

مكتب المبعوث الخاص
للأمين العام للأمم المتحدة إلى اليمن



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

Briefing to the UN Security Council

UN Special Envoy for Yemen – Mr. Martin Griffiths

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Thank you very much. **Mr. President**, and I want to thank you and all the members of the Council for the privilege that I have had serving as the United Nations Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Yemen this past three years. This will be my last briefing to the Council in this capacity. And I'd like to add I'm particularly grateful also to President Hadi for placing his trust in me in this assignment.

Mr. President, the United Nations has long characterized Yemen as the world's worst man-made humanitarian crisis as we have so vividly heard from Mark also these many months. I want to underline here the man-made part of that statement. Ending a war is a choice. Yemeni men, women and children are suffering every day because people with power have missed the opportunities presented to them, to make the necessary concessions to end the war. As a result, Yemenis are obliged to live under violence, insecurity and fear, with limits to their freedom of movement, and freedom of expression. And perhaps most tragically of all, we are a witness to the hopes and aspirations of a generation of young Yemenis for a peaceful future being dashed.

No amount of humanitarian assistance can compensate for the prospect of a brighter future. Only a negotiated political settlement can truly turn the tide in Yemen. And a political

settlement that ends the war and ushers in a just and sustainable peace is what is needed. The parties to the conflict need to be courageous enough and willing to choose that path over the continuation of the conflict. And over the past three years of my assignment on Yemen, we have put together many opportunities to the parties. But in vain.

A mediator is not responsible for the war nor for the peace. His – or her - privilege is not to have the power to end the war, despite a common assumption to the contrary. The mediator's privilege is to present to the parties the ways the war can end. And again so far in vain.

I want to thank the members of this Council, united in the purpose you have displayed on Yemen. And also particularly the United States, as well as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Sultanate of Oman and others, for their tireless diplomatic support and for the considerable diplomatic foreign power that is engaged in support of our efforts in this latest rounds of mediation. There has been no lack of will and no lack of effort.

Mr. President, in that context allow me to turn to the current negotiations. As you know, for the past year and a half, I have conducted rounds of shuttle diplomacy with the parties on issues that I have often described to this Council and need not to repeat here today. It is with deep regret, **Mr. President**, that I report today, as of now, that the parties have yet to overcome their differences. And let me clearly reiterate to the members of this Council the positions of the parties as I understand them, for the benefit of the historical record if nothing else. Ansar Allah is insisting on a stand-alone agreement on the Hudaydah ports and Sana'a airport, as a condition precedent for the ceasefire and the launch of the political process. And indeed, in my recent and useful meeting with Ansar Allah leader Abdelmalik al-Houthi in Sana'a, he said to me that only after an agreement on ports and airport were implemented would Ansar Allah begin negotiations on the ceasefire. This was not enough. The Government of Yemen, as we know well, on the other hand, insisted all these issues, the

ports, the airport, the ceasefire, the political process launch, all these issues be agreed to and implemented as a package, and in particular with the focus on getting that ceasefire started. Now we have offered different solutions to bridge these positions. Unfortunately, as of now, none of these suggestions have been accepted. I hope very very much indeed, I'm sure we all do, that the efforts undertaken by the Sultanate of Oman as well as others, but the Sultanate of Oman in particular, following my own visits to Sana'a and Riyadh will bear fruit and that we will soon hear a different turn of fate for Yemen.

I want to stress, **Mr. President**, as if it needs to be stressed that a nation-wide ceasefire would have undeniable humanitarian value, it is a humanitarian act to agree to start the ceasefire. It allows for the silencing of the guns, the opening of vital roads, including in Marib and in Taiz, and elsewhere and a return to some sense of security for the people of Yemen, especially for those civilians living near multiple frontlines in Yemen. Marib, I should add, is just one of many fronts, but the loss of young lives there, this past year, is unconscionable. Let me also be clear, the continued closure of Sana'a airport as well as the extensive restrictions on fuel through the ports of Hudaydah are not justifiable and must be addressed urgently. We are already very late to do so, as Mark has always reminded us.

In Taiz, that great city in the heart of Yemen, people have experienced six grueling years of war, and we have seen many courageous journalists' accounts of this situation there, the sniping of children is one of the images that comes home to me and I'm sure to all of us in such shock. And these people have suffered regular shelling of their homes, schools, difficult to get to schools, landmines obstructing their roads to their schools and places of worship, and also extraordinary impediments to get to work to provide a minimum of livelihood for their families. Nobody should have to live like this. And it is a shame on all of us that the agreements made in Stockholm on Taiz have yielded no results. None at all.

The Stockholm Agreement, **Mr. President**, included the landmark Hudaydah Agreement, which established a ceasefire in that strategically located coastal governorate. It allowed for the distribution of vital goods, including food, arriving through the three Red Sea ports which had previously been disrupted by volatile front lines. The Hudaydah Agreement sealed in late 2018, also has resulted in the dramatic reduction in civilian deaths and injuries by as much as 80 per cent, if you compare rates before and after the agreement. That isn't to say that stark challenges don't continue to persist in Hudaydah as we will hear from General Guha later. Ceasefire violations are a daily occurrence. And in addition, not enough progress of course has been achieved on reactivating the joint Redeployment Coordination Committee, a critical component of ensuring the ceasefire, since the suspension of the committee in March 2020 and despite the tireless efforts of General Guha and his colleagues in that mission.

Mr. President, the war has also exacerbated divisions in the southern governorates. The situation there has come perilously close on several occasions to all-out conflict. And for the sake of the peace process that we have in front of us these monthly briefings, for the sake of that process as well as hopes of longer-term stability, the partnership established between the Government of Yemen and the Southern Transitional Council thanks to the exceptional and continuing efforts of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia must, must, must continue to hold. Of course, mistrust runs deep and there are major differences of opinion on how the future of Yemen should look. But the only way out of this quagmire is for the leaderships of the Government of Yemen and that Council to commit as they have done in the Riyadh Agreement to resolve their differences through dialogue now and through political negotiations in the longer term.

Mr. President, I know I am painting a bleak picture, but I also want to emphasize in contrast, the achievements of Yemenis who, as you know and I'm sure as we will hear later from our briefers, daily work to open roads, release prisoners, irrespective of the diplomatic mediation

or its absence between their leaders. Yemenis have formed alliances and carried out initiatives that span from non-partisan media platforms to mobilization and organization of activism of civil society and community safety networks. These are courageous efforts and they are the hope and future of that wonderful and currently tragic country. It is our obligation to support them and also to listen to them and to understand their leaders.

Mr. President, I want to take a step back and focus the remainder of these remarks today on what I am trying to learn from the past three years of my assignment.

Yemen is a tale of missed and then lost opportunities. This is not because the opportunities to escape from conflict are not frequent or evident. But, I want to be clear, these are difficult decisions. Ending a war is a difficult decision requiring a confident leadership prepared to make concessions - always an essential part of decisions to move from war to peace. This is a heavy responsibility. I have learned, in a lifetime of involvement in conflicts of this sort, that while the opportunities to end the war and move to peace are often there, the courage needed to avail themselves of these opportunities is much more rare.

Yemen is no different from this historical record. At times, and we have watched it together, leaders have come close to making that crucial choice of peace over war to silence the guns, to start dialogue. We have seen moments of compromise and opportunity, whether in Stockholm over two years ago, in prisoner exchanges, often by the way even more effective when carried out by the people themselves without our involvement, or in de-escalation that has happened from time to time in the many fronts of Yemen. But time and time again, when one side is ready to compromise the other side is not. And meanwhile the polemics from social media and commentary in Yemen and from Yemen, raging against the enemy, against the other, drown out the voices of those women, men and children who all, as we all would, choose peace daily.

Mr. President, what has been most frustrating during my time has been the absence of comprehensive peace talks. Of course, I have emphasized time and again the primacy of an importance of a political process to negotiate the core political and security issues needed to end the war and ensure peace. And I am reminded this week having visited Kuwait a few days ago that the last time the parties sat down to discuss these issues was there in Kuwait in 2016 five years ago. And this is of course deeply shocking.

Yemen needs an inclusive political process, and indeed a settlement, if we are to move away from the cycles of violence and conflict, which have preceded this five-year war in previous cycles of conflict. The dialogue that we hope we will be able to see starts soon may take a long time. It will be complex. It will be multilayered. It should help Yemenis identify the elements of a peaceful settlement. And the guiding principles as we have discussed in this Chamber for that vision are already clear: political partnership, accountable governance, sovereignty, economic and social justice and equal citizenship.

A political settlement will need to reflect the interests of diverse conflict parties. It must guarantee the interests and rights of those most affected by the conflict, and not only those who perpetuate and lead in the conflict. My engagements with Yemeni civil society, women, local leaders and movements, and youth over the past several years almost certainly not as frequent as they should have been, they have always been of the utmost importance to me and to my colleagues. These actors, these champions for peace are the integral partners that we need to define that roadmap to peace in Yemen.

Time is not on Yemen's side. Over the course of the conflict, armed and political actors have multiplied and fragmented. Foreign interference has grown not diminished. What was possible in terms of conflict resolution years ago is not possible today. And what is possible

today may not be possible in the future. And I believe that possibly an international conversation of process may need to restate the realistic goals for a negotiation process.

Finally, for most of my time in office, **Mr. President**, I have been asking the parties at least to provide for the humanitarian needs of their people. But real leadership goes beyond looking to the immediate welfare of the people to securing their rights and the future of those people. That is the real battle. It lies ahead. And my worry, **Mr. President**, is not so much about the ceasefire as about the future. Let me be clear. Yemen needs a pluralistic political future, and the political process must reflect that in the most robust and inclusive way.

We know very well what the people of Yemen want. There is no secret in this. It is precisely what this Council has always said, it also wants: stability based on rights and freedom. And Yemen needs, for its survival and the welfare of its citizens, a government accountable to its people, united in support of fundamental rights, and an open and prosperous economy linked to the region and beyond. Every day of this war, every day that we don't get that ceasefire threatens this future more. And let us, **Mr. President**, for the sake of Yemen, hope to end this war without delay so that we can begin the real and final battle, which is of course, the battle for peace.

Thank you Sir.