



## **Briefing of the Special Envoy of the United Nations Secretary-General for Yemen to the open session of the Security Council**

**20 August 2019**  
*(As delivered)*

**Thank you very much, Madam President,** thank you for this opportunity

Madam President,

One month ago, I stated to this Council that we are facing a crucial moment in the destination of this conflict in Yemen and events since then, have made this moment even more crucial. As we have seen in Aden and Abyan, questions regarding Yemen's future are being posed more forcefully than before. The fragmentation of Yemen is becoming a stronger and more pressing threat. This of course makes our efforts in the Yemeni peace process more urgent than ever. There is no time to lose. The stakes are becoming too high for the future of Yemen, the Yemeni people and indeed the wider region.

I remember vividly one senior Yemeni leader saying to me some months ago, and I quote: "What we want, he said – all that we want – is the return of civility in our lives. To return Yemen to the social fabric that has nurtured its people for centuries." He was right. The immediate tragedy of death, injury, disease and hunger happens within a context of the destruction of the state and of society. A civil war is a curse upon its people. The conflict is fought out in the streets and in the countryside where live the civilians. Their lives are changed, damaged, destroyed and this is sometimes so for a generation as the time needed for that rekindling of community, so central to a living country is no small thing.

**Madam President, Yemen cannot wait.**

Since the last briefing, I have had the opportunity to meet with representatives of the Yemeni parties and the international community and they continued to assure me, the parties continued to assure me of their strong desire for a political solution. I believe that they and the international community also share my sense of urgency to move forward with the discussions on a solution to end the conflict and resume the political transition.

This sense of urgency is in painful contrast to our efforts so far to resolve the conflict. Every single step that we have discussed in this chamber, these many months, has been fought over, negotiated, stressed and delayed. Nothing comes easily in Yemen. For example, when I started this assignment, in the early months of last year, I was given clear assurances that the opening of Sana'a airport was imminent. We are still waiting. Even the mercy flights painfully negotiated over many months by my colleague, Lise Grande and the World Health Organization have yet to begin. And

the Stockholm Agreement, a confidence building measure with a simple humanitarian purpose, has demonstrated how vulnerable such agreements are when commitment to a peaceful solution wavers. The list of frustrations is long, and it must not grow longer.

**Madam President,**

Before I turn to the situation on the frontlines and in Aden, I would like to provide a few updates on the implementation of the Stockholm agreement and other developments in Yemen.

The core of that agreement on Hudaydah is the governorate-wide ceasefire and the humanitarian imperative of maintaining the flow of life-saving assistance through those three ports. And to this day, eight months later, there have been no major military operations in Hudaydah city, or in the surrounding area, and there has been a sustained reduction in violence, as we have often observed in this Council. Aid continues to move through the ports, and this is by itself a major achievement which continues to benefit the civilian population in Hudaydah first, but also those elsewhere in Yemen who rely on that humanitarian pipeline.

Implementing the remaining parts of the Hudaydah agreement will be an important step on the way towards resuming that political process to which I have just referred, and I am encouraged about the ongoing communication with both parties and their commitment to an enhanced ceasefire mechanism under the leadership of UNMHA, which has recently been discussed in that committee under the auspices of UNMHA, the RCC. And together with my colleagues in that mission, we are continuing our efforts to drive the process for the redeployment of forces and the establishment in their operation of a tripartite monitoring mechanism.

Since the last briefing, we have presented a proposal to the parties to make further progress on implementing the first phase of the Hudaydah agreement. I expect a final, official response from both by the 25<sup>th</sup> of August, and I am confident that will be forthcoming. And it is clear from my discussions with the parties that they are considering the proposal very carefully.

I'd like to add, Madam President, the Hudaydah agreement was only ever intended to be a temporary measure to avert further conflict, a humanitarian stop gap. It was not designed, and some might think, to set a precedent for addressing the underlying issues of the conflict, the most essential of which of course, is the issue of sovereignty. Now following many months of negotiations, both parties are fully aware of what the other is able to accept and I hope based on that knowledge, their responses to me by the beginning of next week will be constructive and practical on the way forward.

I am very encouraged that we now have an agreement as I think my colleague Ursula will also refer to, and I hope I'm not overlapping with her, on facilitating access for UN assessment mission scheduled to be deployed, I think on the 27<sup>th</sup> of August to assess the SAFER oil tanker, the dilapidated vessel near the port of Ras Issa with its cargo of oil. This assessment mission, under the auspices of UNOPS, is critical to mitigating the risk of severe environmental consequences, as we have discussed in this chamber, along the Yemeni Red Sea shore.

Negotiations on the implementation of the exchanges of prisoners and detainees are ongoing. It is a fundamentally humanitarian gesture for which numerous civil society groups, particularly women's groups, have vocally advocated publicly and privately. The parties sat for several days in Stockholm, held detailed technical discussions here, where I am, Madam President, subsequently in Amman in the subsequent months. The slowness of these negotiations is prolonging the suffering of the prisoners and their families. And I believe that we should be able to address the concerns of both parties to the proposal that I have put on the table in front of them and to which I have referred to before. I hope that receives a positive response.

Now I am frustrated, like everyone, that progress on Hudaydah has not been quicker, that I am not able to announce more dramatic developments in that agreement, and that there has been no tangible implementation of the agreements on Taiz or in the exchanges of prisoners and detainees to which I have just referred.

The Stockholm agreement is a key milestone in Yemen's peace process, and it would be of considerable benefit to the parties and the Yemeni people, where it to be fully implemented. But it is also clear that we must not allow the implementation of it to override our broader imperative to bring the conflict to an end.

And indeed again, Madam President, Yemen cannot wait.

### **Madam President,**

Military operations have continued in several governorates, including Sana'a, Sa'ada, Taiz, Al-Jawf, Al-Bayda, Hajjah and Al-Dali' governorates, as well as on Yemen's border with Saudi Arabia. And the continued impact of the military operations on civilians, as I'm sure we will hear from my colleague on civilians is horrifying, including the attack on a market in Sa'ada in late July. And I also of course, condemn the continued attacks by Ansar Allah targeting civilian infrastructure in Saudi Arabia, including the recent extension of that targeting to civilian facilities in the eastern part of the country. Further threats to civilian life, further events of this kind, and acts of military provocation, only inevitably deepen the divide between the parties and increase the impact of this conflict beyond Yemen's borders and postpone the attention that we all require to the efforts to bring a resolution to this conflict.

I turn now, **Madam President**, to events in Aden and Abyan. These events show us the complexity and volatility of the challenge that we face in achieving peace and the dangers should we not succeed. We cannot underestimate, we certainly cannot underestimate the risks that these events pose for the future of the country of Yemen.

On the 7<sup>th</sup> of August, following attacks in Aden a few days before, clashes broke out between Presidential Protection Brigades and forces affiliated with the Southern Transitional Council. Subsequently, the Southern Transitional Council took control of military camps and surrounded key state institutions in Aden by force. Last night, forces affiliated with the Southern Transitional Council also took further steps to increase their military control in the neighboring governorate of Abyan.

This violence has led to the deaths of dozens of civilians and injury to hundreds more. And I am alarmed by this violence, as I'm sure will be the members of this Council, and I condemn the unacceptable efforts by the Southern Transitional Council to take control of state institutions by force. I also deplore the harassment of Yemenis of northern origin in Aden which preceded these recent events, such as through physical violence, forced displacement and denial of freedom of movement, including the targeting of government officials and their supporters.

Simply stated, a continuation of this current situation is simply untenable. Functioning of state institutions will almost certainly break down further and daily life for the people will become even more difficult than it is already the case. There is indeed a grave and present risk of further damage to Yemen's social fabric and the spread of violence to other southern governorates. And at this time, Madam President, it is frankly difficult to know where events will lead us.

I am grateful to all those member states, including members of this Council, who have called for restraint and dialogue. In particular, I welcome the efforts of the Coalition to restore calm and the efforts exerted by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in particular to convene a dialogue in Jeddah to discuss the situation and resolve its difficulties. I believe it is essential that that meeting takes place in the very near future to prevent a further deterioration of the security and safety of Yemenis, of Yemen's citizens in the south, and to ensure the continuity of governance, security and basic service provision in Aden and other relevant areas under the exclusive authority of the state.

**Madam President,**

In this context and with these events in mind, we must also be alive to the danger of a resurgence of the activities of violence extremist groups. This Council will recall that Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, AQAP, has taken control of the capitals of Abyan and Hadramout for significant periods of time in recent years. During the past month alone, we have seen attacks by Al-Qaeda and by the so-called Islamic State in Aden, Abyan and Al-Bayda governorates. And further fragmentation of the security in Aden and other areas made certain, almost certainly will allow those activities to expand and gather momentum once again as we have seen before, with a terrible impact on the civilian population and prospects for future stability in this key strategic location.

**Madam President,**

The situation on the ground is changing with great speed. We need to seize any opportunities for progress. And the United Nations remains committed to inclusive dialogue to resolve differences and to address indeed the legitimate concerns of all Yemenis, including southern groups, in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Gulf Cooperation Council Initiative and its Implementation Mechanism and the outcomes of the comprehensive National Dialogue Conference.

As recent events remind us, long-term questions about Yemen's future remain unresolved. I believe these can only be resolved through peaceful political means. This is why I have always talked with numerous groups from the southern governorates as well as elsewhere in Yemen, and have long advocated for their inclusion in the peace process. There is a range of views to be taken into account in any dialogue on the future of Yemen, and we need all of its citizens to assist us in

making sure that future is stable and secure. This is of vital importance for the efforts to end the conflict and to ensure the resumption under the political transition that is been interrupted by these recent years.

Now, I hope that all Yemeni stakeholders, from all parts of the country, take events in Aden as a clear sign that the current conflict must be brought to an end – swiftly and peacefully, and in a manner, which addresses the needs of Yemenis across the country. The implementation of the Stockholm agreement is politically significant and has had tangible benefit on the ground. But surely that cannot be a precondition for achieving peace in all of Yemen. Every additional day of this conflict adds to the total of the tragedy and the misery, and no country, no country can tolerate these stresses, and the stresses of internal conflict indefinitely.

And finally, Madam President, Yemen cannot wait.

**Thank you very much.**