

SPECIAL ENVOY OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR YEMEN, ISMAIL OULD CHEIKH AHMED
BRIEFING TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL
31 October 2015

Mr. President,

Thank you for this opportunity to update the Council on the latest developments in Yemen and challenges facing efforts to ensure the country's return to peace and stability.

What Yemen is witnessing today contravenes the commitments made by the parties to the United Nations to peace. The security situation is dire, and the humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate despite the efforts of the humanitarian agencies.

With regards to security, the Grand Hall in Sana'a witnessed a tragic attack on 8 October, where nearly one thousand Yemenis were gathered to pay their condolences at a funeral, left more than 140 dead and 550 injured. I visited the site of the attack several days ago together with family members of the victims, and saw for myself the shocking scale of destruction. The Mayor of Sanaa, Abdel Kader Hilal, a seasoned politician known for his bravery and commitment to peace until his last day, and two members of the De-escalation and Coordination Committee (DCC) were among the victims of the attack. The bombing of a funeral is contrary to all Yemeni norms and traditions and the perpetrators must be held accountable. I extend, once again, my deepest condolences to the families of the victims and wish a speedy recovery to those who were wounded in this attack. I commend the statements by the families of the victims, which called for restraint and thorough investigation of the incident. This is a clear demonstration of their sense of nationalism and their commitment to peace.

The Arab Coalition has taken responsibility for the attack and its Joint Incidents Assessment Team conducted a rapid preliminary investigation, which recommended action against those involved and a revision of the Coalition's rules of engagement. It will be very important to complete the investigations and to ensure accountability of those involved.

Mr. President,

Sadly, the 8 October attack was not the only incident where civilians and civilian infrastructure were targeted in the past weeks. On 3 October, shelling of Bir Basha district of Taiz, from areas controlled by the Houthi-GPC forces, resulted in nine civilian deaths including three children. Indiscriminate attacks on residential areas of Taiz have been ongoing for many months. They have caused great damage to the city and its population and must stop. These incidents are a horrific reminder of the consequences of war, a war that has blighted the country during the last eighteen months of conflict.

Mr. President,

The conduct of the parties on the ground is contrary to the commitments they made previously to engage fully and constructively in the UN-mediated peace process. I called on the parties to recommit to the April 10 Terms and Conditions for the Cessation of Hostilities. Although I would have preferred an open-ended Cessation of Hostilities, I was able to gain agreement on 72-hour pause which entered into force on 19 October. I regret to report that both sides were involved in significant violations of the Cessation of Hostilities from its first day. I am deeply concerned by the escalation of hostilities, which has continued at an alarming rate in the past few weeks. Fighting has escalated in Taiz, Maarib, al-Jawf,

Hajjah and on the border with Saudi Arabia, where ballistic missile attacks have increased in both frequency and range. Targeting the area of Mecca al-Mukarrama was a dangerous development, which affects the course of the war and the feelings of more than 1.5 billion Muslims worldwide.

I am also concerned that international vessels travelling off the coast of Yemen have come under fire from Houthi-controlled territories in recent weeks. A UAE vessel was targeted in the Strait of Bab al-Mandab. US destroyers travelling through international waters were reportedly targeted by direct missile attacks, and responded by reportedly firing on Houthi radar sites. These incidents risk a more acute escalation of the conflict, and threaten the security of international maritime movement. I thank the Council for its call on 4 October, for “such attacks to cease immediately”.

In southern Yemen, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and the so-called “Islamic State” (IS) continue attacks on state institutions and civilian targets. In Aden, on 1 October a suicide bomber killed one civilian and injured three others, and on 29 and 30 September, gunmen affiliated with IS assassinated a retired intelligence officer and a security officer. As part of their counter-terrorism efforts, Yemeni security forces raided the house of a prominent IS leader and confiscated a variety of weapons and explosives. In Abyan, counter-terrorism forces killed three militants, including a high-ranking AQAP affiliate and arrested two others.

Mr. President,

The escalating military situation continues to worsen a very dire humanitarian situation which requires far greater attention from the international community. Local authorities are unable to provide basic social services for the population. This is particularly prevalent in the health sector, where only 45 per cent of facilities are functional. In addition to the growing difficulty for Yemenis to obtain medical treatment at home, many Yemenis are also unable to seek treatment abroad due to the prohibition of commercial flights from Sanaa. I call for the immediate resumption of commercial flights to and from Sana'a. I also call on the Houthis and the GPC to ensure that access for humanitarian agencies are free from bureaucratic impediments and intimidation. My colleagues Stephen O'Brien, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, and Mohannad Hadi, Regional Director of the World Food Programme for the MENA region, will provide you with a more detailed briefing of the humanitarian situation and the UN's efforts to provide assistance.

I should add that the worsening economic situation threatens to create a far greater humanitarian crisis in the coming months if urgent action is not taken. Salary payments for most civil servants have already ceased. This was a primary source of income for much of the population. Unless they are continued quickly, many more Yemenis will face destitution and be forced to rely on humanitarian aid to survive. There should be a commitment from all parties, including the Government of Yemen, the Houthis and GPC to collaborate to ensure the continued functioning of the Central Bank and a rapid resumption of salaries throughout the country.

Mr. President,

Despite the International Community's calls for the Yemeni parties to fully commit to the peace process, the parties continued to embark on unilateral actions, which risk undermining the prospects for peace. On 2 October, the High Political Council established by the Houthis and GPC, asked the former Governor of Aden to form a new government. President Hadi's decision to replace the Governor of the Central Bank and relocate the Bank to Aden has created further economic uncertainty at a time when urgent

measures to save the economy are necessary. Prime Minister Ahmed bin Dagher announced via social media plans to convene the National Body to ratify the draft constitution. I urge the parties to refrain from taking any further measures, which will only complicate reaching a negotiated settlement to put Yemen on the path to peace.

I conducted extensive consultations with the Yemeni parties and members of the international community over the last few weeks, and presented the parties with a comprehensive and detailed roadmap to end the conflict. The roadmap is consistent with Security Council resolution 2216 (2015) and other relevant resolutions, the GCC Initiative and its Implementation Mechanism, and the Outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference. The Roadmap contains a set of sequenced political and security steps, conducted in parallel, which would help Yemen return to a peace and orderly political transition.

The Roadmap foresees the creation of military and security committees, which would supervise withdrawals and the handover of weapons in Sanaa, Hodeida and Taiz. The committees would also be tasked with ensuring the complete end of military violence and the safety and security of the population and state institutions. The Roadmap also lays out interim political arrangements including the appointment of a new Vice President and the formation of Government of National Unity which would lead Yemen's transition process and oversee the resumption of political dialogue, completion of the constitutional process and ultimately elections. I was informed, unofficially, that the parties have rejected the Roadmap. This demonstrates that the political elite in Yemen remains unable to overcome their differences and prioritize national, public interest over personal interests. It is time for the parties to realize that there can be no peace without concessions, and no security without agreement. They should base their positions on the question of how to ensure security and stability for the Yemeni people.

I will return to the region immediately following this briefing to start consultations with both parties in Sana'a and Riyadh with the aim of reaching a detailed agreement based on the Roadmap. It is now the responsibility of the delegations to prioritize peace, rather than partisan agendas. The Roadmap and the agreements discussed in Kuwait should allow process towards a comprehensive settlement in the coming weeks if the parties engage in good faith and demonstrate a sense of political and national awareness.

I am grateful for the International Community's continued support to my proposal for a comprehensive agreement and calls for a Cessation of Hostilities. The quadrilateral meetings of the Foreign Ministers of the United States, United Kingdom, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in Jeddah, New York and in London have supported these efforts along with their counterparts from the remaining members of the Gulf Cooperation Council. These calls were echoed in other meetings with the Foreign Ministers of the Sultanate of Oman, France, Egypt, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and the deputy Foreign Minister of Russia. I am grateful to the Council Members for their unwavering support of the efforts to restore peace in Yemen.

Mr. President,

After 18 months of horrific fighting, thousands of deaths, injuries and unspeakable human suffering, we all need to ask how long will Yemenis remain hostages to personal and reckless political decisions? What are the parties waiting for to sign a political agreement? Have they not understood that there are no winners in wars?

The Roadmap I have proposed to the parties is widely supported by the International Community because it provides a comprehensive solution, and includes guarantees for the political representation all political groupings.

I would like to ask the Council for its full support of the peace plan, and for an immediate cessation of hostilities and a release of detainees. And to the Yemenis I say, the dawn of peace could be near, in case those responsible decide to prioritize national interest and start working on rebuilding a stable state, which guarantees the rights of all of its people without discrimination.

Thank you.