



Briefing to United Nations Security Council by the Special Envoy for Yemen – Hans Grundberg

10 Sep 2021

Thank you. Madame President, I am honored to have been appointed the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Yemen, a position I started four days ago. I appreciate the expressions of support from Yemenis and the international community, including Council members. And I am also grateful for the previous Special Envoys who have exerted considerable efforts towards ending the conflict.

Madame President, I started working on Yemen over a decade ago. Yemen is a country of massive potential, situated in the gateways between Asia and Europe, between the Gulf and Africa. Yemen's impressive history of commerce, cultural richness and diversity is something I continue to admire.

However, my experience with Yemen also makes me painfully aware of the complexities of this conflict. Unfortunately, these complexities multiply as the conflict drags on. I am therefore under no illusions about the difficulty of the task handed to me by this Council. Enabling a resumption of a peaceful, inclusive, orderly and Yemeni-led political transition process that meets the legitimate demands and aspirations of the Yemeni people, as mandated by this Council, will not be easy. There are no quick wins.

Madame President, the current armed conflict has continued unabated for over six years. Civilians, including so many children, have been killed, displaced, and impoverished. Civilian infrastructure has been targeted. Armed actors have detained, abducted and forcibly disappeared people with impunity. Gender-based violence has increased significantly.

The epicenter of the military confrontation has shifted over time with combatants taking turns on the offensive. Since early 2020, the focus has been on Ansar Allah's sustained offensive on Marib governorate, in which thousands of young Yemenis have lost their lives. Civilians, including the many internally displaced persons who sought refuge in Marib, live in constant fear of violence and renewed displacement. The UN and the international community has been clear in its message: The offensive must stop.

In Hudaydah, the City continues to experience a noticeable decline in ceasefire violations, while hostilities in the southern districts of the governorate are of particular concern. The UN Mission to support the Hudaydah Agreement, UNMHA, continues its vital work, including to urge the parties to come together through joint dialogue to define a sustained way forward.

The situation in the southern governorates, where there have been regular flare-ups of violence, is also deeply worrying. Basic services and the economy have deteriorated into a desperate state. The implementation of the Riyadh Agreement continues to face challenges, and the government is not performing its functions from Aden. In this context, the impact of the conflict on the diverse range of grievances and demands in the southern governorates cannot be ignored. Peace in Yemen will not be sustained in the long term if southern voices do not play a part in shaping it responsibly.

The conflict in Yemen also spills across borders, threatening regional security and international waterways. I am particularly concerned about targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure inside of Saudi Arabia.

Madame President, the fighting must stop, the violence has to come to an end.

In this regard, it is also vital that external actors encourage de-escalation. Their involvement should be based on supporting a Yemeni-led political settlement. A peaceful and stable Yemen is essential for the stability of the entire region.

Madame President, from unrelenting violence to fuel and electricity shortages to surging food prices, every detail of daily life in Yemen is somehow tied to difficult political questions that demand a comprehensive resolution. State institutions have split apart, hobbling the economy and leaving citizens and businesses to navigate dizzying and often contradictory administrative requirements. Economic warfare by all sides is sowing devastating long-term consequences for the Yemeni state and its people. Yemenis all over the country live with severe limitations on their freedom of movement and of the movement of essential goods due to ongoing fighting, checkpoints, road, port and airport restrictions. The UN's position remains unchanged — the freedom of movement of people and goods in and out as well as throughout the country should be guaranteed. Roads must be opened to allow people and goods to move in and out of Taiz. Sana'a airport needs to be open for commercial traffic. Restrictions on the import of fuel and goods through Hudaydah port must end. There is a continuous need for close coordination among all members of the UN family, the broader international community as well as parties to the conflict to appropriately address these issues.

By now, it should be obvious, **Madame President**, that the peace process has stalled for too long. The conflict parties have not discussed a comprehensive settlement since 2016. This has left Yemenis stuck in an indefinite state of war, with no clear way forward. It is therefore long overdue for the conflict parties to engage in peaceful dialogue with one another under UN facilitation the terms of an overarching settlement, in good faith and without preconditions.

The UN's approach to ending the conflict must be inclusive. To define the best way forward, I intend to assess past efforts, identify what has worked and what hasn't, and listen to as many Yemeni men and women as possible. The way forward must be guided by the aspirations of the Yemeni people.

My Office and I will do our utmost to ensure the meaningful participation of women in all aspects of our engagement and to integrate gender perspectives across all issues. As we will hear also from my colleague from OCHA, the rights of Yemeni women and girls are overlooked, if not ignored. The UN is obligated to strive for a peace that not only ends the violence, but also a sustainable

peace that protects the full range of their civil and political as well as economic, social and cultural rights. A peace that ensures accountability, good governance and state institutions that serve all citizens equitably.

We are clearly a long way off from that today. Nonetheless, I will spare no efforts in trying to bring together actors across conflict lines, to engage Yemenis from all political perspectives and societal components and from all parts of the country, to discuss under UN auspices how they can find common ground and resolve their differences without resorting to force. I will be guided in this effort by the mandate given to me by this Council through its relevant resolutions.

Madame President, we all have a shared responsibility in our different capacities for ending the conflict in Yemen. The beginning of my tenure should therefore be used as a moment to reassess our respective responsibilities. The initiatives from Yemen's neighbors and members of this Council in support of the UN's efforts have been appreciated and will need to be stepped up.

My first consultations with Yemeni, regional and international actors will soon start. I will shortly travel to Riyadh to meet with President Hadi and other members of the Government of Yemen. I also look forward to meet with Ansar Allah leadership and other Sana'a-based actors, as well as other political actors throughout Yemen. And I plan to meet with regional leaders in Riyadh, Muscat, Abu Dhabi, Kuwait, Tehran, Cairo and elsewhere. My office and I stand ready to spend as much time in Yemen and with Yemenis as possible. I will return to the Council each month to reflect frankly and openly on these discussions. And I will seek your tangible and coordinated support to take my mandate forward.

Thank you, **Madame President**.