



**Briefing to the United Nations Security Council
Mr. Martin Griffiths – UN Special Envoy for Yemen
14 January 2021**

Thank you very much **Mr. President**, and welcome to the new members of the council looking forward to our very close association in the months to come.

2020 ended on a harrowing note for Yemen. On 30th December, a vicious attack targeted the newly formed Cabinet of the Yemeni government upon their arrival at Aden's international airport. Dozens of civilians were injured or killed, including government officials, humanitarian relief workers and a journalist. I should note that deliberate attacks on civilians or civilian objects are prohibited by international humanitarian law and may constitute a war crime.

I condemn this attack in the strongest terms possible. I offer my most sincere condolences for all those who lost their lives, and my hopes for a full and speedy recovery to the injured. And I want to express my solidarity with the new Government, which has demonstrated its resolve to stay in Aden despite very considerable security risks to carry out its duties to the Yemeni people.

In the days after the attack, I was privileged to travel to Riyadh to meet President Hadi, and to Aden to see the Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister Dr Ahmed who is with us today and I also met Aden's Governor. In Aden, the wreckage I saw at the attack site shook me. The extent of the damage was extraordinary.

The Government has launched an investigation into the Aden attack and has made its conclusions public earlier today that Ansar Allah was behind the attack.

The attack cast a dark shadow over what should have been a moment of hope in the efforts to achieve peace in Yemen. The formation of the Cabinet and its return to Aden was a major milestone for the Riyadh Agreement, for the stability of state institutions, the economy, and the peace process. I congratulate President Hadi, the parties to the Riyadh Agreement, and all political parties and components that supported and contributed to this process, and of course I also commend the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for its successful mediation role.

Mr. President,

I am extremely concerned about the impact of the decision from the United States to designate Ansar Allah as a Foreign Terrorist Organization. We fear in my mission that there will be inevitably a chilling effect on my efforts to bring the parties together. We all hope to have absolute clarity on far-reaching exemptions to be able to carry out our duties. In any event of course, you can be clear that I remain committed to engage with all parties, including Ansar Allah, designated or not, to end the conflict in Yemen.

However, Mr. President, none of this, none of this is the slightest bit as important as the humanitarian consequences, as we will hear from Mark and David. I strongly associate myself

with their views that the decision would contribute to the prospect of famine in Yemen and should be revoked based on humanitarian grounds at the earliest opportunity.

Mr. President,

The path to peace in Yemen was never easy. And I believe that it is now a great deal more difficult than it was a month ago. There is a way out. We must remember that, even after all the tragedies that Yemenis across the country have suffered, peace is possible where there is the will to make it happen.

Mr. President,

Every single month for the last nine months, we have discussed in this Council the hopes we shared that the parties might agree to that Joint Declaration we have been negotiating, a set of proposals, I need hardly to remind you, covering a nationwide ceasefire, some measures of humanitarian and economic relief for the people of Yemen, and of course the resumption of the political process. The fact is that the two parties agreed in principle to the nationwide ceasefire, but differences have remained on the economic and humanitarian proposals. In particular, these concerned the manner in which the salaries would be paid to civil servants, the ports of Hudaydah open for imports, and for Sana'a airport to be open for international flights.

Mr. President, the United Nations has been clear from the beginning that these humanitarian measures need to be introduced. Indeed, I would remind us that in my very first briefing of this Council in April 2018, I called for the opening of the Sana'a International Airport. The parties need to agree also on the release of more prisoners and detainees. I am encouraged **Mr. President,** that the parties will be expected to meet soon to advance on this issue at least.

I know that these negotiations on the Joint Declaration have been cumbersome and frustrating, I perhaps know that better than any of us and that they cannot continue indefinitely. But let me be clear, the parties can slice and dice the set of proposals contained in that Joint Declaration any way they wish. It can be a whole package. It can be done in parts. None of us has no objection to the way these measures are adopted. And I still believe that it is right at this moment to pursue the proposals contained therein.

And indeed, just in the last few days, in my visit to the region I have received candid and direct advice from Member States in the region that now, now actually, is the time to pursue a successful conclusion to those negotiations.

In any case, and irrespective of those negotiations on that declaration, we need to maintain our focus and that of the parties on the primary goal. The primary goal is to resume an inclusive political process designed to comprehensively end the conflict. Agreeing on a political end state is of fundamental importance. It is indeed the way this war will end. And thus, for the parties, resuming the political process is more than an obligation, it is a duty.

Mr. President, these are dire times, these are dark times in Yemen. Let me end on a perhaps slightly more positive note. Progress on the Riyadh Agreement is significant. It took time, it took effort, it took attention, it took commitment and it worked. Dr Ahmed bin Mubarak who is with us is a symbol of that. It shows us that reconciliation between opposing parties can be achieved.

Despite all their bitter opposition, and with the tireless efforts of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as mediator the two sides made peace with each other. So it can be done, **Mr. President**. It can be done.

Thank you.