

Briefing to the United Nations Security Council
UN Special Envoy for Yemen – Mr. Martin Griffiths
16 March 2021
(As delivered)

Thank you very much **Madam President**, and congratulations on your assignment to this Council.

It will be no surprise to anyone here that I am returning to this Council, yet again, to report a deterioration of the conflict in Yemen. This time, a dramatic one. Ansar Allah's offensive on Marib governorate continues, putting civilians, including an estimated one million internally displaced persons, at risk. Fighting forces on both sides have suffered heavy losses in this unnecessary battle. I see shocking reports, as I am sure we all do, of children increasingly getting drawn into the war effort and deprived of their future.

Cross-border attacks have also increased significantly in recent weeks. I am like all of us concerned by the intensification of the missile and drone strikes, including ones that have targeted civilian and commercial infrastructure in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Subsequently, airstrikes took place within the confines of Sana'a city, endangering civilians there as well.

We are also seeing other fronts in Yemen opening, including with military escalations in Hajjah and Taiz and Hudaydah. The war is back in full force **Madam President**.

In Hudaydah, there has been a troubling continuation of violence causing civilian deaths and injuries, including women and children. I join General Guha, my colleague who is the head of that mission, in condemning attacks that endanger civilians. The Mission continues its efforts to reactivate the Redeployment Coordination Committee and its subsidiary joint mechanisms, and to achieve a more balanced mission footprint across the territory, the governorate of Hudaydah. And of course, I encourage the parties to work constructively with our colleagues in that Mission to make progress in these particular regards.

Madam President, even as the conflict intensifies, acute fuel shortages for civilians persist in Sana'a and the surrounding governorates. Fuel imports have not been permitted to enter Hudaydah since January. This has contributed to the increase in cost of basic commodities, puts hospitals and services at risk and I am sure Mark will speak more eloquently on this point and it is simply unacceptable, of course, on humanitarian grounds, and Mark himself and the United Nations has consistently drawn the attention of this Council to these issues. But longer than we may imagine. It is vital that obstacles to imports and domestic distribution of fuel for civilian use, obstacles to those, are removed. I call on the parties to prioritize civilian needs and not to weaponize the economy.

As a result, I call on our friends in the Government of Yemen to urgently permit the entry of fuel ships to Hudaydah without delay. We also believe very strongly that the revenues stemming from the fees and taxes of oil ships coming in should be exclusively used for the

payment of the civil service salaries based on the 2014 payroll database. I hope that the parties will engage constructively with more recent UN efforts, including by my colleague, David Gressly, the new Resident Humanitarian Coordinator to find a sustainable solution on this extraordinarily important humanitarian issue.

The situation in Aden and the surrounding governorates remains difficult. It is encouraging, however, that the new Cabinet continues to execute its functions from inside Yemen and despite the attack that took place on the 30th of December. This is good for state institutions, it's good for the overall prospects of peace in Yemen. But it is clear that improving basic services, including access to electricity in particular, making sure that salaries get paid to government employees will ensure the security and stabilization of the economy that needs more resources than is currently available to the Government. These resources are of course in short supply.

Madam President, this is month where we note that it is not only Yemenis who are suffering in Yemen. The world was reminded of the plight of the migrant community last week when an extraordinarily horrific fire broke out at a detention facility in Sana'a holding predominantly Ethiopian migrants. Dozens were killed in that fire and over 170 seriously injured. There must be an independent investigation into the cause of the fire to settle the claims which are now a matter of public commentary. All people in Yemen, regardless of nationality, deserve protection and to be kept safe.

Madam President allow me to return to announce the proposed way forward. There have been many reports and much public commentary of late on the efforts being made to bring an end to the fighting and to the need for the launch of the political process. If you permit me, I would like here to clarify here for this Council my own appreciation of that engagement, of that situation.

We are often and rightly reminded that Yemen is the world's largest humanitarian crisis, and that famine has now I think arrived to add to the tragedy of Yemen. In this connection, Mark often reminds us of the link between the incidence of famine and other humanitarian needs and the places where the war is hottest. The coincidence of the frontlines to the conflict and the greatest vulnerability to disease and crises. It is logical therefore and it has been incumbent upon the parties for a very long time, and now more than ever, to agree to stop the fighting and to silence the guns. A nationwide ceasefire, along with the opening Sana'a airport and ensuring the unhindered flow of fuel and other commodities into Yemen through Hudaydah ports, are urgent humanitarian imperatives. These measures will ease the impact of the conflict on civilians, will facilitate Yemenis' right to freedom of movement and it is clear we must do all we can to allow Yemen to survive, to give it a chance under these circumstances. So it is logical that we should focus on these issues as a priority in the negotiations upon which we are engaged.

In addition to those humanitarian considerations, my particular task, **Madam President**, is to help the parties to end the conflict and that of course can only come through resolving their differences through negotiation. This is my focus, and this is why I am there for, and that is why of course we include the resumption of an inclusive political process to the three

humanitarian priorities listed above. We know that without a resolution of those differences, without a political settlement, there will be no sustainable defeat of humanitarian problems. Hence the urgent agenda of the United Nations and my privilege is for negotiations on these four issues: three of them are in fact specifically humanitarian and one of them the launch of the much-delayed political process. And I hope you would agree with me there is a logic to put these four in the front of our priorities.

Madam President, I should also clarify that there should be no preconditions for resuming the political process, if we fail on these other matters. Resuming the process, and engaging seriously in it, is an obligation upon the warring parties anywhere. They need to engage constantly and seriously at all stages with the United Nations to make this happen. They owe it to the people that they represent to provide hope even in these days that there is an end in sight to this conflict. I am alarmed, to be very frank, that the mere fact of meeting across the table to discuss with us or with others or with each other the contours of ending the war is being framed by some, not by all, as a concession rather than an obligation, as a transaction rather than a priority.

Madam President, we have been pursuing this agenda, I think a simple agenda, with renewed vigour these past weeks. We are fortunate to work very closely with key member states [technical interruption] ... I hope the machine didn't stop me referring to the tireless efforts of Tim Lenderking, who never seems to sleep and **Madam President** through you very grateful for his efforts. There are others, many of them unnamed, but it is making a huge difference. And frankly, this is giving us hope despite the dark picture you have been hearing from me this morning.

I wish of course that today, finally I could bear glad tidings. But we are not there yet. We know what this Council wants. We know what the international community wants. We know what the people of Yemen want. They all want the same thing, a very simple matter. An end to the misery, to the lives thrown away for illusory military gains, to the tragedy of Yemen's families desperate for a way out of this misery. And to them, and to you, and to us all, we say these glad tidings cannot come a day too soon.

Madam President, thank you very much.