



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

14 May 2020

(As delivered)

Thanks very much. Thank you **Mr. President**, and I want to start by extending my warmest wishes to the people of Yemen, of course firstly, and to Muslims across the world for the holy month of Ramadan.

Mr. President, I am coming to this Council yet again to express hope, instead of to report success. And this is frustrating, at a time when the spread of COVID-19 and a global economic downturn threaten to cause even more adversity in a country that has already experienced more than nearly any other, and I am sure we will be hearing much detail from Ramesh on that in due course. United Nations has provided a feasible roadmap to the parties, which I will describe in a minute. And now it is up to them, to those with arms and power to make the decisions to achieve the objectives set out there.

Mr. President, since the Secretary-General's March call for a ceasefire globally and then in Yemen, people across Yemen have been speaking out forcefully to demand peace. And in response to that, I shared with the Government of Yemen seeing the ambassador here, and with Ansar Allah at the end of March draft agreements on: firstly, a nation-wide ceasefire; secondly, humanitarian

and economic measures; and thirdly, the urgent resumption of the political process as we have discussed in this Council before. And since then, and still now, I have been engaged in intensive negotiations with the parties, identifying and building on points of convergence, and of course proposing compromised texts where differences remain.

I am pleased to report that we have seen significant progress on these negotiations, in particular with respect to the national, nation-wide ceasefire. And this is the most important element of course of these three that I put in front of the parties, and it responds directly to those calls from across Yemen who desperately need a measure of calm to return to their lives.

However, the ceasefire is part of the broader package that needs to be agreed in full. And differences remain on some of the humanitarian and economic measures in that package. Now **Mr. President**, I firmly believe that all the measures in front of the parties are necessary and indeed overdue. They are not new issues; the UN has been calling for progress on those issues for a long time including in Sweden in December 2018. They are there for the people of Yemen, they are not there for the interests of one Party or another but for the people in Yemen. And the parties should be able to agree on how to move forward with them quickly, and I emphasize the word 'should'.

These humanitarian and economic measures are also needed to help Yemen counter COVID-19, which is spreading at an unknown rate, given very low levels of testing. And the measures include, suggested by my colleague, Lise Grande, the Resident Humanitarian Coordinator, and the WHO Country Representative, include the creation of a Joint Operations Cell between the Parties to counter the virus. And they would enable medical supplies and personnel to reach vulnerable populations. Now a very very urgent priority indeed.

They also include a reaffirmation of the Parties' prior commitments to release conflict-related detainees. And in this regard, I hope and indeed expect that the Parties will immediately move forward with an implementation plan for the large-scale releases that we have discussed before and that they already committed to in February in Amman. I am extremely frustrated that so many Yemeni families have had to wait unnecessarily, for additional months to be reunited with their loved ones. And the details of implementation should not be allowed to become another matter for drawn-out negotiations.

Mr. President, the Government of Yemen has engaged very constructively with the UN's proposals. This is extremely encouraging and I am grateful to them. Thank you. Ansar Allah has engaged seriously and positively with my proposals. And these are important indications of the willingness of the Parties to make many of the compromises needed, as in any negotiation but those in this case to bring an end to the war in Yemen. And the negotiations have benefited, again as we have discussed before when we were last together from concerted international and regional diplomatic support, including particular from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, from Oman, from members of this Council and others in the region and elsewhere. And I am also grateful, and I should note that here for the Coalition for extending its ceasefire through the month of Ramadan.

However, however, the people of Yemen are right to be frustrated about the slow pace of these negotiations. We all hope to see these negotiations soon come to a successful close.

Mr. President, women's rights activists have shed light on the terrible consequences of this conflict for women and girls. Yemeni women have repeatedly demonstrated their leadership and activism, leading calls for a ceasefire, the proposal that is in front of us, the release of prisoners also, and assisting the civilian population. I regularly consult the Yemeni Women's Technical Advisory Group, a group of Yemeni women whose aim is also to help me focus and my mission,

and my Office is in contact with a diverse array of women's organizations. Women must continue to be at the forefront of peace efforts. I am convinced about this. And I therefore want here to reiterate my call that the Parties include women in their negotiation delegations and decision-making, in line with the outcomes of the National Dialogue, that extraordinary achievement of the Yemeni people some years ago.

Mr. President, the 3rd of May marked World Press Freedom Day. This was a reminder to all of us of the extraordinary risks that journalists, globally and equally in Yemen take to do their jobs. Without this reporting, we would be in the dark about much of the real costs of this conflict. The conflict has created an increasingly repressive environment for the media. And all parties have an obligation to protect journalists and uphold freedom of the press. I am particularly concerned about the convictions, which includes death sentences, by a Sana'a-based court last month to ten journalists. And we would like to see them all released.

Mr. President, the military situation in Yemen, despite these negotiations on the details of a nation-wide ceasefire, despite that, the military situation remains extremely concerning. In my last two briefings, I raised alarm about the battle in Ma'rib, the governorate to the east of Sana'a. And to my dismay, hostilities there continue to this day, and we are also seeing heavy fighting, no doubt linked in part to that battleground in Al-Bayda and Al-Dali' governorates.

In Hudaydah, ceasefire violations continue all too often. I am particularly concerned by the regular shelling of residential areas in the city and in southern districts. UNMHA, the UN Mission for the Hudaydah Agreement, led by General Guha, continues to sustain dialogue with both Parties, but its work is under strain. I regret to report that Colonel Muhammed al-Sulayhi, from the Government of Yemen, a Government of Yemen Liaison Officer in that mission who was shot in March has died of his injuries. The death of Colonel al-Sulayhi was tragic, and I extend my

sincerest condolences to his family. I hope that the Parties will find a way to overcome their mistrust and reactivate the Redeployment Coordination Committee and the joint mechanisms to implement the Hudaydah Agreement.

Further, **Mr. President**, I am deeply concerned about the situation of course in the south, where a perfect storm is brewing. The people of Aden in particular, face outbreaks of COVID-19 and other diseases believed to include malaria, cholera, dengue and others. Deaths are rising daily, but nobody knows exactly why because the health system is so ill-equipped to diagnose and treat people. Exceptionally heavy flooding in late April have led to the damage of infrastructure and homes, exposing ailing infrastructure and exacerbating already very considerable daily power outages. And long-deteriorating public services are now at a breaking point. Aden is an example of the horrors that attend Yemen.

And amidst this precarious backdrop, the Southern Transitional Council's declaration of 25th of April is particularly troubling. I am alarmed by their subsequent steps to make local institutions in Aden answerable to them. Adding to this dreadful mix, military tensions are now rising in the south, particularly in Abyan and also in Socotra. I call for immediate restraint.

I call on the Government of Yemen and the Southern Transitional Council to intensify their efforts toward the urgent resumption of the implementation of the Riyadh Agreement, as you remember, Mr. President, mediated by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia last November. Implementation would help ensure responsive governance, so crucial for the people in the south and improved service delivery in Aden and elsewhere. It would also, of great importance to me, provide the STC's inclusion in the Government's negotiation delegation in a resumed UN-led political process, which we hope is not too far off. And this is important, this inclusion is important to make that political process more inclusive.

Mr. President, I want to raise another concerning development. On 16th of April, Ansar Allah announced that it would withdraw funds from the Special Account in the Hudaydah branch of the Central Bank of Yemen. My Office has repeatedly requested documentation from Ansar Allah that is needed to verify the Special Account activity. Indeed, I have written to the leadership to personally reiterate this request. And we are working now with both Parties to find a way forward in that imbroglio.

It is our intention after the agreements that I have described and that we are negotiating are I hope adopted, that the Parties would swiftly resume that long delayed political process that we have discussed so frequently. This process would be aimed at concluding an agreement comprehensively end the conflict and outline political and security arrangements for that transitional period leading to accountable elected government.

The transitional period would give Yemen an opportunity to escape the misery of conflict. It would allow for the focus to shift toward reconstruction, recovery and reconciliation, and it would pave the way for a future, and I would like to remind us what this future might be, which, instead of hunger, sickness and loss, provides that Yemenis' essential needs would be met and their families would be safe, journalists would freely report, freedom of movement would be upheld, women would speak out and lead without risking repression, and instead of anxiety and bleakness, Yemeni youth would hold high hopes for their futures. And I want to say that to remind us that this is the vision and the people of Yemen have for a return of civility in Yemen when this conflict is resolved.

Yemen's state institutions, of course, would serve citizens equitably, and differences would be resolved in this vision through partnership and dialogue.

Mr. President, I insist, I insist that such a future for Yemen is eminently realistic and it is possible.

The draft agreements that my Office has put on the table would place Yemen at the beginning of this path. The outcome is in the hands of the Parties. And this Council has a vital role to play in supporting them, and through them, the Yemeni people, along that path toward peace.

Thank you Sir.