



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

15 September 2020

(As delivered)

Thank you very much indeed. Merci **Monsieur le Président**. Thank you for giving me this opportunity to brief the Council.

Monsieur le Président,

Earlier this year, I warned that Yemen was, I think I called it, a critical juncture: I said either that the guns would be silent and the political process would resume, or Yemen would slip back away from that road to peace, and alas, this is exactly what seems to be happening. Increased fighting, greater humanitarian needs and the COVID-19 pandemic is still taking its toll.

This doesn't mean, at any rate, that we cannot together turn the corner and move back towards finding a solution to this conflict. But it requires the parties to choose and to decide. We all know what needs to be done, and we all know what choices need to be made if Yemen is to emerge successfully from this conflict.

Last week, I've sent an advanced draft of that Joint Declaration, that as you know **Monsieur le Président**, we have been negotiating these past six months. I sent that to the two parties. This draft reflects and balances the comments from prior rounds of the talks during these months, and importantly I believe, incorporates inputs from civil society, women's groups and other components of Yemen's voice for peace.

And now is the time for the parties to swiftly conclude the negotiations and to finalise that Joint Declaration. And my appeal, therefore, at this time is very simple. Choose peace. End this conflict. Work with us urgently on the Joint Declaration.

Mr. President,

Nowhere is the importance of this choice more evident than in Ma'rib, the governorate to the east of Sana'a. Heavy fighting continues to take place, if anything, has increased along its frontlines, including along the governorate's borders with Al-Jawf, Sana'a and Bayda governorates.

And the situation in Ma'rib is of concern in a number of different ways. A high degree of loss of life. A real threat, a real threat to hundreds of thousands of internally displaced people and others in need. Ma'rib has played the role in this war of a safe haven for those people displaced from other parts of Yemen who came to Ma'rib for safety. And a battle there that is threatened would tragically displace them yet again forcing them to move yet further from their homes.

And the political importance of Ma'rib must also not be underestimated. Military shifts and consequences and events in Ma'rib have ripple effects on the dynamics of the conflict across Yemen. And if Ma'rib falls, simply put, this would undermine prospects of convening an inclusive political process that brings about a transition based on partnership and plurality.

Mr. President,

In Hudaydah, meanwhile, reports of ceasefire violations continue daily. The UN Mission to support the Hudaydah Agreement, UNMHA, led by General Guha, continues to experience restrictions that hamper the Mission's operations. You will recall, **Mr. President**, the tragic shooting in March of the Government of Yemen Liaison Officer Colonel Suleyhi, who later died of his wounds. UNMHA is engaging with both Parties to ensure such incidents do not reoccur, and to pave the way for a return to a functioning joint set-up overseen by the Redeployment Coordination Committee setup by that agreement. And these steps should further the implementation of the Hudaydah Agreement.

Mr. President,

I am also deeply concerned about the humanitarian consequences of fuel shortages in Ansar Allah-controlled parts of northern Yemen. I want to emphasize the importance of ensuring that civilians can regularly and reliably access adequate supplies of fuel and other essential goods. This is a principle, this is a basic principle of humanitarian protection and assistance. And the flow of essential commercial imports, including food, fuel, medical supplies, and their distribution throughout Yemen to civilians, of course, is of the highest priority.

I am also deeply concerned that Ansar Allah recently announced the closure of Sana'a airport to humanitarian flights. As I'm sure Mark will discuss, this has the potential of a serious impact on the UN's operations, as well as the operations of other humanitarian agencies in that part of Yemen, providing critical assistance, which maybe thus prevented from entering Sana'a.

Mr. President,

We also, this Council, ourselves, together need to remain focused on ensuring the earliest possible arrival of the UN technical mission to assess and undertake initial repairs of the Safer oil tanker, and the ports of Hudaydah, and I know again that we will be hearing more from Mark on that issue.

Mr. President, I would like to report that, logistical arrangements permitting, always complicated in Yemen, even more so now at a time of the pandemic, but if those arrangements permit and are in place, we expect to see the Parties this week in Switzerland to continue their discussions on the implementation of prisoner exchanges, and this would be under the joint auspices, as you know, of my Office, but also of the International Committee of the Red Cross, to whom again I pay tribute for their work on that project. The Parties committed to release conflict-related prisoners and detainees back in 2018 in Stockholm, and furthered their discussions to fulfill that commitment in Amman earlier this year. What I hope is that this meeting will actually result in the release of some prisoners, and some evidence of the

implementation of those commitments, particularly given the threat of COVID-19 in places of detention.

Mr. President, I want to emphasize here the vital role of Yemeni civil society in demanding an end to the conflict. They truly are champions of peace. Civil society has also vocally advocated for measures to bring relief to the population, including and very recently, in very marked way, including the release of prisoners and detainees. Civil society's role is central in maintaining the pressure needed in every conflict, but included in Yemen, the pressure for a peaceful resolution. They have provided analysis, ideas, language on issues of importance to Yemenis – from public service delivery to economic reform to peacebuilding. Not only to my Office, but to all those of us interested in improving the circumstances and prospects of Yemen. We have been engaging with various groups and will continue with respect to the Joint Declaration negotiations, and discussing in detail plans to ensure their meaningful inclusion in the future political process that we hope will not be long of.

Also, as part of these inclusion efforts, we are organizing a skills-building workshop with the Yemeni Women's Technical Advisory Group, I think we have discussed their role and their significance in this Chamber before. But we have also stepped up our engagement with the Group of Nine women's organizations to seek their inputs into our Joint Declaration, and I want to pay specific tribute here, **Mr. President**, to the close relationship that we enjoy, that we continue to enjoy with UN Women to which we are very grateful.

So finally, **Mr. President**, I want to close by emphasizing that, although as I have said perhaps rather boringly before, that the situation is very dire. The parties can choose either to continue this trajectory of escalating violence, or to make the compromises necessary to revive the political process and allow for a political settlement, and these choices are clear and evident and in the hands of the parties. The UN and the members of this Council must, and I am sure we will do everything possible to push for and support that outcome.

We are a supporting role, a supporting player. The outcome lies in the hands of the parties and we are there and we will watch with the people of Yemen to see what choices they make and how they may swiftly be implemented.

Thank you very much, **Mr. President**.