



Briefing to the United Nations Security Council
UN Special Envoy for Yemen – Mr. Martin Griffiths

12 March 2020

(As delivered)

Thank you very much indeed, **Mr. President** for giving me the opportunity to brief this Council.

Mr. President, the last time I did so, I warned that the military situation in Yemen was growing increasingly dire. Today, I see the country at a critical juncture. The parties to the conflict will either move Yemen towards de-escalation and the resumption of the political process, or, I fear, towards greater violence and suffering that will make the path to the negotiating table more arduous.

The most alarming military escalation has taken place in Al Jawf, the governorate to the east of Sana'a. I am deeply concerned about the rationale driving these escalations and of course, the impact of the violence on Al Jawf's people. Thousands of families have been displaced by the recent fighting as I think we will hear from Ramesh, and are in critical need of shelter and assistance.

And this escalation could trigger conflicts in other governorates and drag Yemen downwards into a new and irresponsible cycle of violence. This would have devastating humanitarian consequences and also political consequences. It would gravely endanger civilians, and delay the long-awaited, much-needed political process aimed at bringing this war to a comprehensive close. So the parties must exercise maximum restraint to prevent such a terrible outcome. And it is imperative that they uphold their obligations under international humanitarian law. Indiscriminate attacks affecting civilians or civilian objects are unlawful and reprehensible.

Mr. President, over the last week, I traveled to Yemen to stress the need to stop the fighting. In Ma'rib, I met with local government officials, political parties, tribal chiefs, civil society leaders - including women and youth - and persons displaced by the conflict. And let me, through this Council, thank the Governor of that governorate, Governor Aradah for all his support and hospitality to me on that day. I listened to the concerns of all those I met about the military escalation and the humanitarian challenges, and I assured them of the commitment of my Office to supporting peace in Yemen. And I heard from the people in Marib a strong demand for peace. But not a peace that would be dictated from a position of military dominance.

In Sana'a, from which I have just come, I also discussed the need to stop the fighting in Marib governorate. I met with representatives of Marib tribal and communal figures living in Sana'a to listen to their views and concerns about the conflict in Marib.

To be very clear, **Mr. President**, I wish to be very clear, there is no justification for military escalation in Marib. Ma'rib must not become the next epicenter of Yemen's tragic conflict.

Mr. President, the governorate of Hudaydah continues to experience clashes, particularly in the city and in the southern part of the governorate, and civilian casualties are regrettably increasing. Developments since yesterday's distressing and indeed tragic incident at the joint observation post in Hudaydah City threaten to undermine the de-escalation mechanism put in place and the achievements of the Redeployment Coordination Committee. The UN Mission to Support the Hudaydah Agreement, approved of course, **Mr. President**, by this Council under the leadership of my colleague General Guha, is working to mediate and restore trust between the parties after yesterday's events. And I call on both parties to work through established mechanisms to recover that calm.

I should add that UNMHA continues to face movement restrictions. For example, their patrols have not been granted access to the city of Hudaydah since 20th of October 2019, and this naturally enough hampers the implementation of their mandate.

I am also observing with much concern the violence elsewhere in the country. So clashes have continued in the Nihm district of Sana'a, we have discussed that, **Mr. President**, in this Council before, and in the governorates of Al-Dhale, Shabwa, Taiz and Saada.

In short, **Mr. President**, there is a real risk, as we have discussed before, of a protracted military escalation across much of Yemen. We must do all we can to support the parties in containing and reversing the current trajectory.

Since the start of the escalation in January, as you know, I have been calling publicly for the parties to agree to an immediate and unconditional military de-escalation, and to work with my Office to achieve that goal. It is imperative that the parties agree to participate in a public, accountable, nation-wide de-escalation mechanism that quiets the tempo of war, and steers Yemen off this precarious path I have been describing. I repeated this call when I was in Marib on the 7th of March, and I had received initial, positive responses from the parties. And these reactions must now translate into tangible commitments on the ground.

Any de-escalation discussion should also be reinforced by efforts to resume the political process, also a subject we have discussed in this Chamber. And the de-escalation and the political tracks should be supported and enhanced by an expeditious move to address seriously certain issues that have tangible effect on people's lives and as confidence-building measures, build confidence between the parties.

Mr. President, I would like to add that I join the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in their statement condemning the death sentences handed down by a court in Sana'a earlier this month to 35 Yemeni parliamentarians. To say the least, the fragmentation and politicization of the judiciary and other institutions is a serious cause for concern.

Mr. President,

Despite the alarm I am expressing today, I also want to share with you the messages I have heard from Yemenis that reassure me despite all this that the expeditious resumption of a peaceful political process remains within reach.

On the 26th and 27th of February, my Office convened a group of Yemeni public and political figures here in Amman, and I am grateful to the Government of Jordan for allowing that meeting to go ahead, and these figures expressed a shared view that a durable peace can only emerge from a negotiated political settlement. And many participants called for the prompt resumption of a comprehensive political process, with no preconditions. Several expressed a frustration, which I share, that the political process has been stalled since the last round of official peace talks, which took place in Kuwait in 2016, three and a half years ago. Over a third of the participants in that meeting were Yemeni women leaders. And during my meetings with them, they emphasized the importance of including in political negotiations a diverse array of Yemenis, including women and youth, tribal and social leaders. And I completely agree with that call and that need and that requirement. And I will continue to work to get the parties to ensure the full representation of women in political consultations and indeed, I raised the matter earlier today in Sana'a.

Mr. President,

Despite this bleak season, the parties have indeed exhibited some willingness to continue engaging in confidence-building measures, measures of humanitarian purpose. The parties are taking important steps, as you know, toward implementing finally the agreement that they reached in mid-February, again in Amman, on a large-scale exchange of prisoners. My Office has continued to work with them as has the international Committee of the Red Cross to make that promise happen. Meanwhile, the World Health Organization continues their efforts to ensure that the medical air bridge flights operate, those flights which have as their next destination Cairo, allowing Yemeni patients to travel abroad for medical assistance, which they cannot receive in Sana'a.

But much more must be done. All parties bear a responsibility to ease the impact of war on civilians. And they must work assiduously on prisoner exchanges; on opening and securing access roads in Taiz, Hudaydah, Marib and elsewhere and we discussed that very issue in Marib with the governor, to whom I have earlier referred. Ensuring the payment of public sector salaries across the country. Sana'a's airport must be opened for commercial flights to alleviate the suffering of the Yemeni people, and these are crucial humanitarian measures, and none of them particularly new and they must not become the subject of politicization.

There is a limit, however, **Mr. President**, to how much we can achieve in the absence of that political process to which I referred. We must maintain the focus and I pledge that we will, on reviving a process that ushers into Yemen an inclusive transition away from conflict. We have consulted widely among Yemenis, as you know, and will continue to do so, on the key elements of such a transition. Several common themes have emerged, and I have communicated them publicly to this Council before, but they bear repeating, if you would allow me, if only to ensure that the people of Yemen know what is on offer and in prospect.

During a transition, power will need to be shared among different political and social components, including women of course and civil society, in the spirit of partnership and consensus. Transitional security arrangements will need to be agreed, to provide for the security of Yemen's people and to lead toward the state's monopoly over the use of force. And finally, the Yemeni people will need guarantees of humanitarian relief, reconstruction and economic recovery across the country to put this, the suffering of this war into history.

Mr. President, I think we all hope that this that I have described, will soon become the reality for Yemen.

Thank you very much.