

مكتب المبعوث الخاص
للأمين العام للأمم المتحدة إلى اليمن



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

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

28 July 2020

(As delivered)

Thank you very much, **Mr. President**, and a strong welcome to those in Sana'a, very good to see Sana'a on the screen. Thank you very much for this opportunity and I want to start by congratulating Muslims in Yemen and around the world on the occasion of Eid al-Adha, which comes towards the end of this week, and may this Eid brings to people of Yemen calm, health and some safety.

Mr. President, the last time I briefed this Council, a month or more ago, I outlined the substance, as you know, of the UN-brokered negotiations between the Government of Yemen and Ansar Allah. Just to remind, these negotiations aim to reach agreement on a Joint Declaration that will include: a nationwide Ceasefire; economic and humanitarian measures; and the resumption of the political process aimed at comprehensively resolving and ending the conflict. I warned then that we had reached a delicate moment, with much at stake. And these negotiations have now been ongoing for four months. Both Parties have provided feedback on various drafts and proposals, but they have yet to reach agreement on a final text. The process, as we discussed last time, has been long and challenging. It has experienced bursts of momentum, as well as very significant hurdles, so this is perhaps, I suppose, normal for any mediation process, which addresses issues of great importance to the Parties. But it is important that both Parties continue to engage in the process. The negotiations must be concluded before the window of opportunity closes. As a mediator, not as a negotiator, as a mediator, I continue to attempt to bridge the divides between the Parties' positions. And I hope that they will make the compromises necessary to reach their

agreement, not mine, their agreement between them that meets the aspirations of the Yemeni people.

Unfortunately, **Mr. President**, even as the negotiations continue, and I am sure, as will hear from all the briefers today, much more cogently than from me, for Yemenis across the country life has become even more unforgiving, and I am sure Mark will tell us that Yemen is experiencing the worst of times.

The military situation has not improved over the past month. The continued military campaign against Ma'rib has wreaked profound humanitarian and economic consequences. And it could easily undermine the prospects of reaching agreement on a ceasefire for the whole country, and the end of the shooting war. The strategic importance of Ma'rib should not be underestimated, and this is why we have frequently made reference to it. I call for immediate and urgent steps for de-escalation, more so than ever now, on this eve of Eid. And, of course, my Office stands ready to support in this respect.

I am concerned, and I am sure Mark will be more so, by the missile attacks that have threatened and injured civilians in Ma'rib. I have been dismayed by civilian fatalities, including many children, caused by aerial attacks in Al-Jawf and Hajjah. And like Mark, we condemn all attacks against civilians and civilian objects. And of course, I call on all sides to uphold their obligations under international humanitarian law to protect civilians and children in particular.

In Hudaydah, the level of violence has not relented, and there has been an increase in the number of ceasefire violations. The Redeployment Coordination Committee and the joint mechanisms to implement the Hudaydah Agreement are still not functioning, and I am sure we will hear later from my colleague, General Guha. His mission, UNMHA, continues efforts to overcome the mistrust between the Parties and to restore dialogue at a minimum between them.

In a further sign of how life is becoming even more difficult for Yemenis, I am sorry **Mr. President**, this is a gloomy presentation in many ways, the indicators on the economy are all pointing in the wrong direction. I am sure as Mark will explain, food prices are rising, the currency is depreciating, most Yemenis do not have enough money in their pockets to meet their basic needs. And there are no quick fixes to Yemen's economic problems, but the Parties need to agree on steps to keep the economy out of the conflict. It is the people of Yemen who suffer where the

economy is weaponized and politicized. The Joint Declaration process aims to reach agreement between the Parties on key economic and humanitarian measures that will bring at least some tangible efforts finally for people's lives, and of course we look to the Parties to agree quickly on these mechanisms to make this happen.

Mr. President, last month I informed the Council that we were engaging the Parties to find a solution to allow for the continued and regular entrance of ships carrying oil derivatives into Hudaydah port. These efforts are ongoing. The humanitarian consequences of the impasse grow greater by the day. And this situation cannot continue. It is essential that all obstacles to imports and the domestic distribution of fuel and other goods vital for the civilian population be removed. The Government of Yemen has taken the positive step of clearing a number of fuel ships in recent weeks and we encourage them to continue to release more ships. And I want to stress our position on this, because it is frequently misunderstood. Of course we need, want, would like to see these ships entering Hudaydah port. This can only provide, however, temporary relief. We have shared ideas with the Parties about how to move forward in the immediate term prior to a Joint Declaration agreement, but a long-term solution is needed. So please, I urge, through you, **Mr. President** and this Council, the Parties to engage constructively with the proposals, which are in front of them, so that Yemenis can get the fuel they desperately need. And the Parties also urgently, as they know well, need to agree on a mechanism to disburse revenues, also from Hudaydah port, as a contribution, as agreed back in Sweden, eighteen months ago, as a contribution towards civil servant salaries.

My Office has consistently endeavoured to support the Parties in reaching an agreement on paying civil servant salaries to all Yemenis according to the 2014 payroll database. And I am repeated here, **Mr. President**, because there are some who publicly deny this. These civil servants have the right to receive their salaries in full and on time, and we will continue to engage the Parties on proposals to achieve this vitally important goal, a deserved entitlement of these people, but also of extraordinary importance in terms of the humanitarian requirements of Yemen.

Mr. President, it has been two weeks of course since this Council's session, under your Presidency, on the Safer, the decaying oil tanker that threatens to spill over a million barrels of oil into the Red Sea. In that session, Mark and others raised the alarm, yet again, about the immense environmental and humanitarian threat posed by this tanker. And at the beginning of this month,

Ansar Allah confirmed in writing to us that they would authorise a long-planned, UN-supervised, technical mission to the tanker. However, we are still awaiting the permissions necessary for this team to deploy. The United Nations has made clear to Ansar Allah the team's mission: which is to assess the condition of the tanker, to undertake any initial possible repairs, and to formulate urgently needed recommendations on what further action is required. An independent and expert-driven assessment is of critical importance, I think we all agree, to allowing us to fully understand the scope, the size, the threat of this issue and the possible solutions to it. With Mark, I am sure, I will keep the Council informed of any developments in this regard in the coming days and weeks.

Mr. President, in the southern governorates, I am encouraged that the level of military activity has reduced in recent weeks, due to the efforts of the Parties, despite some limited clashes at the frontline in Abyan. Tensions over state institutions persist in Adan and other areas, which are particularly troubling of course in the humanitarian context that Mark will describe.

As we know, the Government of Yemen and the Southern Transitional Council is engaged daily in efforts in Riyadh under the auspices of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to reach agreement on moving forward on the Riyadh Agreement. We had hoped to have specific news on that before this meeting of the Council, but we are given to understand that there is some good news. We hope so. It is of vital, vital importance for all of us including for the Joint Declaration and that process.

Mr. President, the elements under negotiation in the Joint Declaration are important, both for the Parties and for the Yemeni people. We have seen intense debate among civil society and other figures around these issues. I am grateful for the advice and guidance that we have received from them. My Office is fully committed to an inclusive mediation process, as is required, as you know very well, by Council Resolution 2216, and I will continue to engage with civil society actors, including through digital means. Gender inclusion is a high priority and I know it is of yours, **Mr. President**, my Office is systematically integrating gender perspectives into the Joint Declaration text and the planning that will follow it, of what we hope is implementation.

Finally, **Mr. President**, I continue to hope, I do, that the Joint Declaration negotiations will turn the tide away from these maudlin views but toward peace. But I do not want today to sugarcoat things. There is a real risk that these negotiations will slip away, and that Yemen will enter a new phase of prolonged escalation, of the uncontrolled spread of COVID-19, and of severe and threatening economic decline.

And the United Nations, in all its forms, is committed of course to doing all that it can to support the Parties to reach an agreement that puts Yemen on the path towards a peaceful and prosperous future. And I, through you, **Mr. President**, call on all member states, including the members of this Council, but others who have an interest in the stability and future of the region to lend their full support to us to persuade all involved to move forward with speed to a successful conclusion. But ultimately, the responsibility lies with the Parties to bring these negotiations to a successful close. I said it before, I hope I won't say it too often again, the coming period will test the Parties' political will to bring forward a breakthrough, and I hope I can bring you better news, **Mr. President**, when next we meet.

Thank you very much indeed.