

EU welcomes Libya unity government, warns 'spoilers'

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BRUSSELS: The European Union on Thursday welcomed a vote by Libya's parliament to approve a unity government and warned it could sanction foreign or domestic "spoilers" who undermine peace efforts.

"This is a significant breakthrough that creates the conditions to reunify institutions in Libya and lead the country toward national elections on 24 December," EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said in a statement on behalf of the 27 member states.

"We call on all Libyan stakeholders to ensure a timely and seamless transfer of power to the Government of National Unity."

Oil-rich Libya descended into conflict after dictator Muammar Qaddafi was killed in a NATO-backed uprising in 2011, resulting in multiple forces backed by competing foreign powers vying for control.

After two days of intense debate under heavy security in the central coastal city of Sirte, parliament on Wednesday approved the cabinet of interim prime minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibah.

Libya has been split between the Government of National Accord (GNA), based in the capital Tripoli and backed by Turkey, and an administration in the east supported by military strongman Khalifa Haftar.

"This is a historic opportunity for the Libyans to come together in a joint effort to rebuild their country as peaceful, stable and united and restore Libya's national sovereignty and territorial integrity," the EU statement said.

The bloc called for a cease-fire deal, arms embargo and demands for the withdrawal of all foreign fighters and mercenaries to be respected.

"In this regard, the European Union recalls its instrument of sanctions against possible spoilers," the statement said.

"We also invite the leadership of the Government of National Unity to demonstrate its strong resolve toward laying the foundations for a comprehensive reform in the security sector, including through genuine efforts to dismantle militias and unify armed forces under a civilian oversight."



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Guterres hails endorsement of interim unity government in Libya
Saudi Arabia welcomes Libya parliament's approval of unity government

[UAE sets up \\$10bn fund to invest in Israel](#)

Author:

Thu, 2021-03-11 22:54

LONDON: The UAE has established a \$10 billion fund to invest in strategic sectors in Israel, state news agency WAM reported on Thursday. The announcement came following a "constructive" phone call between Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The UAE and Israel signed a US-brokered peace agreement in September that established official relations between the two countries.

"Through this fund, the UAE will invest in Israel within strategic sectors

that include energy, manufacturing, water, space, health care, agricultural technology, and others," the statement on WAM said.

The fund will focus on development initiatives and enhancing economic cooperation between the two countries, and will be funded by allocations from the government and private sector institutions.

"This move aims to strengthen economic relations between the two booming regional economies, open the way for investments, and create partnership opportunities to boost social and economic growth in the two countries and the region," the statement added.

Since the signing of the Abraham Accords, both countries have established diplomatic missions, launched direct flights, and held several trade visits.

"This initiative is one of the results of the peace agreement and embodies the spirit of friendship and cooperation between the three countries, in addition to their common will to advance the region and provide a model for peace by improving the lives of the peoples of the region," the statement said.

Netanyahu canceled a second planned trip to the UAE on Thursday, citing a disagreement with Jordan. An earlier visit in February was canceled due to concerns from the coronavirus pandemic.

The UAE was the third Arab country to normalize relations with the Jewish state after Egypt and Jordan. Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan then followed suit and also signed the Abraham Accords.



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Israeli PM cancels UAE trip, citing disagreement with Jordan
Netanyahu to visit UAE for first official trip

[Houthis accused of starting fire in Sanaa detention center](#)

Thu, 2021-03-11 23:40

AL-MUKALLA: The Houthis have been accused of starting a fire in a migrant detention center in the Yemeni city of Sanaa.

Abdurrahman Barman, a Yemeni human rights advocate and director of the American Center for Justice, said his organization had interviewed some survivors who accused the militia of starting the March 7 fire and squeezing hundreds of Ethiopians into the center, leading to overcrowding.

He criticized international organizations and the international community for not strongly condemning the Houthis' actions.

"This is a heinous crime," he told Arab News. "The world would have made a scene if the burnt migrants were white. If the perpetrators were not the Houthis, the (UN) Security Council would have convened immediately."

He said the Houthis had prevented the organization's monitors from visiting survivors at Sanaa hospitals and that, based on survivors' accounts, the number of dead migrants was between 200 and 300.

Mwatana, a leading Yemeni human rights organization, also blamed the Houthis for the fire and accused them of arbitrarily detaining survivors and relatives of the victims in order to stop them from talking about the incident.

"The Ansar Allah (Houthi) group caused the death and injury of scores of African migrants by starting a deadly fire in an overcrowded detention facility in Sanaa on March 7," Mwatana said in a statement.

The Eritrean community in Yemen said that 34 migrants were killed and 200 were injured in the fire which, it said, started when police sought to resolve a quarrel between two groups.

Yemeni officials and activists disputed the figure, saying the statement had been obtained at gunpoint since it shifted responsibility for the fire from the Houthis to the International Migration Organization for not expanding and rehabilitating detention centers for migrants in Houthi-controlled areas.

Yemeni Information Minister Muammar Al-Eryani said the Houthis had begun

intimidating survivors and their families to influence their accounts to the media or any international probe in the future.

He described the deadly fire as a "heinous massacre" and said that survivors and other witnesses would not give fair testimonies if they remained inside Houthi-controlled areas. He urged the UN migration agency to evacuate them to other locations, away from Houthi pressure.

"We warn of threats and pressures by the terrorist Houthi militia on the survivors and families of fire victims who died in the genocide that aroused Yemeni and international public opinion to force them to hide the truth in anticipation of an international investigation into the crime," he tweeted.

In Aden, the Yemeni Cabinet said the international community had contradicted its ethical and humanitarian norms for not taking a tough stance on the Houthi crime against migrants, warning that "timid condemnations" would encourage the Houthis into committing more crimes.

Ali Al-Fakih, editor of Al-Masdar Online, said the international community's tolerance of Houthi crimes against Yemenis had bolstered the rebels into starting the detention center fire.

"This is a heinous crime against humanity," he added, accusing the Houthis of deliberately killing Africans who refused to take part in the war or pay levies.

"I think it is one of the results of the international community's tolerance of Houthi crimes against civilians for years. The Ethiopian government should make a strong move by demanding the UN and international organizations to investigate the crime and punish the perpetrators."



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US and Europe condemn Houthi attacks on Saudi Arabia and Yemen's Marib
Exposed: How Houthi's brutal treatment of African migrants in Yemen sparked deadly fire at immigration center

[UN talks with Houthis continue over repairs to stricken oil tanker](#)

Author:

Thu, 2021-03-11 01:16

NEW YORK: Talks with the Houthis in Yemen are continuing in an effort to resolve the issues preventing experts from accessing the Safer oil tanker to assess its condition and make emergency repairs, the UN said on Wednesday.

Recently a new list of Houthi demands relating to "logistics and security arrangements" caused further delays.

"We hope that these discussions conclude quickly so we can move forward with booking the mission's vessels and finalizing a concrete deployment timeline," said Stephane Dujarric, the spokesman for UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

The Safer has been moored in the Red Sea off the coast of Yemen, near Ras Isa oil terminal, for more than five years. It contains about 48 million gallons of oil, but its condition has deteriorated and the UN has warned it threatens to leak four times as much oil as was spilled during the 1989 Exxon Valdez disaster off the coast of Alaska.

Guterres and the Security Council have repeatedly pleaded with the Houthis in Yemen to allow access to the tanker for assessment and repairs.

"The environmental and humanitarian disaster that is waiting to happen in case of an oil spill is entirely avoidable," said Dujarric. "We are doing everything possible to deploy this mission at the earliest possible opportunity as an important step toward averting this catastrophe."

The Safer is a floating storage and offloading terminal that was used as an offshore platform for vessels loading crude oil from the Marib-Ras Isa pipeline. It is owned by the Yemen Oil and Gas Corporation but fell into the hands of the Houthis in 2015, early in the Yemeni Civil War. Since then no maintenance work has been carried out.

"There are several issues right now" in the negotiations with the Houthis, said Dujarric. "Those are where an eventual UN ship can drop anchor, who can stay on board (and) whether (or not) Houthi security officers will monitor the work of the staff. We are trying to resolve these issues but some have cost implications. (Others) have security implications."

However some of these issues "are beside the point," he added.

"None of them are technically required to implement the plan that has already been agreed to," he said. "It's a bit of a cat-and-mouse (situation)."

"At this point, we can't spend any more donor money – and we don't want to spend any more donor money. We have a restricted amount of money. We've already spent about a million dollars of donor money on equipment which we'd secured, and now we have to pay to store that equipment."

"So, the longer the delay, the more the cost increase and, most importantly, the longer we delay, the more the risk (of an environmental disaster) will increase."

Meanwhile the humanitarian crisis in Yemen continues. David Beasley, executive director of the World Food Programme on Wednesday issued yet another urgent plea for funding to help feed "the most vulnerable, hungry families."

As he completed a two-day visit to the country, he said that more than half of the population in Yemen faces acute food shortages, "with millions knocking on the door of famine."

He added: "Famine-like conditions are emerging across Yemen. We have a vaccine for this: it is called food. All we need to save lives is funding."

Beasley said he had visited a hospital in Sana'a where he saw first-hand "the devastating toll that malnutrition is having on Yemen's children."

According to the UN, about 2.5 million Yemeni children under the age of five are expected to suffer from acute malnutrition this year.



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UN worried Yemen's Houthis may renege on tanker examination
Yemeni officials repeat warnings over Safer oil tanker

Aid agencies warn of 'irreversible damage' in Syria 10-years after crisis began

Thu, 2021-03-11 00:50

LONDON: Ten years since the start of the Syria conflict, a coalition of international aid organizations has warned of the "suffering and increased, irreversible, damage" if growing humanitarian needs are not met.

A joint statement issued to Arab News called on world powers to use "all their influence to stop the crisis."

"A decade since the outset of the conflict, living conditions for many Syrians are worse than ever," the coalition of 35 aid agencies, including Save the Children, MercyCorps, and the Norwegian Refugee Council, said.

"There continues to be violence and indiscriminate attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure."

More than 80 percent of people in Syria are living in poverty and food insecurity levels are at a record high. More than 12.4 million people are food insecure and a further 1.8 million are at risk.

A further 12.2 million Syrians lack regular access to clean water and 2.4 million children are currently out of school.

"The protracted displacement crisis as a result of the Syrian conflict is the worst since the Second World War," the statement said.

The rare joint appeal "should be a stark warning to the world," Charles Lawley, head of communications and advocacy at Syria Relief, one of the statement's signatories, told Arab News.

"If next week's commemorations of 10 years since the start of the Syrian crisis is just a history lesson, then there is no point in even mentioning it. Our organizations are joining together because we want this grim milestone to highlight the present and growing needs here in Syria and the neighboring countries and what action needs to be taken to meet them.

"We also call on governments with influence over the warring parties to use their pressure to seek an end to this brutal conflict and spare millions more Syrians from the violence."

The appeal comes at a time of intense scrutiny over the future of the UK's role in resolving the Syria war.

Earlier this month, leaked information from the British Home Office revealed that the government is planning to cut its aid budget to Syria by as much as 67 percent.

Anna McMorrin, shadow minister for international development in the UK's opposition Labour party, told Arab News: "This is a time for leadership not retreat. Any attempt by the UK Government to cut vital lifesaving aid would further signal Britain's shameful retreat from the world stage at a time when we need the international community to act together."

She said the UK government should redouble efforts to end hostilities and help the millions still caught up in the conflict, "particularly in the northeast and northwest where the regime and rogue forces act with impunity."

The war in Syria started in 2011 when President Bashar Al-Assad launched a brutal crackdown on protests against his rule.

The clashes escalated into all out conflict between Assad's forces and rebel groups ranging from the Free Syrian Army to extremist factions linked to Al-Qaeda.

Assad, who was already backed by Iran and its Lebanese proxy Hezbollah, gained the upper hand in the war after Russia stepped up its military involvement in his support in 2015.

The war has killed nearly half a million people and displaced half the country's population.



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