



**Office of the Special Envoy  
of the Secretary-General for Yemen**

**Briefing by Special Envoy Hans Grundberg to the UN Security Council  
14 February 2024**

**Thank you, Madame President.**

**Madame President** allow me to state the obvious: we meet at a particularly challenging time for Yemen and for the region.

Until recently, we were making steady progress in our mediation. And for almost two years, relative calm has prevailed along the frontlines and key actors continued negotiations toward ending the conflict in Yemen. In late December 2023, the parties committed to me to a nationwide ceasefire, measures to improve living conditions, and restarting an intra-Yemeni political process. They also committed to work with my Office to operationalise these commitments through a UN roadmap agreement. I am grateful to the roles of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Sultanate of Oman in supporting the UN mediation.

However, the locus of attention has since shifted. The mediation landscape is now undeniably much more complex, and efforts to reach an agreement are being buffeted by different priorities and interests.

Rising regional tensions linked to the war in Gaza, and in particular the military escalation in the Red Sea, are slowing down the pace of the peace efforts in Yemen. As much as I have tried to insulate the peace process from wider regional dynamics, the reality is that mediation efforts in Yemen cannot be neatly cordoned off. What happens regionally impacts Yemen, and what happens in Yemen can impact the region.

In response to Ansar Allah's repeated attacks on vessels in the Red Sea, the United States and the United Kingdom have struck weapons storage facilities, missile systems and other targets in Ansar Allah-controlled areas in Yemen. And in the coming days, also in response to Ansar Allah's military actions in the Red Sea, the United States is expected to designate Ansar Allah a Specially Designated Terrorist Group.

Let me be frank, these developments are concerning. Despite potential complications, my work will continue no matter what. It is therefore imperative that we protect the political space, that communication channels are kept open, and that all actors remain actively engaged with my efforts.

While the spotlight is on the Red Sea, I also want to draw your attention to worrying developments inside Yemen. There is a sense of foreboding along several frontlines, with reports of clashes, mobilisations, and casualties, including in Shabwa, Al Jawf, Marib, Saadah and Taiz. I am also concerned about the growing din of public threats to return to fighting. Meanwhile, the scale of economic challenges across the country is simply staggering. Civil servants, especially in Ansar Allah-controlled areas, have not been paid their salaries in full, and people in Government-controlled areas face extended power outages and rising prices as a result of currency depreciation. In the past week, I have visited Aden, Mocha, and Taiz. I have listened to Yemenis' concerns – particularly those related to the need to open roads and improve living conditions.

And I have heard their hopes for the future. I have also consistently signaled the importance of maintaining calm on the frontlines, and protecting progress made so far.

**Madame President**, although the path to peace now faces more challenges, my mediation approach is flexible enough to adapt to different scenarios and challenges. In addition to Yemen, I have travelled extensively in the region in the past weeks, including to Iran, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. My discussions have focused on the need for a conducive environment for resolving the conflict in Yemen. Amid today's shifting sands, I see that three things need to happen in the immediate term to create an off-ramp to this dangerous escalatory cycle.

First, we need to see regional de-escalation. The United Nations is engaging with relevant stakeholders to encourage the prioritisation of diplomatic channels to this end. The United Nations Secretary-General has called for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza and has warned he is gravely concerned about the further spillover of this conflict. I reiterate his call, and I am engaging the Yemeni parties and relevant regional actors to support de-escalation in the Red Sea to protect the mediation space in Yemen.

Second, the Yemeni parties must stop public provocations and refrain from military opportunism inside Yemen at this delicate juncture. Escalation in Yemen is a choice. Making that choice comes with a price. A price that will be paid by the Yemenis in even greater loss of lives and livelihoods. The parties must avoid all actions that risk this outcome. And I am encouraged, **Madame President**, that in my latest exchanges, I have received assurances that all parties prefer the path to peace.

Third, and because Yemen is not a footnote to a wider regional story, the parties need to refocus on safeguarding the progress that has been made thus far toward reaching an agreement. The regional escalation does not negate the urgent needs in Yemen for a nationwide ceasefire, paying public sector salaries, resuming oil exports, opening roads, ports and airports, reconstruction and other elements that have been under negotiation. The parties still need to engage in sustainable dialogue structures under UN auspices to achieve these measures and address other priorities. My Office has been engaging the parties on the details of a ceasefire mechanism that would bring them together, building off the Military Coordination Committee established during the truce. And we continue to prepare for the creation of a joint Economic Committee facilitated by the United Nations to support the implementation of agreed economic measures and to negotiate other short- and longer-term priorities. Ultimately, peace is a political project. So, the backbone of all this must be a credible, internationally-supported, intra-Yemeni political process. Through this process, Yemenis will decide how to durably end the war and to build a new political future.

**Madame President**, there is no reason Yemenis should be condemned to conditions of war, poverty and repression. The United Nations roadmap under discussion presents an alternative future. Instead of the zero-sum mindset of war and extraction, the parties can cooperate to generate transformative benefits for all Yemenis.

For example, a durable, nationwide ceasefire would save lives and allow for the revival of economic life. Opening roads and removing double taxation would enhance civilian safety and lower prices of essential goods. Resuming oil and gas production and export would generate significant finance flows, enabling civil servant salary payments and public service delivery. All of this would mean Yemenis have better access to health, education and other essential needs and services.

In peacetime, international donors could support rebuilding houses and infrastructure, and developing sectors such as renewable energy. Foreign direct investment could help Yemen move from aid dependency to investment-driven post-conflict reconstruction. Yemen would have greater access to grants and lending from international financial institutions. More internally displaced persons could return home. And crucially, a political settlement should ensure that Yemenis can participate safely and freely in civil and political life. It should also ensure state institutions are accountable to the priorities and needs of Yemenis.

**Madame President**, Yemenis deserve nothing less. We've seen successful peace processes in other contexts unlock many of these gains. And in Yemen, there is a compelling alternative to the path of conflict and economic ruin. We are working toward an agreement that allows the parties to come together, negotiate political, economic and military/security priorities, and make a difference to the lives of the Yemeni people. This is a pathway to shared and common recovery.

Everyone in this Council wields influence. What you say, and what you do, matters. And Yemen deserves your full attention. Although your vantage points vary, you have a collective responsibility to protect the mediation space and ensure Yemenis have a real chance at peace. I will continue to rely on your concerted support.

Thank you very much **Madame President**.