

**BRIEFING TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL BY SPECIAL ENVOY OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR YEMEN,
ISMAIL OULD CHEIKH AHMED,
21 June 2016**

Mr. President,

I am grateful for the opportunity to brief the Security Council once again on progress in the Kuwait talks and on the prospects for Yemen's return to peace.

Today I am providing this briefing from Kuwait, two months after the launch of the peace talks.

These talks have been characterized by a positive spirit at times, and also by a certain apprehension. Progress has been made in some cases and further efforts are still needed in others.

Over the previous period of the talks, the parties unanimously agreed on the necessity of reaching a peaceful solution to put an end to the conflict in Yemen. The parties have met directly in several sessions and agreed on solid foundations to build on. A number of prisoners and detainees, including children, have been released. The cessation of hostilities has allowed humanitarian aid to reach areas that were previously not accessible.

Participants to the Kuwait peace talks held a number of important sessions characterised by an extraordinary openness and they have discussed the most sensitive issues including: military withdrawals, security arrangements and the handover of weapons, sensitive political issues and ways to improve the economic and humanitarian situation, as well as the release of prisoners and detainees.

After intense talks with both parties during which I listened carefully to their respective views and concerns, I presented a roadmap outlining a practical plan to put an end the conflict in Yemen and bring the country back to a peaceful political process. The roadmap provides for the implementation of the security arrangements specified in Security Council resolution 2216 (2015) and the establishment of a national unity government that would ensure the delivery of basic services and address the recovery of the Yemeni economy.

According to the proposed roadmap, the national unity government would also be responsible for preparing a political dialogue to define the remaining steps for a comprehensive political solution, including: the electoral law, the mandate of the institutions, which would oversee the transition period and the completion of the draft constitution. It is essential that this political dialogue also finds ways to ensure more effective participation of women, youth and representatives from the South of the country in determining Yemen's future. I note that the roadmap also included the need to establish national and international mechanisms to monitor and support the implementation of an agreement between the parties.

The delegations have responded positively to the proposals, but have not yet reached agreement on the sequencing of the different steps provided for in the roadmap: when would the Government of National Unity be created? What if particular provisions of the roadmap are implemented and others are not? These are important concerns that need to be addressed carefully in order to ensure a comprehensive solution with solid foundations. I look forward to the support of Member States in the region and this Council to encourage the delegations to overcome their differences quickly, strengthen the common

ground and demonstrate good faith. Yemen is on the path to an agreement and each day of delay needlessly extends the country's agony.

Mr. President,

The Cessation of Hostilities (CoH) which was declared on 10 April 2015 has continued to provide relief from violence in many parts of Yemen. The De-escalation and Coordination Committee (DCC), based in Kuwait, and the Local Disengagement Councils (LDCs), have continued to play an important role in de-escalating outbreaks of violence and reducing violations of the CoH.

Unfortunately, the work of the committees has not been successful at stopping serious violations, such as the shelling of a popular market in Taizz on 4 June, which resulted in 18 civilian deaths and tens of injuries. In addition, there were violations of the CoH in Marib, al Jawf, Taiz and in the border areas with Saudi Arabia. I encourage you to call on all parties to fully cease all hostilities and respect their obligations under the international humanitarian law.

In order to strengthen the effectiveness of the CoH, my team has pursued several initiatives to support and incentivize the members of the DCC and LDCs, with the support of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the European Union, the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom, Turkey and the Netherlands. This has included training workshops to build the capacity of LDC members in several Governorates. This training will be repeated and broadened over the coming weeks to cover all remaining LDC members.

I would note that Prime Minister Ahmed Ben Dagher, and members of his cabinet, returned to Aden on 4 June in order to support the resumption of basic services and reinforcement of security and stability. His efforts deserve our support. I also acknowledge the continuous work in countering terrorism in the South, which has led to a relative improvement of security.

Mr. President,

While progress in the Kuwait talks brings hope for the future, we must be mindful of the severe decline in living conditions for people throughout the country. The failure to provide basic services over the last year has had a devastating impact. High temperatures and the lack of electricity in Aden, Hodayda and elsewhere have exacerbated the health crisis in these areas and caused a number of preventable deaths. In this regard, I welcome the efforts made by the United Arab Emirates to urgently provide fuel and emergency power to Aden.

Over the last few months, the Yemeni economy has seen a dangerous deterioration. Since the beginning of 2016, Yemen's GDP shrank by more than 30%. To address this alarming situation, the Central Bank has continued to ensure the import of basic commodities such as rice, wheat, and medicines. Such support will however become more difficult in the weeks ahead leading to a deterioration in the living standards of Yemenis, especially vulnerable groups. In this regard, my office is coordinating with the Government of Yemen, the Central Bank and certain Member States to find quick solutions to the rapidly deteriorating economic situation. I have recently met with the Minister of Finance and the Governor of the Central Bank –who is playing a very constructive role - and we discussed practical and rapidly implementable initiatives that can help prevent the deteriorating economic and humanitarian situation in the country. The humanitarian situation in Yemen is alarming and there are credible reports by humanitarian organizations warning of a humanitarian catastrophe, should the situation not be addressed rapidly.

I very much welcome the release of prisoners that took place since the beginning of the Holy month of Ramadan based on the recommendations of the Committee for prisoners and detainees established within the framework of the Kuwait talks which communicates data on the release of prisoners. In this regard, the Government of Yemen has handed 54 children to their families in coordination with support from UNICEF and ICCR. Likewise, more than 400 detainees, including prisoners of war, have been released by Ansar Allah in the past weeks. I emphasize the obligation of the parties to immediately and unconditionally release all children and to prioritize the release of vulnerable detainees, such as the elderly, sick and wounded, as well as those individuals specified in Security Council resolution 2216 (2015).

Tragically, the limited release of prisoners has still been accompanied by continued and systematic persecution of civilians, including journalists and civil society activists in Yemen. These acts of intimidation and harassment are a clear violation of the international instruments on Human Rights. I call on all parties to halt these acts and to fulfill their obligations under international human rights law.

In short, the general atmosphere continues to be positive although difficulties remain which need to be addressed. The Kuwait talks have progressed slowly, yet constructively, over the last two months. I am reassured by the commitment of the two delegations, but I am appealing to them to finalise these difficult negotiations and reach a comprehensive settlement as soon as possible.

The unwavering unity of this Council has been a key factor supporting progress in the talks. The parties have received a clear and consistent message from the international community that a solution must be reached here in Kuwait. I appreciate the encouragement and support of Member States in reaching a negotiated and peaceful end to this conflict and remain profoundly grateful to the General Secretariat of the Gulf Cooperation Council and to the League of Arab States. I also extend my sincere and utmost gratitude to the Emir of Kuwait, His Highness Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, for his generous and steadfast support, and for the hospitality of the Government and People of Kuwait.

Mr, President,

Yemenis are watching the talks in Kuwait with hope and impatience. The people of Yemen have experienced the indignity and suffering of war for too long. I am confident that the unprecedented international support to the ongoing process will encourage the different parties to overcome obstacles and difficulties and reach a comprehensive political agreement. The delegations of the Government of Yemen, the General Popular Congress and Ansar Allah have demonstrated over the past weeks a true commitment to making peace, and a political wisdom in negotiations, which did not shy away from broaching sensitive and complicated issues. We have to recognize that any agreement emerging from the Kuwait talks takes place in a very difficult context and implementation will present a serious challenge. Those responsible should listen to their patriotic and political conscience and ensure implementation for the sake of national interest.

I will provide the Yemeni parties, in the next few days, with a written proposal for the upcoming period before we resume consultations after a short break aimed at allowing parties to consult with their respective leaderships. We are working towards reaching a comprehensive and sustainable peace agreement that will create security and stability for Yemen and its people and constitute a signal of hope for the Middle East which is afflicted by a series of regional and international disputes. The parties to the negotiations now have a responsibility to find a political solution for the issues still pending and which evolve mainly around the timeline and sequencing of the different steps. I call on all parties to show political courage and make their highest national interest prevail by making the concessions necessary to reach a comprehensive agreement that will preserve the safety of Yemen and its citizens.