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

مكتب المبعوث الخاص للأمين العام
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Security Council Briefing of the Special Envoy for Yemen, 14th of December 2018

Mr. President,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Members of this Council,

I come before you today with some good news and a message of hope.

After two and half years of missed opportunities, it is fair to say that the political process to find a comprehensive solution to the conflict in Yemen has finally resumed. This week, during our consultations in Sweden, parties to the conflict have reached several agreements included in the Stockholm Declaration, which came into force on 13 December upon the publishing of the documents. This is no small achievement, made possible first and foremost by the commitment of the parties. And the credit goes to them. I was extremely impressed by their dedication. All made concessions. All engaged. In-depth and at length. Intensively and in good faith. Last week's consultations saw the highest level of interaction between the parties ever seen in consultations on Yemen - to quote members of the delegations.

All members of this Council will share my sincere gratitude to the Government of Sweden for hosting us. You understood better than any of us what was needed to make these consultations a success. I know this feeling was shared by all those present. Thank you.

Members of this Council, members of the international community, Sweden is also your success. The agreements reached would not have been possible without the extraordinary level of support of world leaders. I feel privileged to have been able to rely on them. I am thankful to the Saudi Crown Prince Mohamed bin Salman who showed his personal support for this process at vital times and for the agreements we were negotiating in Sweden. I am grateful to President Hadi who followed very closely our negotiations and whose involvement has been key on all files. It was President Hadi himself who confirmed to the Secretary General yesterday morning personally his approval of the various proposals.

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I am also grateful to the leadership of Ansar Allah, Abdul Malik al-Houthi who demonstrated his commitment to progress at the talks throughout the consultations. I understand he was in constant communication with his own delegation.

I would also like to thank the heads of both delegations: Foreign Minister Khaled al-Yamany and Speaker Mohamed Abdul Salam had a difficult task but they led their delegation with professionalism, discipline and perseverance. It was not an easy exercise but I thank them both for their outstanding performance. Thank you also to UK Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt who made a flying visit yesterday to the talks at a crucial moment.

And of course thank you to all those who helped with logistical arrangements to make the talks happen, in particular the Saudi-led Coalition, the Sultanate of Oman and Kuwait.

Last but not least, you will allow me to record here the leadership of our Secretary General. As I have said to this Council before Mr. Guterres is very familiar about Yemen. We were in frequent contact these past two weeks. His meeting at the G20 in Argentina with the Saudi Crown Prince ensured the last minute clearances essential to move the 50 injured to Muscat two days before the talks. And his subsequent visit to the consultations for the vital last 24 hours were instrumental in making the agreements happen. I am most grateful for his leadership.

Mr. President,

What did we achieve exactly?

Firstly, lest we forget, both parties turned up on time for the consultations. This was no small achievement. Many people and governments can claim credit for that. I have already thanked them. But I am grateful also to the two delegations for arriving ready to work.

Sweden consisted of eight days of hard work. Meetings were punctual. The parties laboured daily on texts as well as principles. What began as meetings of a formal nature became overtime true engagements between people from both sides who knew each other and who seek agreement over differences. I would not want to overstate the level of confidence between the two sides. But they did business together. And almost always in good spirits.

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But more than mere attendance of course there are a range of agreements made, details of all of which have been published and are available to members of this Council.

What are these agreements?

Firstly and most dramatically the parties have agreed finally to the end of the battles in Hodeida. This Council has for months called for just such an agreement. I believe we now have it.

This agreement entered into force upon the publishing of the papers on 13 December. It includes phased but rapid mutual withdrawals of forces from both the three Hodeida ports and the city. This will be achieved in the context of a governorate-wide ceasefire. The United Nations is asked to monitor the compliance of the parties to these commitments. I am sure this Council will want to address this requirement. A robust and competent monitoring regime is not just essential. It is also urgently needed. And both parties have told us they would welcome it and indeed depend upon it. At the instruction of the Secretary General relevant departments in New York and elsewhere are already active on the planning for urgent deployment subject to the decisions of this Council.

Hodeida has been the focus of international attention this year for a reason. Not only it is the center of gravity of this conflict but it is the vital lifeline for the humanitarian programme upon which millions of Yemenis depend. The ghastly prospect of famine has made solving Hodeida urgent and necessary. For this reason the precise nature of the agreed withdrawals revolve around humanitarian requirements. And allowing the UN the lead role in the ports is the vital first response. We must see this happen within days. The UN will take on a leading role in supporting Yemen Red Sea Ports Corporation in management and inspections at Hodeidah, Salif and Ras Isa ports, which will include enhanced monitoring by the UN Verification and Inspection Mechanism (UNVIM). The UN Country Team under the leadership of my colleague and friend Lise Grande has developed a plan seeking specific support from member states in the port.

Lise Grande and her agency colleagues have been integral to the shaping of agreements on Hodeida. Two of her colleagues were with us in Sweden. I am grateful to her and them. She and they will play a lead role in the civilian aspects of the deal. But I would like to stress here that Hodeida is an outlier. Very deliberately the arrangements agreed particularly as regards to governance intend to set no precedent. They are time bound. This is a humanitarian stop gap to save lives and turn the tide of war towards peace.

Parties have also reached a mutual understanding to ease the situation in Taiz with the prospect of opening of humanitarian corridors to allow the safe passage of goods and people across the front

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lines, the reduction of the fighting in the governorate, the deployment of demining operations and the release and exchange of prisoners. The parties in Sweden have agreed to the creation of a joint committee with the UN in the lead to make these things happen. That committee should meet soon and agree a plan to bring the massive urban center of Taïz back to temporary peace.

Before arriving in Sweden the parties agreed to the establishment of a joint committee to provide and plan for the mutual release of all prisoners. This was the first injunction by President Hadi who urged the United Nations to focus on the release of prisoners. This committee met frequently in Sweden, exchanging lists of over 15,000 prisoners. We are also very pleased to have the full support and involvement of ICRC. We hope for a mass exchange as soon as mid-January of as many as 4,000 prisoners.

We did not reach agreement on all items that were on the table in Sweden. We have yet to finalize agreements on the opening of Sana'a airport and on the measures needed to improve the operations and reach of the Central Bank of Yemen as a condition for the full payment of the salaries of all civil servants. We will continue to seek agreement.

Finally, but not least, parties have agreed to reconvene at the end of January. This particular point was raised by the UN Secretary-General with President Hadi.

Mr. President,

In Sweden, parties have also discussed my Framework presented to you in June. The key principle of my Framework, based on the three references - the GCC initiative and its Implementation Mechanism, the outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference and relevant Security Council resolutions, including UNSCR 2216 (2015), is to restore state institutions and the state monopoly of force by providing a clear political future to all parties and all those who have a say in solving this conflict. And indeed to return Yemen to civil politics and peace.

Parties have agreed to discuss the Framework at the next round of consultations. I am extremely encouraged by this commitment. I am very pleased by the generally positive responses of the parties to this framework. Indeed I think it's fair to say that Ansarullah are in agreement with the general tenor of all its elements. The Government of Yemen has some reservations which I understand and respect, indeed very much so. And the next step will be serious consideration of its suggestions when next the parties meet. In this way we hope to move from the essentially humanitarian theme of Sweden to a first serious consideration of the issues that need to be addressed between the parties if this conflict in Yemen is to be resolved.

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Mr. President,

I also come before you today with a call for caution. Our collective achievements this week were indeed a significant step forward. But what's in front of us is a daunting task. As ever the hard work starts now.

People ask us whether we can trust the parties to implement the agreements that they together made in Sweden. All of us no doubt have different views on this. My own is that this is not about whether we can trust one or the other on this or that commitment. This is about helping them to make it happen and reporting success as well as failure. Verification is the key to building trust. And I personally hope that this Council will play a part in keeping international attention on the minutiae of the implementation of these agreements.

Having said that I can also confirm the public and private statements made to the Secretary General by all involved that these promises will not remain only on paper. We believe these statements. And we all hope to see them reflected in the next days.

Mr. President,

Before the consultations, I was asked by both sides whether the other side was serious. To be honest, I wasn't really sure until about two weeks ago. Today I am more confident. But more than this what Sweden demonstrated every day was the absolute international consensus on the need for progress and on the simple proposition that only a political solution can resolve this conflict. Among with us were Ambassadors accredited to Yemen. This sense of international consensus gives hope to Yemenis. As the Swedish Foreign Minister said to the press no longer can Yemen be considered a forgotten war. And now we can begin to hope for a track that may indeed lead to its early resolution.

Thank you.