

**BRIEFING OF THE SPECIAL ENVOY OF THE UN SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR YEMEN TO THE OPEN SESSION
OF THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL
30 May 2017**

Mr. President,

Thank you very much for the opportunity to brief this Council on the latest developments in the Yemeni peace process.

Tragically, the violence continues on numerous fronts, deepening the suffering of the Yemeni people. Much of the violence has focused on the western coastline of Taiz governorate, where pro-Government forces are attempting to make progress from Al-Dhubab and Al-Mokha towards Al-Hodeidah port and inland towards Taiz city. An assessment mission carried out by humanitarian agencies in early April found that Al-Dhubab town was largely empty due to widespread destruction of infrastructure and contamination by unexploded ordnance and landmines. In Al-Mokha town an estimated 40 per cent of houses and infrastructure have been damaged by the fighting.

Violence has also continued in Hajjah governorate and the border area between Yemen and Saudi Arabia. There has been a significant escalation of violence in Ta'iz, including intensified shelling between 21-23 May by forces allied with Ansarallah and Ali Abdullah Saleh leading to the death and injury of tens of civilians and significant damage to civilian infrastructure in the city. The shelling of civilian areas and civilian infrastructure is a serious violation of international humanitarian law.

Airstrikes have hit numerous other locations in the country. On 29 March, an airstrike in Saada governorate reportedly killed 12 civilians, including several children. In addition, ballistic missiles were fired into Saudi territory. The persistent military action is leading to an increased militarization of the Yemeni population, extensive proliferation of weapons, and widespread use of deadly landmines.

The terrible scenes witnessed on the west coast and other areas of country show yet again how the conflict is laying waste to the civilian population, their homes and their livelihoods. The parties must urgently come together to prevent the deepening of this catastrophic situation.

I will not hide from this Council that we are not close to a comprehensive agreement. The reluctance of the key parties to embrace the concessions needed for peace, or even discuss them, remains extremely troubling. Yemenis are paying a price for their needless delay.

Mr. President

At the begging of the holy month of Ramadan we have to remember that seven million Yemenis are at risk of famine unless this conflict ends. A quarter of Yemenis cannot afford food on the local market. Half of Yemen's population lacks access to clean water, sanitation and hygiene services, increasing the risk of infectious diseases. The latest outbreak of cholera has led to more than 500 deaths and over 60,000 suspected cases in 19 governorates. The rapid spread of the disease has been worsened by the inadequate healthcare system. Less than 45 per cent of medical facilities are functioning and medicines for diabetes, hypertension, cancer and other chronic diseases are in short supply. As the World Health Organization has underlined, Yemenis are dying not just from violence: they are also dying because of violence, lack of salaries and the loss of their livelihoods prevents them from receiving the basic treatment they need to survive.

Mr. President

So far, we managed to avert military action in Al Hodeidah. The spread of fighting to the city would lead to a devastating loss of civilian life and infrastructure. It would threaten the flow of food and medical supplies through the port and bring further suffering to the Yemeni people.

I have made it clear to the parties during my recent meetings with the Government of Yemen and with political leaders in Sana'a that they must reach a compromise on the situation in Al-Hodeidah, in order to prevent such a horrific scenario. I regret that the Ansarallah – General People's Congress delegation in Sana'a did not meet me to discuss the framework for such an agreement.

My proposal, which includes security, economic and humanitarian elements, would allow for the continued flow of commercial and humanitarian supplies and ensure the end of any diversion of customs revenues and taxes so that they can be used to support salaries and services rather than the war or personal benefit. Agreement on these issues between the parties will safeguard the population of Al-Hodeidah against further harm and preserve commercial and humanitarian supply chains and the payment of salaries.

I have proposed an agreement which avoid military clashes in Hodeida that should be negotiated in parallel with an agreement to ensure the resumption of salary payments nationally to all civil servants. The lack of salary payments is driving millions of Yemenis into destitution. Such an agreement will require mechanisms to ensure that all state revenues, whether collected in Hodeida, Sanaa, or elsewhere, are used in support of salary payments and the preservation of essential government services in all areas of the country. I call on all parties to engage with me without delay on the basis of my proposal. Salaries payments are only possible through an agreement between the Yemeni parties. This requires cooperation and negotiations about the use of existing resources in the country rather than scapegoating of the UN.

In parallel with efforts to avoid destructive conflict, we must also preserve systems that can serve the Yemeni people now and in the future. I am grateful to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the World Bank for organizing a conference to discuss urgent measures to support Yemen's economy and state institution as well as its longer-term recovery and reconstruction.

I praise the work of the World Bank, UNICEF and local Yemeni institutions re-start cash assistance to the poorest families through existing distribution mechanisms for social safety nets. These mechanisms will be a vital boost for household purchasing power and help millions of Yemenis keep their children out of the growing ranks of malnourished.

Commercial importers currently lack access to the financing required to sustain imports of essential goods. I welcome the efforts to create a trade finance facility that will allow commercial importers access to the hard currency that they need in order to pay for imports. This will ensure the continued availability of key commodities in Yemeni markets and will prevent the degradation of supply chains, allowing for more rapid economic recovery in the long term. This work is just a part of a dynamic and innovative collaboration between the WB and UN which is unprecedented in scale and in the rapidity of its deployment. I am confident that it is having a positive impact today on the lives of Yemenis and will help ensure a more rapid and stable recovery following the conflict.

The prospect of economic recovery and stability is still a distant prospect for most Yemenis and the country continues to be fertile ground for extremist groups. Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula operations have persisted in several governorates, including Hadramout, Aden, Al-Dhali', Ma'reb and Shabwa. The absence of stability, economic opportunity and rule of law means that Yemen will continue to be a haven for such groups unless there is lasting peace.

Mr. President

I would like to express my deep concern regarding recent reports from Yemen of efforts to suppress and undermine the work of journalists, human rights activists and civil society, including harassment, beatings, arbitrary detention and trials without due process. I am particularly worried by the sentencing to death of Yahya Al Jubayhi, a prominent Yemeni journalist by a court run by the Houthis and GPC on 12 April. I am also concerned by the arbitrary arrest and threats to the safety of members of the Baha'i community. The parties must uphold their obligation to respect the integrity of civil society and allow such actors to carry out their valuable work without fear of threat or intimidation. They must also allow religious minorities to live without fear of persecution.

I must highlight the important and effective role that Yemeni women continue to play in resolving conflict and contributing to the vision for a lasting peace and reconciliation, despite the atmosphere of violence and the increasing risks to their safety. During my visit to Sanaa, I had the pleasure of meeting representatives of the Yemeni Women's Pact for Peace and Security which brings together Yemeni women from different political parties as well as independent members of civil society. The meetings, which were convened by UNWomen, discussed issues that are central to the current conflict in Yemen including the economic crisis, political deadlock, and the possibility of preventing an attack against Hodeida. The members discussed mechanisms to increase women's inclusion in the peace negotiations and implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325.

Yemeni women, civil society and political leaders have also been meeting regularly in discussions on the peace process and future of the transition. I am very grateful for the efforts of Germany and the Berghof Foundation for hosting these events which help Yemenis build consensus on way to return to a peaceful orderly transition which meets the aspirations of Yemenis people.

Mr. President

During the past two months, the demands of the southern governorates for greater autonomy have become more prominent. These calls show again the urgent need for a peace agreement so that Yemenis can engage in discussions to finalize the constitution, agree on a framework for addressing past injustices and prepare for the election of a leadership that puts the country on the path towards recovery and prosperity.

Yemenis all over the country have been worn out by this conflict. My meeting with an inspiring group of youth activists in Sanaa last week reminded me of the great hopes for their political transition held by Yemenis before this war. The hopes of these young women and men for the resolution of issues have been ignored for too long. We discussed the political and security challenges facing Yemen and the cholera outbreak. In my discussions with these civil society, women and youth groups they proposed very practical ideas including for the opening of the Sana'a airport for civilian flights and urgent demands for the thousands of students, and thousands of Yemenis requiring urgent medical treatment throughout the country. Those demands by the Youth are just, logical, inspiring and practical.

I very much regret to inform this Council that the call for peace from Yemeni women and civil society and the international community is still falling on deaf ears. An agreement on Hodeida and salaries should be just a first step towards a national Cessation of Hostilities and renewed discussion of a comprehensive agreement. Yet even serious negotiations of these first steps have been slow to start.

I am deeply concerned by the attack on my convoy while traveling from the airport to the UN compound on 22 May. Such an incident cannot be ignored and I call on the local authorities to conduct a full and transparent investigation into the attack, and hold those responsible for the attack to account. Despite its gravity, it has increased my determination to continue with my efforts to find a negotiated political settlement that best serves the interests of the Yemeni people.

I urge the Council to strongly convey to the parties that they need to engage immediately with the United Nations to agree on steps to avoid further bloodshed, to halt the slide towards famine and to re-commit to a peaceful end to the war. The humanitarian crisis and the threat of famine is entirely man-made. If the conflict stops, Yemenis and their partners in the international community have the capacity and the will to rebuild the country. With the unified backing of the international community, the path towards peace has been clearly laid out in front of the parties.

I would like to take this opportunity to remind you all of the thousands of Yemenis who have lost their lives, for no other reason, than paying the price of a war between their leaders. I would also like to remind you of the millions of Yemeni victims affected by man-made hunger, violence and famine.

I appeal to the parties to stop fighting for power and strive to build a country that respects the rights of all its citizens, a country with a prosperous economy, and strong institutions. A country for Yemenis, all Yemenis, as Yemenis deserve.

Ramadan Mubarak

Thank you, Mr. President.