

**Briefing to the United Nations Security Council
UN Special Envoy for Yemen – Mr. Martin Griffiths
18 February 2021
(As delivered)**

Madame President, thank you very much for this opportunity.

I am saddened, I think the word is probably more than that, to report that over the past month, the conflict in Yemen has taken a sharp escalatory turn with Ansar Allah's most recent offensive in Marib governorate. I have condemned this many times since early last year when this offensive operation started, and I will repeat my call now: the attack on Marib must stop. It puts millions of civilians at risk, as Mark has been commenting this week, especially with the fighting threatening to reach camps for internally displaced persons. The quest for territorial gain by force threatens all of the prospects of the peace process. The humanitarian situation is also worsening, of course as Mark will explain to us in a minute. The threat of famine looms. Large numbers of civil servants are not being paid their salaries. Insufficient fuel ships entering Hudaydah port, coupled with obstacles to domestic distribution, have resulted in serious fuel shortages in Ansar Allah-controlled parts of the north. We hear reports that hospitals and food factories are running out of fuel. I hope that the Government of Yemen will quickly permit the entry of fuel ships to alleviate this particular situation. Although the situation on the ground is indeed deteriorating, I am encouraged, Madame President, to report that there is renewed international momentum behind finding a peaceful resolution to the conflict. I join others in particularly welcoming the renewed focus the United States is placing on this conflict and congratulate Mr. Tim Lenderking on his appointment as special envoy of his country. International support for ending the conflict is indispensable, and this offers us a new opportunity to reopen space for a negotiated solution.

Madame President, there is a negotiated way out of this conflict. But in any negotiation, the parties need to know where they are going. They need to clearly see the end-state. And if you permit me, I think it is important at this point if I reiterate what I believe would constitute the basic elements of a mutually acceptable end to the war and a path toward peace.

Those elements should be guided of course by the aspirations of Yemenis and those aspirations have long been expressed – for a future marked by peaceful political participation, accountable governance, equal citizenship and economic justice. This is what I and others and all of us have heard time and again from Yemeni women, youth, civil society, political parties and community leaders, the people indeed of Yemen. Yemenis own that vision of the future and must drive all our work. The only way to realize these aspirations is through a genuinely inclusive, Yemeni-led political process under United Nations auspices supported by the international community here represented. Through this political process, Yemenis can indeed negotiate an agreement to end the conflict and start the road towards sustainable peace. Such an agreement should ensure a complete end to the use of violence for political gain. The agreement would be time-bound and would end with national elections. Political arrangements should be based on the principles of inclusive partnership and continued dialogue among Yemen's political and social components, including women and civil society. The political partnership would have to be strong – and Yemenis would need to address

critical political questions that will persist nationally and in many areas of the country after this conflict is over, not least of course in the south. Security arrangements should provide for the Yemeni people's safety and lead toward responsive security institutions that uphold the rule of law. The Yemeni people will need guarantees for equal citizenship under the law, including for Yemeni women and girls. And they will need also guarantees of humanitarian relief, reconstruction, transitional justice and economic recovery.

Madame President, I felt it right to repeat these elements now so that we are clear on the vision that should drive us in these important and frankly crucial efforts now to end the conflict. None of these elements indeed are new. They are based on wide consultations with Yemenis, we are not making this up, and they are based on prior rounds of peace negotiations, the most notable of course in 2016, the 100 days in Kuwait. The main outstanding question is a simple one, how to get there. To seize this chance to revitalize the political process that we now hope we can see in front of us, the parties should, in my view, immediately agree to a nationwide ceasefire that halts all forms of fighting; to economic and humanitarian measures, at a minimum to include: ensuring the unhindered flow of fuel and other commodities into Yemen through Hudaydah ports, with those port revenues put toward civil servant salaries based on the 2014 payroll database; and opening up the Sana'a airport to commercial international traffic. These measures, all of them, should maximize humanitarian objectives, while providing appropriate security guarantees in line with this Council's resolutions. They should not be exploited for political or military gain. It is the Yemeni people who suffer after all from the weaponization of the economy.

Madame President, these issues – the ceasefire, Hudaydah ports, and Sana'a airport - have long been under negotiation. We have discussed them pretty much every month since March of last year and I am grateful for your patience. They are well known to all the parties. Mechanisms can be agreed upon. What is needed is simply and fundamentally the political will to end this conflict. We now need a decision.

An agreement on these issues would offer Yemenis a break from the relentless cycles of violence. It would facilitate movements of people and goods. And it could create a conducive environment for the parties to move to the real issue at hand – those elements that I spoke of earlier, inclusive talks to end the war on the basis of those aspirations. The political process thus would need to resume promptly. A nation-wide ceasefire would not be sustainable, and we know this from Yemen and we know from other conflicts, will not be sustainable if it is not tied to progress on that political track.

Madame President, I will continue engaging the parties on this way forward. I hope they will come along with me and I hope others are also doing all they can to add to this persuasion. But I want to emphasize what is at stake. The military situation in the country is extremely tense. Indeed, I think it has not been this tense in the time I had the privilege to be engaged with Yemen. Civilians bear the brunt of the hostilities, as always; shocking violations of international humanitarian law takes place. In Hudaydah and Taiz governorates, worrying spikes of violence and hostilities continue, causing civilian deaths and injuries and damage to homes. And of course, I am of those alarmed by continued cross-border attacks, which

damage prospects for peace and regional stability. And I mentioned already the centre of gravity of this war. The battle for Marib which is already now daily robbing young lives of their future.

Madame President, we know the negotiating table can produce win-win results. The parties demonstrated that last year when they successfully negotiated a large-scale release of prisoners and detainees. And I am glad to report that for the past three weeks, the parties have been meeting again in Amman in an effort to agree on more individuals to release. We are not quite there yet. There are more negotiations to happen but I am sure you will join me in urging them to continue their discussions in good faith and to bring this round also to a successful conclusion. And I would like to add the call echoed in many parts of Yemen for the immediate and unconditional release of all sick, wounded, elderly and children detainees as well as all arbitrarily detained civilians, including women and journalists.

Finally, **Madame President**, and I know I have said this often before, as a mediator, I seek common grounds for agreements. That is my job. With the support of the international community, we persuade, we facilitate, we encourage dialogue and we try to get past the events of the war. Nothing anybody can do unfortunately to force the warring parties into peace unless they choose to put down the guns and talk to each other. And this is their responsibility. And this we must earnestly hope is the responsibility that they will now seize and that we will have a different discussion in this Council when we next meet.

Thank you very much **Madame President**, thank you.