

Transcript of the interview of Al Hurra TV with Martin Griffiths

Amman, 8 November 2018

Q: welcome to this special interview with the Special Envoy of the Secretary General for Yemen Martin Griffiths. Mr. Griffiths good evening and thank you for joining us. There are efforts deployed by the UN to achieve peace in Yemen. Are you convinced that a peaceful solution is the only and best solution for Yemen?

A: I think there is no doubt that a political solution agreement between Yemenis is the only way to resolve this conflict and it is not only me who says that. The security council in New York is absolutely united on this point and I think more and more people are realizing that that has to be the way forward.

Q: Mr. Griffiths, the American administration has given the warring parties a deadline of almost 30 days to come back to the negotiating table. Have you already started consulting with the Yemeni parties to the conflict to hold these consultations?

A: well we have been preparing for these talks for some time and I think the calls from Washington in recent days have been very helpful, because they have concentrated everybody's mind about the need for these consultations to happen soon. We have got some key issues to resolve before we can formally invite the parties. I need to sit down with President Hadi before that, but I am hopeful I am planning indeed to convene these consultations before the end of this year.

Q: Can you tell us about the date and place of these upcoming talks?

A: We have a couple of possible venue locations. Governments in Europe have been very generous with the hospitality so we have a couple of options and again as I said I need the government of Yemen to pronounce on that as well as Ansarullah. As for the dates, it will be as soon as we can, once we have cleared away these formalities.

Q: What are the peace elements on which Mr Griffiths will base himself in case these talks happen?

A: I think both parties keep telling me anyway that they are keen to go to consultations. The statements that you would have seen recently both from Ansarullah and the Government of Yemen are very encouraging in that regard, there is obviously the need to make sure that the security of transport of the delegation from Sanaa of Ansarullah needs to be assured for them to go safely there and back and we are finalizing those arrangements but yes the parties keep telling me and I completely believe it that they want to get down to business

Q: In general, what are the elements of the peace plan on which Mr. Griffiths is basing himself in case these talks happen.

A: I think we need to do two things in the coming round, if we can persuade the parties to go this way. First of all, we need to make sure that the confidence-building measures that we have been working on and starting to implement already, that the parties can discuss those and to make progress on that. Very encouraging news in the last 24 hours of further moves by Ansarullah of allowing key detainees, key prisoners to speak to their families so we need to ensure that there is progress on that and secondly in these consultations, I would like to see a framework for the eventual settlement of the conflict so we have a preliminary discussion between the parties so we begin to get into the substance and not just confidence building measures.

Q: Mr. Griffiths how do you see the role of Iran especially with the announcement of the American administration of imposing new sanctions that are the toughest on Iran. Will we see a kind of redeployment (of Iran) in Yemen ?

A: you have to ask the Iranians that question I certainly don't know and frankly it is not a focus of our work. Our work is focused on trying to get Yemenis to agree on the stability of their country and a vital contribution that would make to the region and indeed to Europe as well.

Q: With regards to the humanitarian situation in Yemen, the Saudi-led Arab Coalition speak about hundreds of thousands tons of humanitarian aid while Ansarullah is kind of accused of looting and selling them and negotiating over some plots of lands in exchange for receiving the food.

A: The United Nations Humanitarian Programme in Yemen is one of the biggest in the world. I do not run it. I am looking at the political issues but my colleague Lise Grande with the leaders of the UN agencies and humanitarian NGOs there with the support as you pointed out of very generous donors, I think they are doing a remarkable job to provide at the moment 8 million Yemenis with food support. That's an extraordinary achievement and that is testimony to the fact that aid is getting through to those who need it.

Q: During this period and while you work to get the warring parties together, do you expect a cessation of military hostilities including suspension of missile attacks from Yemen on Saudi Arabia and suspension of airstrikes by the Coalition on Yemen

A: Secretary Pompeo in his statement of Tuesday as you know in Washington made some suggestions exactly as you say about de-escalation including the possible suspension of missile and drone attacks on Saudi Arabia and Emirates and indeed the suspension of airstrikes in some form or another. I think what we really need to do now is to start negotiating with the parties what we can actually achieve on de-escalation. We also watch with concern the situation in Hudaydah. It is a very volatile frontline and none of us would like to see that battlefield erupting into a major battle and a major assault so I think yes from now until consultations and thereafter, we always need to work on de-escalation and we are grateful, I am grateful to the calls from Secretary Mattis, Secretary Pompeo and others to urge all the parties to go in that direction

Q: Mr. Griffiths how would you describe the role of the USA with the administration of the American President Donald Trump, and the statements that you have just mentioned of American Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense in putting pressure on warring parties in Yemen

A: I am not a great believer to be honest in the virtue of pressure, I am a great believer in the benefit of good sense, which is why as we were saying a little bit earlier, I believe that the focus on a political solution is simply good sense for the people of Yemen. It is very gratifying when countries like the United States, United Kingdom, France and others call for de-escalation and call for focus on peace. But they are not the only ones, the Government of Yemen repeated that, Ansarullah did too, and we have had positive statements from the coalition, so it is not only the call from Secretary Pompeo and Mattis but I think there is a chorus of international opinion pushing in one direction

Q: But do you expect any American reaction, should the warring parties ignore the calls for peace this time?

A: You must ask the United States how they would react to such a thing. I know for myself that we have consistently urged the parties to show restraint, all parties to show restraint on the battlefield, partly because of purely humanitarian terms, loss of lives should be avoided but also because at the moment if we are moving towards consultations and talks, we need some confidence between the parties and I don't think that comes out of a major assault or a major battle.

Break

Q: We hear lately about a nucleus of democracy in Taiz which is the local council, which is the fruit of elections. Is it possible to build upon this experience and apply it all over Yemen?

A: what I think is so important about Taiz, and I hope to go there soon, I hope to go there and visit both sides of the frontlines, is that there are people there, they are elected representatives, civil

society, women's groups, local commanders from both sides who are trying very hard to bring a local peace to a part of Yemen, so even in the middle of a war, as frightening and as widespread as this one you find stories of hope for the people of Yemen. Taiz has had terrible few years as you know. People of Taiz have suffered enormously and the fact that they are now fighting back for peace, I think is hugely hugely encouraging. I think it is partly to do with elected representatives, but not only. I think it is to do with the fact that ordinary Yemeni families want peace, they want to be able to go to work without spending hours going around the frontlines, they want to be able to work where they can, send their kids to school. You find this in any part of the world, and it is true in Yemen too.

Q: Mr. Griffiths you are mentioning children but there are direct accusations against Ansarullah on recruiting children and involving them into the war. They are assassinating childhood as we say. What are the efforts made to put an end to the involvement of children, civilians and women into the war crisis in Yemen which in its 4th year

A: The United Nations has a special representative to the Secretary-general for the children in armed conflicts, an office which is always involved in advocacy, not only with regard to Ansarullah but to all those involved in this war. Children often are the first victims of war, sometimes recruited as you say into the militias that fight wars, the UN I think has a distinguished history of arguing passionately against those practices. UNICEF is one of the largest humanitarian agencies working in Yemen. I was lucky enough to meet one of their representatives yesterday here in Amman, and hear the extraordinary stories of survival and resilience of Yemeni families in the middle of this terrible economic crisis now as well as humanitarian crisis, so children are the centre of anybody's lives all over the world and Yemen is no different.

Q: Mr. Griffiths we speak about the economic situation. Do you try to at least to maintain what remains of the Yemeni state institutions, in particular the Central Bank of Yemen?

A: My office has been trying to convene a meeting to support the Central Bank of Yemen to bring cooperation and coherence between its branches around the country, to maximize revenue into the central Bank of Yemen as a basis, among other things for paying salaries of civil servants. Salaries in the North of Yemen for civil servants have not been paid for over a year. This has an enormous impact on the humanitarian needs in Yemen. So helping the Central bank of Yemen and its distinguished governor Mohammad Zamam, is a direct contribution to humanitarian response and keeping people alive.

Q: This economic situation changes the equation on the ground. Are there specific steps that you are taking to maintain the state institutions in general, and drawing lessons from the experience of Iraq, when all state institutions collapsed?

A: Yes indeed there are. I am sure more could be done but for example the efforts, as we speak, to try to keep the salaries of teachers, water supply workers, health workers, to keep the salaries being paid in order to maintain those institutions. So it is partly so that hospitals, clinics, schools can continue to exist and provide the services they need to provide to the people in the middle of a war but also to maintain them as institutions and there is a great deal of work being done with the generosity of many donors, the United Arab Emirates for example recently has announced a series of grants for the payment of some of these workers. That's most welcome.

Q: Mr Griffiths, when speaking about Yemen we would always mention the "Happy Yemen", but what we see today is "Hell on Earth", how can you describe the reality on the ground from a humanitarian perspective, and from the perspective of the internal and external warring parties?

A: I think it is very important that people in Yemen get a sign of hope about the future, about the future that may look somewhat like the past that they had before that war started and I think you are right to point at that as a central focus of all our work. I can help doing in this way by going to Taiz for example, to show that the Yemenis can work together. I can help I hope by offering the parties the

opportunity to resolve their differences through dialogue. More importantly perhaps in all that, is the international community can continue to help to provide the very high level of humanitarian support that Yemen continues to receive with the help of some very generous donors. All these things need to work together so that Yemenis believe there is a future.

Q: Do you think that the humanitarian aid provided by the Saudi-led and UAE Coalition, who have sent as we said thousands of tons (of aid), and the international community is calling for a solution to the cholera problem and famine threatening millions. Will these hinder once again the peace talks that you are planning to lead?

A: I very firmly and strongly of the view that there should be no preconditions for talks. The consultations that I hope we can convene later this year that I believe we will convene later this year should not have preconditions. We would love to have a cessation of hostilities for the whole of Yemen, but if we don't, let's go to the talks. Of course, the humanitarian aid programme needs to go on until that moment that it can convert and shift and move into the rebuilding of institutions and the rebuilding of Yemen as it can easily be. The planning for how we can assist Yemen after a settlement is achieved, is already being done by the United Nations and some key donors including in the region

Conclusion: The Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, Thank you very much for this interview