



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

**SE Grundberg's Briefing to the UN Security Council
11 December 2024
Open Session**

Thank you, Madame President. Madame President, allow me first to take this opportunity to welcome my new colleague at the helm of OCHA, Under Secretary-General Tom Fletcher. I very much look forward to working with you. I would also like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to those Council members whose tenure will conclude at the end of the year. Your continuous support in this Council has been critical to my efforts. **Madame President**, as 2024 draws to a close, we reflect on a year marked by immense turmoil and tragedy across the Middle East. Far too many have endured profound loss due to violent conflicts, including in Yemen. With the last months' dramatic developments in Lebanon and Syria, it should be obvious to all that the Middle East is in urgent need of stabilisation. This includes Yemen.

Let us not forget that Yemen has taken several positive steps in recent years. The UN truce agreement in 2022, the large-scale exchange of conflict-related detainees in 2020 and 2023, and the commitments made in 2023 by all sides to advance peace efforts under a roadmap under United Nations auspices, demonstrate that diplomatic engagement by the UN, regional powers, and international actors, remains the most effective pathway to achieving sustainable peace. It is critical that the parties, the region, and the broader international community capitalize on these moments in order to not miss the chance to take clear steps towards peace.

Otherwise, especially in the context of a collapsing economy and falling living standards, Yemenis will continue to suffer. Nothing justifies this suffering. Ending the war is a choice - one that remains within reach of the parties. I urge the parties to actively engage with my efforts on the roadmap, which would deliver a ceasefire, economic measures such as the sustainable payment of salaries and preparing for an inclusive political process. I firmly believe this is still possible. However, action, compromise, and a sincere focus on Yemen is imperative if they wish to alleviate the suffering of Yemenis and restore hope for a peaceful future.

Madame President, yesterday, on International Human Rights Day, we were reminded of the values enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. For Yemenis, this reminder is stark - as civic space continues to shrink in Yemen. This month marks six months since Ansar Allah initiated a campaign of arbitrary detentions targeting personnel from international and national organisations, diplomatic missions, civil society, and private-sector entities. While three detainees have been released, dozens of others—including a member of my team—remain arbitrarily detained. And some are still denied even the basic humane act of a phone call with their families. These arbitrary detentions constitute a flagrant violation of basic human rights, causing profound anguish for their families left to grapple with uncertainty and fear for their loved ones'

safety. I continue to call for their immediate and unconditional release, and I greatly appreciate this Council's unequivocal support for this message.

In parallel, my Office remains focused on the release of all conflict-related detainees. Some have been in captivity for ten years, despite continuous efforts and numerous meetings through my office with the parties' prisoner committees. I urge all to respect their commitments under the Stockholm agreement and continue working together with my office in good faith and deliver on this important humanitarian file. Negotiations should be guided by the agreed principle – all for all.

Madame President, Yemen's economic crisis is deepening. Each month, I have warned this Council of the catastrophic consequences of the contraction, fragmentation and weaponisation of the economy. The failure to pay public-sector salaries and pensions has driven widespread poverty, while soaring inflation has left many families unable to afford basic necessities, including food.

During visits to Aden and Sana'a, my Office has underscored the critical juncture before the parties: either continue down this catastrophic path of unresolved conflict and weaponisation of the economy where everyone loses, or collaborate on economic issues to pave the way for growth and other possible peace dividends. Through engagement with stakeholders, including the banking sector, we are exploring practical and tangible solutions to restore stability and foster dialogue on Yemen's economy, including payment of salaries and restarting oil and gas exports in the interests of the population. This effort focuses on turning the commitments made by the parties in July this year, into action that benefits all Yemenis.

Madame President, we continue to witness insecurity in the Red Sea through the actions of Ansar Allah, as well as attacks on Israel. The air strikes of the United States and the United Kingdom in response have continued. These developments, which have persisted over the course of the year, have shrunk the space for my mediation efforts. I will encourage all involved to take the necessary steps to create a conducive environment for the conflict in Yemen to be resolved. Failure to do so will only encourage those who call for a return to war.

The fragile situation in Yemen persists along multiple frontlines, with ongoing flare-ups in areas such as Al-Dhale'a, Hudaydah, Lahj, Ma'rib, Sa'adah, Shabwah, and Ta'iz, often leading to tragic losses of life. Recently, hostilities escalated in eastern Ta'iz, with reports of explosions and shelling near civilian neighbourhoods. Just last week, a drone hit a crowded marketplace in Maqbanah, in Ta'iz governorate, killing at least six people and seriously injuring many others. I call on all parties to the conflict to adhere strictly to their obligations under international humanitarian law to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure. Such incidents underscore the urgent need for a ceasefire agreement. To support de-escalation, my Office continues to engage with military and security officials from both parties, facilitating dialogue on current dynamics and exploring opportunities for confidence-building. During recent visits to Aden and Marib, my colleagues held discussions with senior Government of Yemen military commanders to exchange views and address security challenges at the local level.

Madame President, my Office is doing its utmost to listen and consult a wide spectrum of Yemenis. We have continued our political dialogue series with Yemeni political parties and

components, to identify priorities and explore the parameters for a political settlement. A key takeaway from these sessions is the consensus on the need for a Yemeni-led process that places the population's needs at its core, fostering reconciliation and laying the groundwork for sustainable recovery. There is also widespread recognition that any future settlement must be inclusive, ensuring representation of all segments of society. To this end, inclusivity and the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda remain central to our efforts. We recently co-sponsored the 7th Feminist Summit in Aden along with several international organizations, sending a unified and clear message of support, solidarity, and advocacy for Yemeni women's struggle for equality, ending discrimination and violence, and building a comprehensive peace in Yemen.

Such spaces for dialogue between Yemenis of all political persuasions are crucial. It is worrying that they are increasingly endangered by partisan interests aimed at closing diverse civic spaces or threatening participants attending meetings. Restricting civil society's work and perpetuating a climate of fear is an assault on the rights of Yemenis. It erodes the foundations needed for an intra-Yemeni peace process, emboldens spoilers, and enables armed groups to continue committing human rights violations with impunity. Such intimidation and restrictions must stop.

Now more than ever, we need to work together to support Yemeni civil society actors and human rights defenders so that they are protected and empowered to carry out their work in safety and dignity and enable rights-based reconciliation. In this regard, I look forward to the briefing of Mr. Hisham al Omeisy.

On the international stage, I have recently engaged in constructive discussions with Yemeni and international stakeholders in numerous locations. In all those engagements, I carried the same message: a peaceful resolution in Yemen is possible, and continuing international unity and support towards that goal is essential.

To navigate the challenges and translate opportunities into tangible progress, the unified support of this Council is paramount. Only through a shared commitment and decisive action can we create and maintain an environment conducive to effective mediation and realize the sustainable, inclusive and just peace that the Yemeni people have yearned for and rightly deserve. No matter what, Yemenis can count on the United Nation's relentless work and support to enable them to realize these aspirations. Thank you very much.