



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

Briefing by UN Special Envoy, Hans Grundberg, to the United Nations Security Council

13 June 2024

Thank you, **Mr. President**. Mr. President, allow me first to wish all Muslims around the world a blessed Eid-al-Adha. **Mr. President**, I will be briefing you today under worrisome circumstances. Before addressing the economic escalation, a fragile military situation, and a constricted mediation space, as well as outlining my efforts to protect the path to a ceasefire and a political process in Yemen, I must direct your attention to the crackdown by Ansar Allah on Yemeni civil society, non-governmental organizations and the United Nations.

Last week, 13 UN personnel, including one of my colleagues in Sana'a, in addition to five staff members of international NGOs and many more from national NGOs and civil society were arbitrarily detained by Ansar Allah. They remain in incommunicado detention. This comes in addition to the four staff members from OHCHR and UNESCO, who have been held in incommunicado detention since 2021 and 2023 respectively. I urge Ansar Allah to respect the rights of Yemenis under international law and release all United Nations and NGO personnel immediately and unconditionally and to refrain from the arbitrary detention of civilians. The United Nations is present to serve Yemenis. Such arbitrary detentions are not the expected signal of an actor who is seeking a mediated solution to conflict.

In addition, I am concerned about summary judgements by Ansar Allah-controlled court on the 1st of June, sentencing 45 individuals to death. I would like to reiterate the United Nations' calls for a moratorium on the death penalty, in law and practice, everywhere in the world.

Mr. President, I have continued my engagements toward a ceasefire and inclusive political process that allows the warring parties to work out their differences through peaceful means. But since last December, when the parties agreed to a set of commitments to be operationalized through a United Nations roadmap, the regional situation has severely complicated this process. Ever since the escalation in the Red Sea, I have aimed to make sure that no one loses sight of the ultimate objective: a peaceful resolution of the conflict in Yemen. However, instead of making tangible progress towards protecting commitments made and finalizing the roadmap, the parties have reverted to a zero-sum game. Instead of putting the Yemenis first, they have opted for measures they believe will strengthen their own position. This risks jeopardizing the viability of the commitments made earlier.

This zero-sum mindset is most apparent in the economy. The economy contracted sharply following Ansar Allah's attack on oil export facilities in October 2022, leading to a complete halt in the export of crude oil, and severely impacted the income of the Government of Yemen. In the banking sector, the situation of one country with two competing monetary authorities and two currencies was already unsustainable, but it has become even more complicated due to a cycle of escalatory actions. The announcement last March by Ansar Allah that it had brought into circulation its own one hundred-rial coin, to address disintegrating one hundred Yemeni Rial banknotes, challenged the monetary authority of the Central Bank of Yemen. The Central Bank responded in April by demanding that banks relocate their headquarters from Sana'a to Aden and announced punitive measures against banks that refused to do so. In reaction, the Central Bank branch controlled by Ansar Allah banned all banks with headquarters in Aden from operating in their area.

If, as part of the punitive measures, banks in Sana'a are indeed cut off from international financial transactions, it would severely impact the economy, as we will hear in more detail from Ms. Edem Wosornu from OCHA. Imports of basic goods, including food and medicine, and remittances through banks would be disrupted. Overall, these developments further deepen divisions and fragmentation in the banking sector, while also opening the door to potential military escalation.

In order to avert such a scenario, my office has held extensive meetings in Riyadh, Aden and Sana'a to discuss concrete proposals to resolve this crisis. In line with these efforts, I wrote to His Excellency Dr. Rashid Al-Alimi, President of the Presidential Leadership Council, and Mr. Mahdi Al Mashat, President of the Supreme Political Council on the 1st of June, urging them to refrain from further escalation and inviting them for a dialogue, without preconditions, under UN auspices. I have yet to receive a positive response. I cannot emphasize enough the importance of the parties convening face-to-face to discuss these issues and I urge regional and international stakeholders with power and influence to put their full weight behind such direct talks between the parties.

Mr. President, besides occasional flareups, the military situation along the frontlines has remained relatively stable since the April 2022 truce. Thanks to continuing collaboration between the parties and my Office, through the Military Coordination Committee, we are continuously receiving reports of military incidents. The relationships and lines of communications formed during the truce remain effective and have helped to prevent a relapse to a larger-scale violence.

However, the military situation is not sustainable and if the parties continue the current escalatory trajectory the question is not if, but when, the parties revert to escalation on the battlefield. As I have flagged previously, over the past months we have seen a gradual increase in fighting, including last month when clashes were reported in Dhale', Lahj, Ma'rib and Ta'iz, as well as consistent threats by all sides to return to war.

Meanwhile the situation in the Red Sea remains unresolved. Ansar Allah has increased its efforts to strike commercial and military ships, with a number of commercial ships having sustained damage during the reporting period. For its part, the US-led coalition has continued its airstrikes in Ansar Allah controlled areas in Hudaydah, Sana'a, and Ta'iz.

Mr. President, I am frustrated because we have seen the progress the Yemenis so desperately need overtaken by a regional situation that is beyond our control. I am also concerned by the escalatory measures and rhetoric by the parties. However, I do remain hopeful because, despite everything, we have seen some positive developments. This week, we witnessed the opening of two additional roads: one connecting Ma'rib city to Sana'a via Juba district, and the other, between Taiz city and neighboring Hawban area, enabling for the first time in over nine years civilian movements across the frontline running through the city. This was made possible because of the close coordination between the parties and tireless local mediation efforts. This is an important step in the right direction for the city of Taiz and I hope it will trigger the opening of additional roads in Ta'iz, in Ma'rib, and elsewhere. This development is also a reminder to all of us of the power of mediation and negotiation. In addition, I have taken note of the unilateral release of 113 detainees by Ansar Allah, and I encourage the parties to continue to work towards additional releases under the auspices of my Office in cooperation with the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Mr. President, above all, I remain determined. Determined in my efforts to bring the parties together without preconditions, to discuss the issues directly in front of them, on the economy, on releasing conflict-related detainees, on opening additional roads, and ultimately to finalize the roadmap. But I also remain determined to continue to work relentlessly, together with the whole UN family, for the release of our personnel and I echo the Secretary-General in demanding their immediate and unconditional release. I will continue to engage all available channels to this end.

Mr. President, I urge this Council to lend its full support to all these efforts. Thank you very much.