

**BRIEFING TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL BY SPECIAL ENVOY OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR YEMEN,
ISMAIL OULD CHEIKH AHMED,
15 APRIL 2016**

Mr. President,

Thank you for this opportunity to brief the Security Council once again on the latest developments in Yemen. This briefing comes on the eve of the next round of face to face talks in Kuwait, where I hope the parties will come to an agreement on a clear way to end the violence and devastation in Yemen. As a result of months of intense negotiations, I received, on 9 April, letters from the Government of Yemen and Ansar Allah and the General Popular Congress, confirming their commitment to a nation-wide cessation of hostilities. The cessation of hostilities began at midnight on 10 April and I hope it will provide a conducive environment for the upcoming talks, offer the opportunity for expanded humanitarian assistance and provide a rare ray of hope for Yemenis' longing for a return to peace.

The De-escalation and Coordination Committee, established in the last round of peace talks in Switzerland, has been working hard to prevent further violations and avoid any military escalation. I commend the parties for their commitment to the work of the DCC. I am also grateful to the EU, Germany, Netherlands, Turkey, the UK and the US for providing training to the DCC and the support for its operations.

The agreement on the cessation of hostilities also created local levels of support. The Government of Yemen and Ansar Allah have nominated local committees in militarily contested areas to work with the DCC and ensure better compliance with the cessation of hostilities. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has witnessed the signing of agreement to form these committees upon the request of both parties. Unfortunately, most of the local committees are not yet fully functional but we are working to ensure that these become more effective in the coming days.

The first days of the cessation of hostilities witnessed a discernable decrease in the level of military violence in most parts of the country. However, there have also been a worrying number of serious violations particularly in al-Jawf, Amran, Mareb and Taiz. Fighting in Taiz continues to cause civilian casualties and I am concerned that a spiral of escalation could threaten the success of the peace process. However, the recent events over the last weeks at the same time have given me hope. I would like to acknowledge the courage displayed by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Ansarallah by accepting to settle border disputes. Both parties confirmed that these agreements pave the way for the general cessation of hostilities in Yemen. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has supported both the government of Yemen and the Houthis to sign a landmark agreement aimed at supporting the cessation of hostilities and the work of the De-Escalation, Coordination Committee and Local De-Escalation Committees and supports the role of the United Nations. The role of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was praised by both parties which represents an important positive development in the current crisis.

Mr. President,

The humanitarian situation for the Yemeni people continues to deteriorate causing additional human misery. As part of their commitments in the cessation of hostilities, the parties have pledged to respect their obligations under International Humanitarian Law and ensure unhindered access for humanitarian agencies. I call on all parties to support the important work which humanitarian agencies are carrying out. During this cessation of hostilities humanitarians will continue doing their best to deliver assistance to those in need and negotiate sustained access to hard-to-reach areas. I am sure that my colleague, Assistant Secretary General Kyung-Wha Kang will brief you further on these efforts.

There is no doubt that Yemen's rapidly deteriorating economy further undermines the humanitarian situation. In order to help Yemen preserve economic stability during this crisis, I have also pursued agreements which seek to preserve the functioning of key state institutions, like the Central Bank, on which the Yemeni people depend. Re-establishing institutions such as the Social Welfare Fund, which provide cash transfers to the most vulnerable segments of the population, will help avoid destitution of the social fabric and extreme poverty and help speed economic recovery after an agreement.

On the security front, Yemen is facing a brutal war on one hand and a significant terrorist threat on the other. The Yemeni people have continued to witness the devastation of terrorist attacks throughout the country. In my recent visit to Brussels, which suffered a tragic terrorist attack on 22 March, I noted that the absence of the State in many parts of Yemen has allowed the expansion of terrorist groups, creating a long-term threat for the country. The current cessation of hostilities will help create a more conducive environment to prevent further radicalization and extremist violence, but there is much more that needs to be done in order to prevent irreparable damage to the future of Yemen. I take this opportunity to note that this morning, the Government of Yemen supported by the coalition forces regained control of Houta, the capital of Lahj, from Al Qaida forces who had seized control of the city last summer.

Mr. President,

My team and I have been engaged in extensive discussion over the last few months with Yemeni leaders, regional and international partners on the future direction of the country and the possible outcomes of the Kuwait talks. I met President Abdrabbou Mansour Hadi on four occasions and I thank him for his support to my mission. I also met with Yemeni senior officials the Government of Yemen and I visited Sanaa several times for meetings with representatives from Ansar Allah and General People's Congress. I also met with HRH the Deputy Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, Mohamed bin Salman, Foreign Ministers of the Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Jordan, Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council, Dr. Abdulatif Al Ziyani, as well as Federica Mogherini, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the Russian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs. I also spoke by phone with Ministers of Foreign Affairs of France, United Kingdom and the United States of America, all of whom reiterated their support for the cessation of hostilities and peace process facilitated by the United Nations. The success of the upcoming talks will require consistent and coherent support from the region as well as the larger international community.

Mr. President,

I depart in a few hours to Kuwait in order to facilitate the next round of Yemeni peace talks. I am sincerely grateful to the Government of Kuwait, who generously offered to host these talks, and who is providing every kind of support possible for their success.

I also extend my thanks to the Sultanate of Oman for both their political and logistical support to the efforts of the United Nations in the region.

The talks will commence on 18 April and aim to reach a comprehensive agreement, which will end the conflict and allow the resumption of inclusive political dialogue in accordance with UN Security Council resolution 2216 (2015) and other relevant UNSC resolutions.

These talks build on a negotiating framework which provides a mechanism for return to a peaceful and orderly transition based on the GCC Initiative and National Dialogue Outcomes. I will encourage the

parties in the talks to negotiate a detailed way forward starting with each of the following areas: the creation of interim security arrangements, the withdrawal of militias and armed groups, the handover of heavy weapons to the State, the restoration of state institutions and the resumption of inclusive political dialogue, the release of prisoners and detainees. With these components, we are building on what has been discussed and agreed upon in principle, in Beirut, December 2015 based on the demands of UNSC 2216 (2015).

This framework provides a strong foundation for developing a new political consensus that will help Yemen achieve the stability and security that its people deserve and that its future requires. A positive outcome will require difficult compromises from all sides, as well as determination to reach an agreement. I encourage all sides to come to the talks in good faith and flexibility. The path to peace will be difficult but it is in reach and failure is not an option.

Mr. President,

Yemen is now at a critical crossroad. One path leads to peace while the other can only worsen the security and humanitarian situation. I will need your backing in the coming weeks and months, both during and after the talks, to ensure an end to the violence in Yemen, a comprehensive ceasefire and a return to peaceful, inclusive political process.

Finally, please allow me to thank all member states for their trust and unyielding support and ensuring the rights of the Yemenis are well respected and that they can lead a stable life in a safe country.

I would like all of us to focus on this historical and critical moment. We have never been as close as we are today to peace.

Can all the parties use this opportunity for genuine engagement at the talks?

Can they accept their differences and agree to overcome obstacles?

Can they drop their destructive and belligerent attitudes, now that we are so close to peace

This is what we hope for and this is what we ask for. The coming days will tell.