



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

Briefing by Special Envoy Hans Grundberg to the UN Security Council

15 Aug 2024

Thank you Mr President.

Mr President, in four days, on the 19th of August, we will commemorate World Humanitarian Day. A day dedicated to honoring those who tirelessly serve people in need around the world, including in Yemen. Yet, in Yemen, we are facing a clampdown by Ansar Allah on the humanitarian and civic space. It has been almost 80 days since Ansar Allah started its concerted campaign detaining Yemeni employees of the UN, civil society, national and international NGOs, diplomatic missions and private sector entities. Dozens of men and women, among which 13 UN personnel, including one of my own staff members, are still being detained in unknown locations.

These detentions are in addition to OHCHR and UNESCO staff who have been detained by Ansar Allah since 2021 and 2023, respectively. In addition, on the 29th of July, Ansar Allah closed the OHCHR office in Sana'a and asked its international staff to leave. Following the closure, Ansar Allah security forces, in a flagrant violation to the UN Privileges and Immunities, stormed the office on the 3rd of August. This is an ominous signal of the broader direction Ansar Allah is taking and represents a serious attack on the ability of the UN to perform its mandate. Protecting human rights is fundamentally about protecting the future of Yemen, and the rights and freedoms of Yemenis.

I, therefore, call on Ansar Allah to act responsibly and compassionately towards its fellow countrymen and women and immediately and unconditionally release all UN, NGO, civil society, diplomatic mission and private sector employees as well as members of religious minorities, and refrain from further arbitrary detentions. Let them be reunited with their families. Let them go back to their jobs serving Yemenis, providing humanitarian assistance, development assistance, peacebuilding, human rights, mediation and the protection of cultural heritage.

Mr President, the Middle East is currently holding its breath, and I sincerely hope that the escalatory trajectory that we have experienced in the past months can be reversed. What started in Israel and Gaza in October last year has drawn in several other countries, including Yemen. Despite serious efforts to shield Yemen from this regional escalation, Ansar Allah continues to attack ships in the Red Sea and the US and the UK have continued their strikes on military targets in Ansar Allah-controlled territory. This situation, which has lasted for over eight months now, is not sustainable.

Mr President, this regional escalation is taking place in parallel to real and urgent challenges inside Yemen that need to be addressed. Addressing the decade-long conflict in Yemen continues to be at the center of my work. It is a conflict that has claimed hundreds of thousands of victims, has weakened Yemen's social fabric and has undermined the delivery of public services. This has made Yemen more vulnerable to natural disasters and environmental hazards and diseases, as the recent floodings in Hudaydah, Ma'rib and Tai'z in addition to the continuing cholera outbreak have demonstrated.

Therefore, I, once again, call on the Yemeni parties, and Ansar Allah in particular, to prioritize the Yemenis. Your responsibility lies, first and foremost, with Yemen. We need to shift the focus back to Yemen and find solutions for Yemen's problems.

Mr President, over the past months, I have continuously expressed my deep concern about the trajectory of events in Yemen. Unfortunately, this regressive trend, illustrated by continuing military activities and escalatory rhetoric, has continued. While levels of violence along the frontlines remain relatively contained compared to the period before the 2022 truce, we are continuing to witness military preparations and reinforcements accompanied by continuous threats of a return to war, with further reports of clashes in Al-Dhale', Al-Hudaydah, Lahj, Ma'rib, Sa'adah and Tai'z. Once again, this serves as a stark reminder of how volatile the situation is along the Yemeni frontlines.

Mr President, despite this bleak picture, last month, with the support of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the parties were able to halt a dangerous cycle of escalation that was negatively impacting Yemen's banking and transport sectors and threatened to ignite renewed military conflict. Since the announcement of the de-escalation understanding, which includes the functioning of Yemenia airlines and ensuring the continued access of Yemen's biggest banks to international banking services, we have seen some initial progress towards its implementation. However, the onus is now on the parties to not only act in good faith and fully implement the commitments they made, but also to transform the understanding into something that improves the lives and livelihoods of all Yemenis. And with this, I again underscore the importance of working toward the unification of the currency, a unified central bank, and ensuring the banking sector is free from political interference. My office has prepared options and offered a clear proposal and pathway to achieve these objectives, all of which have been based on the input of the parties themselves. We continue to stand ready to support the parties to reach mutually acceptable solutions through dialogue for the benefit of all Yemenis.

Mr President, in December of last year, the parties agreed to a set of commitments. These commitments remain valid today and despite the ever more complicated mediation space, I remain determined to keep all channels of communication open and to continue with our engagements at different levels and on different issues: on the economy, on a nationwide ceasefire and other security arrangements, on a political process and on the release of conflict-related detainees.

In line with these efforts, last month, in partnership with UN Women, my office brought together seventy representatives of different segments of Yemeni society for its fourth consultation in Mukalla, Hadhramaut, to continue to work to develop a vision for inclusive peace, elevating the voice of women. My office also visited Riyadh and Aden to continue engagements on a nationwide

ceasefire and other security arrangements, including exploring ways to support de-escalation efforts in Yemen. In addition, since the conclusion of the meeting on conflict-related detainees in July, we have continued our engagements with the parties to build on the progress reached in Oman.

Mr President, we do all of this in order to keep the focus on the longer-term priorities of seeking a sustainable and just solution for the benefit of all Yemenis. I remain determined to achieve the task entrusted to me by this Council: to support the resumption of an inclusive Yemeni-led political transition. I continue to depend on the Council's full support for these efforts. Your consistent and unified messaging on the importance of a political process and the ceasefire, as well as your continued advocacy for the release of UN personnel is all- the-more crucial during these turbulent times. Thank you.