



Briefing to the United Nations Security Council
UN Special Envoy for Yemen – Mr. Martin Griffiths
16 April 2020
(As delivered)

Mr. President,

Thank you very much indeed for giving me the opportunity to brief this Council.

An opportunity has emerged to bring peace to Yemen. This opportunity has come as the country faces some of its toughest days. Military escalations have continued on several fronts for three months. The arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic to Yemen threatens to bring deeper and more widespread suffering to the people. There cannot be a more timely moment for the two parties to commit to silencing the guns and ending the conflict through a peaceful, political solution.

The threat of COVID-19 has galvanized the effort towards peace among Yemenis as well as the international community. On the 25th of March, the United Nations Secretary-General made an urgent appeal for an immediate end to hostilities in Yemen, and for the parties to focus on reaching a negotiated political settlement and doing everything possible to counter COVID-19.

The Government of Yemen immediately welcomed the call of the UN Secretary-General as did the leadership of Ansar Allah. In addition, there was an outpouring of support from other Yemeni political leaders, and civil society, including from women and youth.

And I, indeed, have been struck by how consistent and clear the message has come across over the past several weeks from people across Yemen: they want this war to end and they want their leaders to agree to resolve their differences through dialogue and negotiation. And to take but one example, I recently met with the Yemeni women's Technical Advisory Group, who have a role of advising, supporting and guiding my mission. And they were insistent to me that the war must indeed stop now and they highlighted as possible dividend the importance of agreeing on humanitarian measures, as a result, particularly on improving freedom of movement and on releasing those detained in the war.

On 8th of April, the Saudi-led Coalition announced a unilateral ceasefire for an initial period of two weeks. The explicit aim of this ceasefire was and is to create a conducive environment for the success of UN-led efforts, those efforts signaled by our Secretary-General. I want to express my gratitude to the Coalition and the leadership of His Royal Highness Prince Mohammed bin Salman for this positive initiative. It is a clear sign of commitment to a peaceful, political solution to the conflict and indeed to supporting the efforts of United Nations to that end in Yemen.

The international community has also been vocal in its support. There have been many governments in the region and indeed beyond who have helped behind the scenes in this period with timely and important advocacy to support our efforts. And I am also grateful, Mr. President, to this Council for your continued support for the United Nations' efforts to put an end to this conflict.

Mr. President,

All eyes are now on the parties to the conflict. This is the time for hard decisions. None of us should underestimate the demands that are placed upon the leadership of both parties. The decisions now needed from both the two parties are of existential importance for the future of their country. And I know that both the Government of Yemen and indeed, Ansar Allah want to end this conflict on the basis, naturally, of a fair and just peace. I am grateful to them for that. I know from all my meetings with President Hadi over the two years that I had the privilege in this assignment that his focus is on what is best for the future of his country.

Following the call of the Secretary-General, I presented proposals to the two parties. The first on a nation-wide ceasefire agreement. The second on key humanitarian and economic measures, which may include: releases of prisoners and detainees; opening Sana'a International Airport; paying civil servant salaries; opening access roads; and ensuring the entry of ships carrying essential commodities into Hudaydah ports, all of which, all these measures will help directly and indirectly in the fight against COVID-19. And my third proposal provides for the urgent resumption of the political process.

Over the past two weeks or more, since then, I have been in constant negotiations with the Parties on the texts of these agreements, on the detail, on the wording of these agreements. We expect them to agree on and formally adopt these agreements in the immediate future. The pace of these negotiations, Mr. President has not, indeed, been impeded by the need to conduct them virtually. The conversations we've had with the two parties, and our consultations with the Saudi-led Coalition among other international actors, are continuous, detailed and constructive. I

can report that we are making very good progress. We are, I hope, I believe, move towards a consensus over the proposals I have put forward, particularly, indeed, on the principle of a nation-wide ceasefire, which is supported by both parties. And we are redoubling our efforts to bridge the outstanding differences in the texts and in the proposals between the parties, before we convene them at a meeting where, because it will be virtual, these agreements will be tabled, confirmed, I hope, and published.

I am grateful to both parties for the way in which they have conducted their negotiations with the United Nations. It's open, frank, constructive, timely, and focused. In my discussions with Mr. Abdel-Malik al-Houthi he has always communicated his desire to end this war. In addition, there is no doubt that the diplomatic consensus, which is very tangible in the context of Yemen and on this particular process and has been ably catalyzed and guided by the interventions of the United Nations Secretary-General, is playing a crucial, I would say central role in pushing all of us and both parties towards what we hope will be a successful conclusion in the near term.

Mr. President,

Lamentably, however, military activities continue on a number of fronts despite the many calls from Yemenis and the international community and this Council for it to stop. I fear this war will continue until we get an agreement on our proposals, which include of course that nationwide ceasefire. Marib, the governorate of Marib to the east of Sana'a remains the center of gravity of this war, yet it is not the only theater. The sooner we can stop the fighting, the better.

The heavy fighting has continued, and I am sure we will hear in detail from Mark, to take the lives of more innocent Yemeni civilians. I would also like to call the Council's attention to the senseless attack on the women's section of the Central Prison in Taiz city on 5th of April, which killed and injured many, including women and children. I, along with many Yemenis and UN officials, condemned this horrific attack underlining yet again and not for the first time that all civilians and civilian objects, including prisons and prisoners, must be protected under international humanitarian law.

In Hudaydah, ceasefire violations continue on a daily basis at the same level as during my last briefing. Following the deeply regrettable shooting and serious injury of a Government of Yemen Liaison Officer by a sniper, the Redeployment Coordination Committee and the joint mechanisms to implement the Hudaydah Agreement have in effect ceased to function.

As we are all striving to maintain stability in Hudaydah and achieve in parallel and as a reinforcement a nationwide ceasefire, which is now in prospect, it is important, indeed it is essential, that the parties resume the work of the Redeployment Coordination Committee and the joint mechanisms that underpin it. And I know that my colleague, General Guha, the Head of the United Nations Mission for the Hudaydah Agreement , is continuing his efforts in Yemen to engage with the Parties to prevent any deterioration of the situation or a spill-over of the escalation from other areas.

Mr. President,

The threat of COVID-19 in Yemen obviously and evidently and without equivocation requires all our attention and resources. Yemen cannot face two fronts at the same time: a war and a pandemic. The new battle that Yemen faces in confronting the virus will be all-consuming. I know that my colleagues under Mark's leadership and in Yemen under Lise Grande have this in prospect and it is a prospect which frightens us. We can do no less on our side than to stop this war and to turn all our attention to this new threat. We have heard the calls since we last met from Yemenis across the country asking all of us to make the virus the priority. I know that the leaders of both parties as well as those in the region understand this as well as anyone.

Thank you, Mr. President.