

Yemen consultations have started, insists top UN negotiator

A positive environment exists for building trust between the opposing parties involved in discussions for a political solution to the Yemen conflict, despite the absence of one of the delegations in Geneva and insecurity on the ground, UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths said on Saturday.

Acknowledging the “elephant in the room” – the fact that the Ansarullah-Houthi delegation was not present in the Swiss city for the consultations – the UN negotiator insisted it was not a “fundamental blockage” to his work.

“The important aspect of these last three days is that we’ve started consultations,” he said, before adding that the “environment for discussions is fairly positive. Despite what’s happening on the ground and despite the fact that we did not of course get the opportunity to receive the Ansarullah delegation.”

Both the people of Yemen and the “remarkably united” international community wanted him to succeed, Mr Griffiths insisted, adding that he intended to meet Houthi representatives in Muscat, Oman, and in Sana’a, the capital of Yemen, which they control.

“We will have similar consultations with Ansarullah,” he explained. “Because one of the advantages of consultations is, that you don’t actually need to be in the same room, you don’t actually need to be in the same city. It’s more convenient – it’s what we planned, I don’t want to underplay that – but we will go, and we will discuss with them the fruits of the discussions we’ve had here. So we will be going to Muscat and Sana’a to take up the issues that we will have discussed here. This is what I mean by, ‘We have begun.’”

He insisted on the Houthi delegation’s willingness to engage in the UN-organized political process.

“I think it’s important to note that Ansarullah also wanted to be here, and they’re disappointed not to be here,” he said. “It’s important to make that point very clear. We have had extensive discussions with their representatives in Sana’a and in Muscat this past week and I have no doubt about that, whatever you may think. And they’re very keen to take this process forward, and so is the international community, who are remarkably united.”

During three days of “very fruitful” discussions with the Government of Yemen Mr Griffiths underscored the progress made on so-called confidence-building measures: the release of prisoners, the reopening of Sana’a airport, economic issues “of extreme importance” and a humanitarian access in areas “where it is possible” and pauses in clashes to allow the vaccination of children to proceed.

Noting the importance of his parallel discussions with women's representatives in Yemen as well as those participating in the Geneva consultations, the Special Envoy insisted on the importance of remembering the grave humanitarian situation in the war-torn country.

"There are two roads to peace," he said. "There's the high road, which is a description of the 'track one' negotiations between the official parties to a conflict, who of course have the fundamental responsibility of resolving it, of achieving an agreement which will resolve the conflicts, not the war. And then there's a low road to peace, which is about local arrangements to stabilize areas, to allow humanitarian access, to build confidence between the parties, to get prisoners out, detainees out and so-forth. And frankly, for 90 per cent of the population, that's the road that counts."

Speaking to journalists, the UN negotiator added that he was also keen not to let "too many days and weeks" before fresh meetings resumed.

"If I didn't think, if the Secretary-General didn't think that there was a real desire for peace, firstly, and secondly that there is a real solution – a political solution to this war – then we wouldn't be wasting your time," he said.

[Backed by UN agency, countries set to take on deadly livestock-killing disease](#)

Gathered at a major United Nations agricultural conference, over 45 countries today pledged to eradicate by 2030 a highly contagious and devastating disease responsible for the death of millions of small farm animals, at cost of more than \$2 billion each year.

Controlling and eventually eradicating the *Peste des petits ruminants* (PPR) disease – which has nearly 90 per cent fatality rate among the animals it infects – will also strengthen food security and nutrition, improve resilience of pastoralists, as well as contribute to the implementation of the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), said the UN [Food and Agriculture Organization](#) (FAO).

"Small ruminants are the primary livestock resource of about 300 million poor rural families in developing and emerging countries ... [Eradicating PPR is fundamental for building a safer and more sustainable world](#)," highlighted the agency's Director-General, José Graziano da Silva.

Organized jointly by the FAO and the World Organisation for Animal Health

(OIE), and hosted by the European Commission in Brussels, the [conference](#) also called on the international development community to contribute to the [PPR Global Eradication Programme](#) to bridge its \$340 million funding gap.

The financial resources to eradicate PPR are not an expense, but an important investment that will result in future economic and social gains – *FAO Director-General Graziano da Silva*

“The financial resources to eradicate PPR are not an expense, but an important investment that will result in future economic and social gains,” added Mr. Graziano da Silva.

In spite of the very high fatality rate, PPR is easily preventable with inexpensive vaccines that can be administered at low cost.

Since its initial identification in Côte d’Ivoire in 1942, PPR – also known as the ‘goat plague’ – has spread to over 70 countries in Africa, Middle East, and Asia and has reached new areas in recent years.

[According](#) to the OIE, PPR is caused by the morbillivirus in the family of paramyxoviruses, that is related to rinderpest, measles and canine distemper. The virus is not known to affect humans.

In December 2016 the first reported outbreak in sheep and goats with spill-over of the disease to a wild antelope species was observed in Mongolia, and later in June 2018, it reached the European Union, with a first-ever case reported in Bulgaria.

African Swine Flu outbreaks ‘almost certain’ in Asian countries

Meanwhile, the outbreak of the African Swine Flu (ASF) in China, first detected last month by authorities there, is [reported to be accelerating and will almost certainly emerge in other countries](#) in Asia, an FAO regional emergency meeting heard on Friday.

In response, China and FAO have been working together and have helped veterinary authorities and others respond quickly and isolate areas where ASF detections have occurred and to date, nearly 40,000 infected animals have been culled in efforts to limit the spread.

Cross-border, regional collaboration is vital in responding to this very real threat to Asia’s swine sector – *FAO Assistant Director-General Kadiresan*

“The Chinese authorities have taken this outbreak very seriously and have been very proactive in sharing information and their lessons learned with FAO and neighbouring countries about the spread of the virus and their actions so far,” said Wantanee Kalpravidh, FAO’s Asia Regional Manager of its Emergency Centre for Transboundary Animal Diseases.

The emergency meeting, convened by FAO in Bangkok, saw veterinary authorities and other key stakeholders from 12 countries, ASF experts, and OIE representatives form a specialized regional network that has pledged to respond aggressively and collaboratively when new outbreaks occur anywhere in the region.

“This cross-border, regional collaboration is vital in responding to this very real threat to Asia’s swine sector, because this isn’t something that Ministries or Departments of Agriculture can handle on their own,” said Kundhavi Kadiresan, FAO Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative for Asia and the Pacific.

“This virus is a threat to livelihoods, to economies, to an entire industry and its associated value chains. So everyone needs to pay attention to this and step up, in a coordinated way, to take on this challenge. FAO will continue to help with that.”

144 years on, Universal Postal Union meets to define its 21st Century role

The Universal Postal Union ([UPU](#)), one of the world’s oldest international organizations, has met in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa to improve its working practices and define its role in the modern world.

Established in the Swiss capital Berne in 1874, the Universal Postal Union (UPU) predates the United Nations by more than 70 years, and became a UN specialized agency in 1948.

The UPU remains the primary forum for cooperation between national postal services, helping to ensure a truly universal network, playing an advisory and mediation function, and providing technical assistance. The UPU also sets the rules for international mail exchanges and makes recommendations to grow and improve postal services.

With reform of the UPU high on the agenda for more than four decades, the UPU has held an [Extraordinary Congress](#) – only the second since 1900 – with the aim of bringing in measures to improve its decision-making and efficiency, and enhance its relevance.

Bishar A. Hussein, Director General of the UPU, underlined the importance of the meeting, saying “the decisions you will take this week will have a big effect on the future of our Union.”

The Congress wrapped up on Friday, with delegates having unanimously agreed to a wide range of reform proposals. These include simplifying election

procedures, improving regional representation and reducing the contributions provided by Small Island Developing States (SIDS), which are some of the most disadvantaged of all UPU member states.

At the Ministerial Strategy Congress, which took place 6-7 September and was part of the overall event, government ministers and other senior decision-makers discussed how the postal sector can better serve nations and citizens, help grow the economy and drive development.

With a global network of over 600,000 post offices, 5.3 million staff and physical infrastructure covering 192 countries, the postal sector is a key contributor to national and international infrastructure and plays an important role in national development and in the attainment of the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#).

[UN police investigating killing of displaced people in Central African Republic](#)

Perpetrators behind the killing of a number of people displaced by conflict in the Central African Republic (CAR) must be brought to justice, the UN peacekeeping operation in the country said on Friday.

The mission, known by the French acronym [MINUSCA](#), has strongly condemned the incident, which occurred on Thursday in the town of Bria.

Alleged members of a rebel group reportedly abducted the victims, most of them women, from outside a camp for internally displaced people (IDPs) known as PK3, situated near the UN base in the town.

Police from the mission are investigating the matter while MINUSCA has also stepped up security around the camp.

Bria is located nearly 600 kilometres from the capital, Bangui. The town is hosting around 100,000 people, the majority of whom—80 per cent—are IDPs. Nearly 48,000 are staying at PK3, which is the largest IDP site in the country.

In the wake of the killings, Najat Rochdi, UN Humanitarian Coordinator in the country, has appealed to warring parties to protect civilians. She expressed deep alarm over mounting tensions in Bria.

She said that just a few days after commemorating World Humanitarian Day “we witness yet another tragedy against innocent civilians. I appeal to all

parties to abide by their obligations under international humanitarian law and protect civilians. Civilians are not a target and these despicable acts must stop”, the Humanitarian Coordinator said in a [statement](#).

[Halt ‘imminent’ executions of Kurdish prisoners, UN experts urge Iran](#)

Two independent United Nations human rights experts have called on the Iranian Government to halt the execution of three prisoners from the Kurdish community, amid concerns that they did not receive a fair trial and allegations that they were tortured while in detention.

Executions of cousins Zanyar and Loghman Moradi, and Ramin Hossein Panahi – detained at the same prison – are due to take place on Saturday.

“We urge the Government of Iran to immediately [halt their executions and to annul the death sentences against them](#) in compliance with its international obligations,” said Agnes Callamard and Javaid Rehman, Special Rapporteurs on [arbitrary executions](#) and on the [human rights situation in the country](#), respectively.

According to the [Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights](#) (OHCHR), Zanyar and Loghman Moradi were arrested in August 2009 for the alleged murder of the son of an Imam in Marivan, Kurdistan province. They were subsequently held at an intelligence detention centre for nine months without formal charges or the opportunity to challenge the legality of their incarceration.

They were also severely beaten, tied up in restricted stress positions and threatened with rape, in order to force them to confess to the murder. In December 2010, they were brought before the revolutionary court in the capital Tehran where they were sentenced to death by public hanging in a trial that “apparently lasted only 20 minutes.”

“During the trial, they both denied the charges in court and explained that they had confessed to the crimes only due to torture following their initial arrest,” said OHCHR, noting that the Iranian Supreme Court upheld their convictions, and that the allegations of torture was not investigated.

The news release also stated that fears of their imminent execution have been raised amid reports that they were transferred to solitary confinement on 5 September, their families asked to visit them, and their access to telephones restricted.

The experts also reiterated their [previous calls](#) to halt Mr. Panahi’s execution – reportedly due to occur at the same time – and annul his death

sentence in light of reports that he did not receive a fair trial and has been tortured in detention.

Mr. Panahi was arrested last June for alleged membership of the Kurdish nationalist group Komala, was repeatedly beaten in detention, denied medical care and access to a lawyer, and held in solitary confinement until January.

UN Special Rapporteurs and independent experts are appointed by the Geneva-based Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or a country situation. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.