

مكتب المبعوث الخاص
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Office of the Special Envoy
of the Secretary-General for Yemen

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

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Thank you **Mr. President**.

Mr. President, as I recently expressed in my call for restraint, I am deeply alarmed by the ongoing military escalation and continued violence in Yemen. Since I last addressed this Council, the conflict has escalated considerably. There is a risk that this could open a new chapter of Yemen's war that is even more fragmented and bloody. This risk is acknowledged by a wide range of Yemeni and regional interlocutors. Yet even as the conflict parties all profess to me their desire for peace, their focus remains on military options. I have been clear that military options will not result in sustainable solutions. Restraint, de-escalation and dialogue are urgently needed now.

Before continuing to elaborate on my engagements and conclusions, allow me first to recapitulate some of the major events since my last briefing.

In Hudaydah, on the 12th of November, the Joint Forces affiliated with the Government of Yemen evacuated their positions from large parts of the Governorate. Ansar Allah forces immediately took control of most of the vacated areas. This has led to a major shift of the frontline in the Governorate. In the first two weeks following the withdrawal, the new frontlines in the southern districts of Hudaydah were highly contested with the parties employing heavy artillery and aerial strikes. While hostilities have seen a noticeable decline since the start of the month, the impact on civilians has been of concern with reports of civilian casualties and thousands of displaced families since the withdrawal.

As confrontations on the West Coast temporarily took center stage, the pivotal battle for Marib continued. Fighting has intensified, with Ansar Allah renewing its push for the city and oil fields in the governorate and the Coalition increasing its airstrikes in support of the Government of Yemen. I remain concerned about the possibility of urban warfare in the city, which would have terrible consequences for the civilians. Ansar Allah's offensive on Marib is having worrying ripple effects across other frontlines. In my meetings with the parties, I have stressed the urgent need for de-escalation and immediate measures to protect civilians.

The intensification of the fighting and shifting frontlines is endangering civilians and in many cases forcing them to flee for a second or even a third time. I am alarmed by the military escalation by all sides of the conflict in Yemen. The increased use of artillery, missiles and airstrikes endanger civilian lives, infrastructure and services. I am also concerned about attacks against Saudi Arabia targeting civilian and commercial infrastructure. The summary execution on the West Coast of ten individuals belonging to local security forces on the 13th of November, which the UN has condemned, is another example of the worrying disregard of international law in this conflict. Here I would like to reiterate, **Mr. President**, that wars do have rules. All conflict actors, whether directly engaged or supporting, are accountable and have obligations under international humanitarian law. This includes protection of civilians and the humane treatment of prisoners of war.

In this respect, we have seen a rising number of detainees held by the parties to the conflict. My Office remains in regular contact with the parties to convene them in order to facilitate the fulfillment of their obligations to release all conflict-related detainees as per their commitments under the Stockholm Agreement.

Mr. President, allow me to highlight a topic that continues to be on the top of the agenda of all my Yemeni interlocutors. The economy. I heard a strong sense of frustration and despair in Aden, Taiz and everywhere I met with Yemeni men and

women. In Aden and the surrounding governorates, the value of the Yemeni riyal reached an unprecedented low against foreign currencies, depleting even further people's purchasing power. The exchange rate is more controlled in Sana'a, but economic hardship is severe. Inflation still poses a challenge and people need salaries. The cost of transferring Yemeni rials from Aden to Sana'a has soared, placing immense burdens on the private sector and on people supporting families in different parts of the country. In recent informal consultations with Yemeni businesswomen, they described the severe challenges they are facing in conducting business. I would like to remind everyone of the drastic regression of women's rights as a result of the conflict, a situation that is made even worse by the economic collapse.

As will be underscored also by Assistant Secretary-General, Ramesh Rajasingham, there is an urgent need for economic de-escalation and wider reforms to improve livelihoods, lower the cost of goods, and protect the currency. The Government of Yemen has recently undertaken some reforms, including with respect to the Central Bank in Aden's board of governors. I hope these steps will open the door for further, badly-needed reforms. There is an urgency to address the economic needs of the country as a whole, and for that we need genuine engagement from the Yemeni stakeholders and close coordination within the International Community to find solutions.

On the subject of the massive challenges for Yemenis to go about their daily lives, I regret to have to highlight yet again how restrictions on freedom of movement, for both people and goods, continue to impose significant hardships on the Yemeni population, especially for women. In Taiz, I heard about and saw firsthand how road closures and checkpoints hinder civilians' ability to seek medical care, education and trade opportunities. The roads must be opened. Similarly, Sana'a airport must reopen. Impediments to imports and the domestic distribution of fuel also continue to cause hardship for civilians, and should be removed, including by, but not limited to, lifting restrictions on Hudaydah port. Movement of people and goods is not a geographically isolated problem, it is a serious issue across the country that needs to be addressed by the conflict parties and supported by the international community. As a final point regarding latest development, I would like to add my disappointment regarding the detention of United Nations staff members that Assistant Secretary-General, Ramesh Rajasingham will comment on in his briefing.

Mr. President, allow me now to come back to my engagements so far and the conclusions I draw from them. I have devoted these first three months of my tenure in accordance with the outline of my first briefing to this Council.

The primary aim has been to engage with diverse Yemenis on how to reverse the current escalatory trajectory and start a political process. This has included numerous

meetings both inside Yemen and in the region. The discussions have often been difficult, highlighting both the complexities and the gravity of the conflict. An understandable sense of frustration and despair has been evident in my conversations, as past attempts at finding solutions have not delivered the desired result.

The other aim of the beginning of my tenure has been to establish close and trustworthy relations with member states in the region to seek their support for a political process. I have also engaged members of this Council on these matters and I am grateful for the support expressed for my efforts.

The efforts of the past years to reach agreement based on the conflict parties' preconditions have not yet delivered. And my view is that this is partly due to the fact that the parties' conditions are tied up in political questions that can only be addressed through more comprehensive talks. Let us therefore be frank. Given that the parties have not met to discuss a broader set of issues for over five years, establishing a renewed political process is a complicated task. As the conflict has continued unabated since the talks in Kuwait in 2016, the gaps between the parties have only widened. In order to have constructive talks about the way forward, some common understandings should be reached. On this note, I would like to reiterate that a serious commitment to peace requires, at a minimum, granting unconditional

and regular access to the Envoy. All communication channels need to be kept open if we are to have any chance of finding a durable solution to this conflict.

Mr. President, as the conflict intensifies, and from my discussions with Yemenis and others over the past three months, I am convinced of the need for a comprehensive approach. And I have drawn a number of conclusions about the way forward.

First, piecemeal solutions can, at best, only provide temporary relief. They will not produce sustainable peace. Immediate needs and priorities must be addressed within the context of a process that gears toward a comprehensive political settlement.

Second, a solution will not be sustainable if it doesn't represent the interests of diverse Yemenis – both those who are involved in the fighting and those who are not. We need to work toward a just and sustainable peace, and not merely the absence of war.

Third, structured and coordinated international and regional support is essential for this process. External actors have a responsibility to support Yemenis as they discuss and build consensus on peaceful solutions. They need to take concrete action that supports the peace process and broader stability. The support of this Council will be critical.

Based on these conclusions, I am envisaging an inclusive Yemeni owned and internationally-supported political process. The process should support near-term solutions to de-escalate the violence, prevent further economic deterioration and mitigate the impact of the conflict on civilians. It should also identify and build consensus around the elements of a political settlement that sustainably ends the war, establishes inclusive governance arrangements, and ensures Yemenis' civil and political, as well as social, economic and cultural rights.

The process should be designed in a way that allows for parallel progress on different agenda items of importance to Yemenis. It will address the parties' stated priorities in the context of a broader agenda that represents the interests of diverse Yemenis. I want to initiate a comprehensive process that allows for incremental progress.

Engagement on this process has already begun with a wide range of Yemeni stakeholders, including the conflict parties, and will be intensified. Clearly, this work is challenged by the intensification of the military conflict. However, military escalation should not be allowed to stop this process, and in fact it makes the work we are doing all the more essential. As I alluded to in my introduction, I remain convinced that warring parties can, and indeed must talk even if they are not ready to put down their arms. Channels of communication should be opened without preconditions and as a matter of priority.

I will continue looking to the members of this Council to support the United Nations' efforts to establish an inclusive, comprehensive process for bringing this conflict, finally, to a just and sustainable end.

Thank you very much **Mr. President.**