34th session of the Human Rights Council
Introduction to country reports of the Secretary-General and the High Commissioner under item 10

Addresses by Ms. Kate Gilmore United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights

Geneva, 22 March 2017

Salle XX, Palais des Nations

Mr. President, Members of the Human Rights Council,
Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,

This [afternoon] you have before you two reports submitted under item 10, concerning Afghanistan and Yemen.

Let me first provide an oral update on Yemen.

One of the world’s worst humanitarian crises – one entirely man-made is underway in Yemen.

Over 21 million Yemenis – 82 per cent of the population – are in need of humanitarian assistance. 14 million are suffering from food insecurity. At least 1.3 million children are acutely malnourished.

Almost three million people have been internally displaced while the country’s infrastructure has been extensively destroyed and its economy decimated.

Excellencies, the living conditions of people in Yemen, simply put, are miserable, deplorable and untenable.

It has now been two years since the conflict intensified, and information gathered by my Office indicates that as of 15 January 2017, at least 4,726 civilians had been killed, while at least 8,217 had been injured.

I wish to stress that our estimates of the lives lost to this conflict are substantially lower than those published by other entities, mainly because under our rigorous methodology we record casualties only after multiple corroboration or through confirmation of death by the victim’s next-of-kin. The extent

The absence of a credible and viable political solution to the conflict, combined with the relentless escalation in violence witnessed over the last three months, is undermining prospects of an immediate ceasefire and the resumption of humanitarian aid.

The fighting in and around the port cities of Mokha and Hodeida has left thousands of civilians trapped
in the crossfire, without any safe passage away from the fighting. Furthermore, the substantive
destruction of the ports, particularly in Hodeida, severely compromises the delivery of desperately-
needed humanitarian assistance.

Excellencies,

In accordance with this Council’s resolution 33/16, OHCHR presented a budget proposal to the General
Assembly for the recruitment of eight staff members to support the Yemen Country Office. The Fifth
Committee of the General Assembly approved the proposal in end of December, and our Office
immediately reached out to the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Yemen in order to request
authorization to deploy additional international staff to Yemen. In the light of the security restrictions,
the UN Resident Coordinator so far has only authorized temporary deployment of four international
staff to Yemen, who have now been recruited to assist the Yemen Office in the implementation of your
resolution.

Since the adoption of resolution 33/16, we have also re-established our engagement with the National
Commission agreeing together a programme of joint activities and a list of thematic priorities. The first
of these activities was a capacity-building workshop on international humanitarian law, investigative
methodologies and lessons learnt from United Nations commissions of inquiry, which took place from
21 to 23 February, in Doha, Qatar.

We encourage the Yemeni National Commission to make progress on all aspects of its mandate to
investigate all allegations of violations of international law and Yemeni law, including those that go
beyond the extent of the Commission’s cooperation with OHCHR.

The de facto authorities in Sanaa have officially communicated their intention not to extend
cooperation to the national commission or to any OHCHR team tasked with implementing the Human
Rights Council resolution. In response, we have urged the de facto authorities in Sanaa to reconsider
that decision and we call on all parties to follow through on their commitment to cooperate with the
national commission and with OHCHR so as to enable the implementation of resolution 33/16,
including by facilitating access to the support team.

Mr. President,

Calls for an international and independent commission of investigation have been dismissed by some
as potentially undermining the existing national commission. Let me briefly address those concerns:

First, there are no persuasive reasons to believe that an international and independent investigation
could not operate alongside a national commission of inquiry - the existence of one does not exclude
the other.

Second, the National Commission so far has failed to live up to the standards with which it must
comply in order to carry out its duties with credibility. Not only did its first publications reveal a failure
to comply with internationally recognised standards of methodology and impartiality, but the
Commission has yet to clarify how its work could facilitate viable mechanisms of accountability.

Third, the violations allegedly committed in the ongoing conflict are of such gravity that continued
impunity simply cannot be accepted. In the absence of credible mechanisms for national remedy,
international and independent alternatives are essential.

The High Commissioner has no choice but to reiterate his call for an international and independent
commission of inquiry into all allegations of violations of human rights and humanitarian law,
regardless of the alleged perpetrators. Such an approach would also support the efforts of the
Secretary-General’s Special Envoy on Yemen to reach a negotiated and durable settlement of the
conflict.

Let me now introduce our report on Afghanistan (A/HRC/34/41).

It is with deep sense of regret, that we must report that between 1 January and 30 November 2016,
the highest number of civilian casualties in one year since 2009 we recorded: a total of 10,533.
Children continued to suffer from the direct and indirect consequences of conflict-related violence, and further, we documented 80 attacks against, or impacting on, hospitals and health workers, as well as increasing attacks against religious figures and places of worship.

Even more recent developments confirm the alarming trend of targeted killings of civilians.

- On 7 February 2017, in Kabul, at least 22 people were killed while over 41 were injured in a suicide attack outside the Supreme Court.
- On 9 February 2017, ICRC suspended its operations in Afghanistan following the killing of six of its employees.
- On 8 March 2017, at least 50 people were reportedly killed and 91 injured in a complex attack on the Sardar Mohammad Daud Khan Hospital in Kabul. Attacker reportedly disguised as medical doctors entered the building and targeted patients and medical workers. Islamic State operatives claimed responsibility for these heinous attacks.

Our report also underscores the enduring prevalence of violence against women, which remains of utmost concern. We further describe the persisting practice of torture and ill-treatment in places of detention and the continued impunity for perpetrators.

Moreover, in relation to the 22 September 2016 peace agreement between the Government of Afghanistan and Hezb-i-Islami, we are concerned about the amnesty provisions applicable for the leadership and members of armed groups with regard to past political and military actions as well as the absence of vetting processes.

Yet, there were positive developments and we welcome the important steps taken by the Government of Afghanistan to uphold its commitments under international human rights law, including the adoption of the strategy and action plan on the elimination of violence against women as well as the recognition of women’s role in the peace process.

Another positive development is the Government’s development of the policy on civilian casualty mitigation which is now awaiting promulgation. The Government also committed itself to establish new mechanisms to address violence against journalists. We stand ready to continue our support on these and other matters of significance for the future of the people of Afghanistan.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This concludes my introduction of country reports and updates under item 10.

Thank you for your attention.