



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

Briefing by Special Envoy Hans Grundberg to the UN Security Council

23 July 2024

Thank you, Mr. President, Mr. President, as I brief you today, the trajectory of the development in Yemen has since the beginning of the year moved in the wrong direction and if left unaddressed could reach a tipping point. The regional dimension of the conflict in Yemen is getting more and more pronounced. Escalation in the economic sphere has been translating into public threats to return to full-fledged war. Ansar Allah is escalating its crackdown on the civic space and on international organizations. While the parties have displayed willingness to engage in dialogue on the economic sphere, which I welcome, I reiterate my warning to the Council that we risk a return to full-scale war and all the predictable human suffering and regional implications this entails. We have a common interest and responsibility to avoid this.

Mr. President, it has been almost seven weeks since Ansar Allah arbitrarily detained thirteen UN colleagues and dozens of personnel of international and national organizations, civil society, and private sector entities, many of whom support the work of the UN. Among those who were arbitrarily detained, there are at least four women. From my contact with family members, I know they are frightened about the fate of their mothers, fathers, daughters, sons, sisters and brothers who are currently detained. Nearly two months have passed without knowing where they are and under what conditions they are being held. Nearly two months, and we have not heard from any of them. Four other personnel from OHCHR and UNESCO have been held even longer, since 2021 and 2023 respectively.

Let me be clear: all the detained personnel are people who, day in and out, work for their country, for Yemen. They provide humanitarian assistance to those in need. They protect the heritage of the country. They work on mediation, development, the promotion of human rights, and peacebuilding. If it were not for these staff members and their organizations, the effects of the war on Yemen's population would have been even worse. Therefore, I repeat my earlier demand to Ansar Allah to immediately and unconditionally release them and refrain from detaining any additional UN, NGO and civil society staff members.

Mr. President, seven months of an escalatory trajectory reached a new and dangerous level last week. I am deeply concerned by the recent military activities in the region, including a drone attack on Tel Aviv by Ansar Allah on the 19th of July and the subsequent Israeli retaliatory attacks on Hudaydah port and its oil and power facilities on the 20th of July. I remain deeply concerned about the continued targeting of international navigation in the Red Sea and its

surrounding waterways. Recent developments suggest that the threat against international shipping is increasing in scope and precision. Commercial shipping vessels have been sunk and damaged, civilians have been killed, the crew of the *Galaxy Leader* remains arbitrarily detained, and international trade has been disrupted. Meanwhile, the US and the UK have continued to carry out strikes on military targets in Ansar Allah-controlled territory. And it is alarming that there are no signs of de-escalation, let alone a solution. These latest developments show the real danger of a devastating region-wide escalation.

Mr. President, the situation along the frontlines also remains a source of concern. Over the past months, we have witnessed an increase in military preparations and reinforcements. This month, clashes have been reported along numerous frontlines, including Al-Dhale', Al-Hudaydah, Lahj, Ma'rib, Sa'adah and Tai'z. While the levels of violence have been relatively contained compared to the period before the 2022 truce, the recent trend of escalation, accompanied by continuous threats of a full-scale return to war, demonstrates how volatile the situation is.

Mr. President, while I am concerned about the overall trajectory that Yemen is on, I am nonetheless encouraged that last night, the parties informed me that they have agreed on a path to de-escalate a cycle of measures and countermeasures which had sought to tighten their grip on the banking and transport sectors. This understanding follows months of intense engagement from my Office to seek solutions and warn against the serious risk to the Yemeni people that this deepening weaponization of the economy would have posed. I welcome the parties' decision to choose a path of dialogue and I look forward to engaging further with the parties to support them in implementing their commitments with regard to the banking sector and Yemenia Airways. The aim remains a unified currency, a unified and independent central bank, and a banking sector free of political interference. I would also like to recognize the significant role that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has played in reaching this understanding.

However, I can and will caution that we have been here before and that the parties have a choice to make. There are underlying issues to be addressed. Stopgap measures might serve as a band-aid but will not provide for sustainable solutions nor will they reasonably pave the way for a nationwide ceasefire and a political process without sustained dialogue. The parties' commitment to de-escalation and dialogue, as reflected in the understanding they reached last night and the broader understanding they reached last December, must translate into readiness to negotiate directly. Engaging in good faith dialogue is the minimum requirement to meet their responsibilities to the Yemeni people and a real test of their genuine intention to follow a path of peaceful conflict resolution.

Mr President, while my UN colleagues and I continue our tireless efforts towards the release of our personnel and the aid and civil society workers, we are also determined to see the release of the thousands of conflict-related detainees. They have been waiting years to be reunited with their families. Therefore, I consider it a positive sign that the parties met and discussed in Oman, under the auspices of the UN and the ICRC, the release of conflict-related detainees on the basis of the all-for-all principle as agreed in Stockholm in 2018. The meeting made substantial progress but unfortunately not yet on an agreement for an all-for-all release. Our efforts in this regard will continue. I would like to thank the Sultanate of Oman for hosting the meeting as part of their valuable support to my mediation efforts.

Mr President, I am tasked by this Council to support the resumption of a peaceful, inclusive, orderly and Yemeni-led political transition process that meets the legitimate demands and aspirations of the Yemeni people. Yemenis demand peace, they demand economic prosperity, they demand basic services, they demand good governance, and they demand justice and reconciliation. But, as of late, rather than being able to focus on finding a sustainable and just solution for the benefit of all Yemenis, the situation has forced me to focus on the short term. New issues are constantly arising and hence considerable efforts go into convincing the parties to either refrain from implementing escalatory measures or, as a consequence of escalatory measures, to return to the *status quo ante*.

The challenges I have outlined today make it all the more clear that the only way to move forward in Yemen is to find mutually acceptable solutions through dialogue and negotiation. The alternative is more fragmentation and more suffering. My office and I will remain as determined as ever to continue to assist, encourage, and provide every opportunity for the parties to find solutions through dialogue. But ultimately the choice is theirs. Beyond echoing the Secretary General's recent call for utmost restraint with regards to Yemen, I urge the parties to engage in good faith with my office and to engage on a long-term approach to de-escalate and to prioritize the well-being of Yemenis. This will allow us to preserve the space necessary to continue the work towards a nationwide ceasefire and the resumption of a political process as part of the previously agreed commitments to be operationalized in a UN roadmap.

Mr President, I continue to depend on the Council's full support in all of these efforts. Thank you.