'adah governorates, and the Saudi-Yemen border areas.

The recent sharp increase in civilian casualties show the parties' continued disregard for the loss of civilian life and their obligations under international humanitarian law.

An airstrike against a residential suburb of Sana'a took place on 25 August 2017, has reportedly resulted in the killing of 14 civilians and the injury of 16 others, and has caused further damage to civilian infrastructure.

In Taiz city, shelling of residential areas from zones controlled by Houthi forces and forces loyal to Ali Abdallah Saleh has continued. In two incidents on 15 and 18 September, rockets fired - killed and injured tens of civilians, including eight children. In addition, on 23 September, the Coalition intercepted a Houthi missile fired towards the Saudi city of Khamis Al-Mushayt. The Houthis' recent threats to expand the firing of ballistic missiles towards other countries in the Gulf region is a counterproductive escalation of rhetoric.

The recent resolution by the United Nations Human Rights Council, supporting the national committee for human rights and establishing a Group of Experts to examine alleged violations and abuses of international human rights and international law is a significant sign of increased engagement of the international community and a step forward towards accountability and reducing future violations.

I have consistently reminded the warring parties of their responsibilities under international humanitarian law and human rights law, including their obligation to stop recruitment of child soldiers and to end sexual and gender-based violence. Targeting civilians and destruction of civilian infrastructure is unacceptable.

Mr. President,

The conflict is creating a desperate situation in every facet of daily life. The economy is shrinking even further and the use of dwindling state revenues to fund the war continues to hinder the salary payments on which millions of Yemenis depend. There are continuing efforts to reactivate the Central Bank and the neutralization of the Yemeni economy as recently discussed in the Track II event held in Germany for the interest of repayment of salaries to Yemeni civil servants, and those in the education and health sectors. This will hopefully decrease the humanitarian and economic strife.

Some 17 million individuals are food insecure and over one third of the country's districts are now in severe danger of famine. The destruction of infrastructure and breakdown of public services have fueled the world's worst outbreak of cholera, which has already killed more than 2,100 individuals and continues to infect thousands each week.

Future Yemeni generations will suffer and bear the burden of this conflict – including the massive destruction, the malnutrition, the lack of education and the economic deterioration. The outlook can only become bleaker in the absence of a political solution. An agreement to end the war is urgently required so that a new Yemeni unity government, supported by the international community, can begin the process of rebuilding the economy and state institutions.

I welcome the efforts of the World Bank and UNICEF to mitigate the impact of the economic crisis. The first disbursement of cash assistance to the most vulnerable Yemeni households took place on 20 August. The 400 million US dollar programme will reach all of its beneficiaries in the coming weeks and months. This programme is providing vital support to these households, and maintains a critical safety net system.

Mr. President,

In Yemen, there are no winners on the battlefield. The losers are the Yemeni people who suffer by this war. The people are getting poorer while influential leaders get richer. They are not interested in finding solutions, as they will lose their power and control in a settlement. The parties have to commit to end all hostilities and start discussions for a comprehensive peace agreement. A common ground must be found to relieve the effects of conflict, hunger and disease and increase the trust among each other. An agreement to secure access of humanitarian and commercial goods to Al-Hodeidah and distribution to the rest of the country, opening Sana'a airport and ensuring more consistent salary payments, will be an essential step to alleviate the humanitarian crisis. However, these steps cannot replace a broad solution that we are trying to achieve, which will be a part of a larger comprehensive peace agreement.

To achieve this end, I had meetings with Yemeni and international officials during the General Assembly session in New York, and continue to be in communication with the parties. I am currently in the process of discussing a proposal that includes humanitarian initiatives to rebuild trust and steps to bring the parties back to the negotiations table. We will discuss the details of this proposal with the government of Yemen and the alliance of the Houthis and General People's Congress, who have committed to engage in a further discussion on the details of the proposal. We hope this commitment will translate into action and deepen their engagement with me on the basis of these initiatives in order to reach a peaceful political solution.

Mr. President,

The bloodshed and the destruction of Yemen has to end. There are no excuses. There are no justifications. People are requesting the United Nations for a solution regarding the payment of salaries while others are hindering talks as if they were ignorant to the suffering of millions of Yemenis. Many of the powerful in Yemen benefit from the current conflict at a time their citizens face the worst suffering in the history of Yemen.

The Yemeni people want this war to end, at a time the gap between them and those in power grows. Yemeni youth, women and civil society groups are calling for peace, stability and accountability for crimes committed. In the southern governorates, past injustices and calls for greater autonomy remain unaddressed, and need to be tackled.

Yemenis have many positive ideas to address all of these issues in a peaceful manner if the parties are willing to be flexible and listen to the people. If they do not, the fissures in Yemen's political and social fabric will become wider, and there is a severe danger of further fragmentation, with an increase in the potential of terrorism.

The United Nations utilizes all its political, logistical, administrative, and advisory facilities to support the Yemeni cause but only the warring parties can decide to bring peace. They are accountable for a failure. I reiterate that the only viable path for the future of Yemen is a negotiated settlement. The proposals that I have put forward meet the concerns of both parties and their implementation would have a real benefit for the Yemeni people.

Finally, I request the esteemed Council to use all the political and economic power to pressure all parties to commit to a path of peace. The parties must climb out from their trenches, and put an end to the hostile rhetoric. Instead of fighting over Yemen, let us cooperate for the best interest of Yemen.

Thank you, Mr. President.