

UN urges Libyans to prioritize national interest in November talks

Author:

Wed, 2020-10-14 00:57

CARTHAGE, Tunisia: The UN's Libya envoy on Monday urged rival parties to place the national interest before political ambitions when they meet for talks next month aimed at ending a decade of bloodshed.

The North African country is dominated by armed groups, riven by local conflicts and divided between two bitterly opposed administrations: A United Nations-recognized unity government based in Tripoli and its eastern-based rival backed by strongman Khalifa Haftar.

Neighbouring Tunisia is set to host talks in early November including representatives of civil society, tribesmen, political leaders, and members of bodies representing both administrations.

"What we want to see in terms of participation is people who are not there for their own political aspirations, but for their country," said UN envoy Stephanie Williams on Monday, after meeting Tunisian President Kais Saied.

Asked whether Haftar or unity government chief Fayez Al-Sarraj would be present, she said participants would be able to take part on the condition "that they remove themselves from consideration in high government positions."

This included membership of the key Presidential Council, the prime minister's job and ministerial posts, she told AFP.

The talks are intended to prepare for national elections, she added.

Tunisia's Foreign Minister Othman Jerandi called for "a dialogue between Libyans that could lead to a political solution to the crisis."

Saied spoke on Monday with his Algerian counterpart Abdelmadjid Tebboune, who saluted the renewed dialogue and said that Algeria, another neighbor of Libya, was "always at Tunisia's side."

Tebboune also spoke of a visit to Tunisia after the Nov. 1 referendum on constitutional reform in Algeria.

The Algerian president's office confirmed that the two men had spoken via telephone.

"The President of the Republic, Abdelmadjid Tebboune, received a telephone call on the part of his counterpart Kais Saied, and they reviewed bilateral relations and his planned visit to Tunisia," it said in a statement.

Tebboune "welcomed Tunisia's organization of inter-Libyan dialogue under the

auspices of the UN," the statement said.

A previous agreement between rival Libyan sides, signed in Morocco in 2015, created a unity government that was never recognized by Haftar.

In April 2019 he launched an offensive to seize Tripoli, but was pushed back after over a year of fighting.

Since his forces were driven from western Libya, the rival sides have resumed talks on specific themes: Institutions, military and political affairs.

The Tunis talks will begin on Oct. 26 by videoconference, before continuing face-to-face in early November.



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UN, Germany host summit to capitalize on glimmers of hope for peace in Libya
Italy, Morocco hold talks on Libya

Sudan's premier sacks provincial governor after protests

Author:

Wed, 2020-10-14 00:52

CAIRO: Sudan's prime minister on Tuesday sacked the governor of an eastern province, less than three months after his appointment, the state-run news agency reported.

Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok's decision to fire Saleh Ammar, newly appointed governor of Kassala province, came amid sporadic protests against his appointment – protests that at times have turned deadly.

Ammar was named governor of Kassala in July, when Hamdok appointed civilian governors for the country's 18 provinces. The move was seen at the time as a key step forward in Sudan's transition to democracy.

But the protesters, who opposed his appointment on tribal grounds, barred Ammar from entering Kassala, so he remained in the capital, Khartoum. The protests escalated in August, when at least five people were killed and over three dozen were wounded.

Sudan is on a fragile path to democracy after a popular uprising led the military to overthrow former autocratic President Omar Bashir in April 2019. A military-civilian government now rules the country, with elections possible in late 2022.

Ammar had claimed, without offering evidence, that supporters of Bashir were behind the protests. The prime minister did not immediately name a replacement for Ammar.

Later Tuesday, Ammar's sacking triggered new protests in Kassala. Footage circulated online showing protesters blocking roads and setting tires ablaze. No casualties were reported.

The Beni Amer tribe, from which Ammar hails, rejected his dismissal.

Several activists also criticized the sacking, warning of widespread chaos in eastern Sudan amid tribal tensions. Award-winning novelist Hamour Zyada said the decision showed the transitional government's weakness in fighting those who opposed Ammar's appointment.

Elsewhere in Sudan, more than 4,500 people in South Darfur province have been displaced in the past week by ongoing clashes between factions of a rebel group boycotting a recent peace deal between the transitional government and a rebel alliance, according to the UN migration agency.

The fighting between factions of the Sudan Liberation Army–Abdel-Wahid Nour erupted earlier this month in the Sharg al-Jabal area, the International Organization for Migration said.

The transitional government and the Sudan Revolutionary Front, a coalition of several armed groups, signed a peace deal earlier this month, capping torturous talks that had been underway in South Sudan's capital, Juba, since late last year.

Abdel-Wahid's group rejects the transitional government and has not taken part in the talks. It criticized the deal, saying it was "not different from" other previous deals that did not end the wars.

Sudan's largest single rebel group, the Sudan Liberation Movement-North, led by Abdel-Aziz Al-Hilu, was involved in the talks but has yet to reach a deal with the government.



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[Yemen leader rejects UN peace deal,](#)

denounces Houthi demands

Author:

Tue, 2020-10-13 22:53

AL-MUKALLA: Yemeni President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi rejected a peace proposal presented by UN Special Envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths on Monday.

According to a government official, the proposal fell outside the agreed framework to achieve peace in the country.

The internationally recognized Yemeni government will only support peace initiatives that comply with the GCC Initiative, the outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference and UN Security Council Resolution 2216, official sources told Arab News on Tuesday.

The Security Council Resolution 2216 recognizes the Hadi-led government's authority over Yemen and requires the Iran-backed Houthis to disarm and abandon territory under their control.

Despite Hadi's rejection of the agreement, a report in SABA, Yemen's official news agency, said the leader still fully supported Griffiths' efforts to broker a peace deal.

The report added that the government had already offered many concessions to the Houthis to reach an amicable solution.

Hadi also accused Iran-backed militias of violating the UN-brokered Stockholm Agreement through growing military activity in the western province of Hodeidah.

Another senior government official told Arab News that Hadi rejected two Houthi demands included in the Joint Declaration presented by Griffiths – maintaining control of an oil pipeline from the central city of Marib to the western city of Hodeidah and exempting aircraft departing from Houthi-controlled airports from inspections.

“Instead of agreeing to emptying the decaying Safer oil tanker, the Houthis demanded the resumption of oil pumping to the same facility,” the official said.

On Tuesday, the UN envoy said on Twitter: “Last evening, I met with President Hadi. We discussed the UN efforts to mediate a resolution to the conflict in Yemen, and exchanged views on the draft of the Joint Declaration.”

In recent months, the UN envoy has urged Yemen's warring parties to accept the Joint Declaration, a peace proposal that requires the internationally recognized government and Iran-backed Houthis to enter a nationwide truce and introduce humanitarian and economic measures to alleviate the suffering of the Yemeni people.

After halting hostilities, both parties can engage in direct peace talks

aimed at reaching a comprehensive peace settlement. The two parties on Sept. 10 received a revised draft of the Joint Declaration that included their comments, edits and suggestions, Griffiths said.

Yemeni parliament speaker Sultan Al-Barakani told Griffiths in Riyadh on Monday that the UN's tolerance of the Houthis has encouraged them to violate truces and agreements, shell cities, target Saudi Arabia with ballistic missiles and drones and reject warnings about the decaying Safer tanker, SABA reported.

Yemen's Vice President Ali Mohsen Al-Ahmer also repeated the government's demands to include the three requirements in peace proposals.

Al-Ahmer told outgoing French Ambassador to Yemen Christian Tiesto in Riyadh that the Yemeni government will only support peace deals that follow the agreed framework.

Yasser Al-Yafae, an Aden-based political analyst, told Arab News that the government should avoid taking a tough stance on the three requirements because the Yemen conflict has "produced new powerful forces that oppose the framework."

He said: "Since 2015, the war has produced a new reality as the Houthi movement has gained control over large areas in northern Yemen and is expanding. The Southern Transitional Council that appeared in 2017 controls important parts in the south. Insisting on the references means continuing the war."

Fierce fighting

Fighting intensified on Monday and Tuesday in almost all major battlefields in northern, western and southern Yemen.

On Tuesday, local army officers told Arab News that heavy mortar, canon and katyusha shelling on residential areas in the southern city of Taiz killed five civilians and wounded many others.

Abdul Basit Al-Baher, a Yemeni army spokesman in Taiz, said that army troops exchanged heavy fire with Houthi fighters.

"The army troops responded to the Houthi shelling, targeting the source of the fire. They have mobilized a huge number of forces and targeted Taiz with all kinds of heavy weapons," Al-Baher said.

In the northern province of Jouf, army commanders said that Arab coalition warplanes hit a convoy of Houthi military vehicles, killing several militants, including a senior field commander.

Another Houthi military leader, Col. Sultan Abdul Kareem, was killed along with five associates in fighting with government forces in Jouf's Beir Al-Mazareq area.

On Monday, hundreds of Houthis in Sanaa attended the funeral of Mohammed

Yahiya Al-Houri, a field military commander who was killed in fighting with government forces in the western province of Hodeidah earlier this week.



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Yemeni president pledges 'permanent support' to UN peace efforts
Yemeni government rejects latest UN peace plan draft

[Tunisians protest after man dies in kiosk demolition](#)

Author:

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Tue, 2020-10-13 17:50

KASSERINE, Tunisia: Angry residents took to the streets of an impoverished Tunisian town on Tuesday after a man died when authorities demolished an

illegal kiosk where he was sleeping.

The shop in Sbeitla, in the central province of Kasserine, was demolished in the early hours on the orders of local authorities, security sources told AFP.

Abderrazek Khachnaoui, the father of the shop's owner, was killed in the operation, according to the same sources and his son.

"I was not informed of this decision... and agents of the municipality proceeded with the destruction without checking if there was someone inside," said the son, 25-year-old Oussama Khachnaoui.

"My father, who was only 49 years old, died on the spot. Security agents fired tear gas at my family who had tried to approach my kiosk to save my father," he told AFP.

The death sparked angry protests by residents who blocked roads and set fire to a municipal car in Sourour district, where the shop selling newspapers and cigarettes was located, witnesses told an AFP correspondent.

The protesters also threw stones and other objects at the security forces, said interior ministry spokesman Khaled Hayouni, who did not confirm the cause of the man's death.

Military and security forces were deployed "as a precaution" to protect sensitive sites in the town, said defense ministry spokesman Mohamed Zekri. Sbeitla, in Tunisia's economically marginalized center, has often seen protests in the past over lack of jobs and investment.

Youths often turn to selling newspapers and bread on the informal market in order to support their family's incomes while out of work.

Tunisia's Prime Minister Hichem Mechichi on Tuesday voiced his support for Khachnaoui's family, announcing the launch of an enquiry into the incident. In a statement, he said he had sacked two top regional officials, a district security chief and Sbeitla's police head, as well as sending Interior Minister Taoufik Charfeddine "immediately" to offer support to the victim's family.

Inland regions of Tunisia have higher unemployment than the already dire national average, which is currently at 18 percent and could top 21 percent by the end of the year.

Khachnaoui's death came as Tunisia prepares to mark 10 years since a revolution sparked when a young street vendor, Mohamed Bouazizi, set himself alight to protest against police harassment.



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[Lebanon, Israel set to hold first maritime talks](#)

Tue, 2020-10-13 21:34

BEIRUT: After decades of conflict, Lebanon and Israel are set for the first round of talks over their maritime border that runs through potentially oil- and gas-rich Mediterranean waters.

The US-mediated meeting between officials from both sides will be held at the headquarters of the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) on Wednesday. This will be followed by talks on demarcating the land border.

David Schenker, US undersecretary of state for Near Eastern affairs, will preside over the inaugural session of the maritime talks, according to the State Department. Beirut insists that these talks “have nothing to do with normalization” of ties with Israel.

On the eve of the meeting, Lebanese President Michel Aoun reviewed

preparations for it and met with Jan Kubis, UN special coordinator for Lebanon.

"The UN welcomes hosting the negotiations session," Kubis said. "The international organization will do its duty by hosting and sponsoring the negotiations, and provide all necessary facilities to make it successful." Aoun met with the Lebanese negotiating delegation, and expressed hope "to reach a just solution that protects the sovereign rights of the Lebanese people."

According to Aoun's media office, he said: "The negotiations are technical and limited to demarcating the maritime borders ... The US party is present in the negotiations as a mediator to facilitate the process."

He instructed the delegation "to stick to and defend Lebanese rights recognized internationally."

Lebanon is putting high hopes on a positive outcome, which could foster a secure environment for international companies to explore oil and gas fields off the country's coast.

Opinion

This section contains relevant reference points, placed in (Opinion field)

The contested zone between Lebanon and Israel in the Mediterranean is estimated at 860 sq. km and is known as Block 9, which is rich in oil and gas.

"What's expected on Wednesday during the negotiations is that each party will come up with a paper that includes all subjects that will be put on the table, and the US side might come up with a paper that includes some solutions," Dr. Riad Tabbarah, former Lebanese ambassador to Washington, told Arab News.

"Usually an agenda is set with a primary point that negotiations would revolve around, then points that might lead to an agreement would be picked up to build on them to reach a final agreement over all other points," he said.

"Each party will try whatever it can to get the maximum that it could in the negotiations. These talks might also be stalled so that each party would refer to its government."

But the absence of a government in Lebanon begs the question: To whom will the country's delegation refer?

Former Minister Rachid Derbas told Arab News: "In this case and according to the constitution, it will be the president of the republic, but in case of the need to take a decision, this necessitates the availability of an active government and not a caretaker government, as is the case today."

Former Prime Minister Fouad Siniora criticized Aoun "for breaching the constitution while forming the negotiating delegation with Israel," because "according to the constitution and to the norms, the president should have consulted with the prime minister prior to the formation of the delegation."



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