

Despite setbacks, 'political will' to end Yemen war stronger than ever: top UN envoy

The ceasefire in Yemen's crucial port city of Hodaydah is "generally holding" and deadlines have had to be extended, but the [UN's Special Envoy](#) said on Monday that "more than any time in the past" the political will remains to end years of conflict that has left millions on the brink of starvation.

Martin Griffiths, said in a newspaper interview with Asharq Al-Awsat, and in a series of tweets reflecting his remarks, that the "biggest challenge is not to fail the people of Yemen" as the Government forces and their coalition backers, attempt to secure the first stages of a tentative peace deal with rebel Houthi leaders, that was inked in Sweden last December, and brokered by the UN.

Mr. Griffiths said that a deadline set for the withdrawal of Houthi fighters in Hodaydah, the crucial port that carries the vast majority of life-saving aid and goods into the country, had been delayed, and said that planned prisoner exchange talks, were still a work in progress.

We have seen the two parties demonstrate remarkable political will, first to reach a ceasefire agreement, and then to abide by it. What we need to see now is the implementation of the provisions...fully and rapidly – *UN Special Envoy, Martin Griffiths*

He also confirmed that the retired Dutch General Patrick Cammaert, who has been leading an advance UN mission tasked with overseeing the ceasefire deal, and talks between Government and Houthi negotiators who are part of the Redeployment Coordination Committee (RCC), was stepping down. He denied that any disagreements had resulted in his resignation.

"There is no element of truth to such reports. As a matter of fact, General Cammaert and I have been working closely to close the gap between the two parties on the operational implementation of the Hodeidah Agreement", he told the Arabic language newspaper.

"Our meetings with all the parties were very constructive last week. General Cammaert's plan was to stay in Yemen for a rather short period of time, to activate the RCC and lay the ground for establishing the Hodeidah mission," he added.

The Special Envoy said that it was "important not to lose sight of the big picture necessary to resolve the conflict in Yemen. A framework that will draw a road map towards a political agreement will provide us with a basis for the end game; that is the political solution for the conflict there."

He added that “we have seen the two parties demonstrate remarkable political will, first to reach a ceasefire agreement, and then to abide by it. What we need to see now is the implementation of the provisions of the agreement, fully and rapidly.”

He acknowledged that “we have seen the timelines for implementation extended, both in Hudaydah, and the prisoner exchange agreement. Such changes in timelines are expected. The initial timelines were rather ambitious. We are dealing with a complex situation on the ground.”

He “categorically rejected” a call from the Saudi-led coalition which is backing Yemeni Government to declare the ceasefire over or apportion blame to one party, for attempting to nullify the hard-won Stockholm agreement.

“We are planning to convene the next round of political consultations soon,” he told the newspaper. “As I mentioned, we do not want to lose the momentum created in Sweden. However, we all are on the same page that we need to see progress in implementing what was agreed in Sweden before convening the next round of consultations. We hope we will be able to announce the date of the next round of consultations very soon.”

“There is a window of opportunity that was opened for Yemen in Sweden, and it is important to seize this opportunity, and to capitalize on the momentum we have seen during and after Sweden”, he said.

Solidarity needed to overcome 'isolated' attacks on Venezuela refugees, migrants

Attacks and hate speech against Venezuelans seeking shelter in neighbouring countries should be condemned “with a clear and forceful message of rejection” and solidarity, a top UN refugee agency ([UNHCR](#)) and UN migration agency ([IOM](#)) official said in a statement on Monday.

Eduardo Stein, Joint UNHCR-IOM Special Representative for Venezuelan refugees and migrants, made his comments after the [UN Security Council](#) met at the weekend to discuss the situation in the country, where opposition leader Juan Guaidó declared himself President on 23 January.

“Although isolated and unrepresentative, these acts of hatred, intolerance and xenophobia are extremely worrying,” Mr. Stein [said](#), in his appeal to “several” unnamed countries.

“Racism, misogyny and xenophobia have no place in our countries and must be

firmly condemned,” the UNHCR/IOM official added, his statement following a warning in November that the reception capacity of Venezuela’s neighbours was becoming severely strained.

While urging “political and opinion leaders” to call for “peace, justice, calm and restraint”, Mr. Stein also highlighted the importance of responsible traditional and online media reporting.

“The media and users of social networks...must report the facts in a responsible manner, without inciting xenophobic attitudes and actions and must also condemn all physical or verbal attacks against refugees, migrants and other foreign persons, when they occur,” said Mr. Stein, a former Guatemalan Vice-President.

According to UNHCR and IOM, thousands of people continue to leave Venezuela every day, amid an ongoing humanitarian crisis linked to an economy in freefall and continuing political upheaval.

More than three million Venezuelans have left their country since 2015, with 2.4 million in neighbouring or nearby countries. Most are in Colombia, which houses well over one million who have fled their homes.

This is followed by Peru (more than 500,000) Ecuador (more than 220,000), Argentina (130,000) Chile (more than 100,000) and Brazil (85,000).

In addition to South American countries, countries in Central America and the Caribbean also recorded increasing arrivals of refugees and migrants from Venezuela. Panama, for example, hosts at least 94,000 Venezuelans.

In response to South America’s biggest exodus in its history, UNHCR and IOM announced the creation of a [regional initiative](#) in May 2018 to support governments as they sought to aid refugees and migrants from Venezuela.

This Regional Platform is open to organisations that have the capacity to respond to the needs of Venezuelan refugees and migrants; it has more than 30 member-organizations, including UN agencies, non-governmental organizations and two Red Cross movements.

Mr. Stein was appointed in September last year. His mission is to promote the dialogue and consensus necessary for the humanitarian response, including access to territory, refugee protection, legal stay arrangements and the identification of solutions for Venezuelan swelling ranks of refugees and migrants.

“Only through dialogue, solidarity, justice, coexistence and respect for diversity can we solve the multiple challenges that confront our region,” he said. “Given the current humanitarian and political challenges, Latin America must remain faithful to its tradition of solidarity.”

[UN chief condemns deadly terrorist attack on church in southern Philippines](#)

In a statement issued by a UN spokesperson, the Secretary-General expressed his sincere condolences to the families of the victims and wished a speedy recovery to the wounded.

According to media reports, twin bombings ripped through the Jolo Cathedral in the island province of Sulu, which is in the Philippines southern Bangsamoro region.

The attack occurred during Sunday morning services and reportedly killed nearly 20 people and left more than 80 wounded.

“The Secretary-General calls for the perpetrators of these crimes to be swiftly brought to justice,” the statement said, and added that Mr. Guterres reiterated the support of the United Nations to the Philippines Government and people in their efforts to fight terrorism and violent extremism, and to carry forward the peace process in Bangsamoro region.

In late July 2018 President Rodrigo Duterte signed new legislation – formally the Organic Law for Bangsamoro in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao – which granted extra autonomy to Muslim communities living in the Southern Philippines, raising hopes that years of separatist violence involving central Government troops and militants could be brought to an end.

Today’s attack comes days after voters approved the creation of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in majority-Muslim areas of southern Philippines.

But reports suggest that voters in Sulu province, where Jolo is located, rejected it.

[Tackling ‘deeply worrying’ global rise in anti-Semitism is a job for all societies everywhere, says UN chief](#)

Warning that anti-Semitism, the world’s oldest prejudice, has persisted to torment new generations, Secretary-General António Guterres has pledged that the United Nations will always be at the forefront of the fight against all

forms of hatred, and work to strengthen efforts to uphold human dignity for all.

'Our urgent challenge today is to heed the lessons of a period when human dignity was cast aside for a racial ideology,' Mr. Guterres said in an address early Saturday morning to the [Holocaust Remembrance](#) Ceremony held annually at Manhattan's historic Park East Synagogue.

He recalled the last time he addressed the event had been just four days after a man carrying weapons of war stormed into a synagogue on Shabbat in Pittsburgh shouting "all Jews must die".

"When the bullets stopped, 11 people lay dead. Brothers. Husbands and wives. A 97 year-old woman. All gunned down in prayer. And targeted, it also appears at least in part, for performing a mitzvah – living their faith and welcoming the stranger – new immigrants to the Pittsburgh area."

"It was a barbaric assault – the worst anti-Semitic attack in the history of the United States. In our sorrow, we joined hands here in this pulpit. We were united in our feelings of horror and solidarity," he said, adding that many faiths had been represented, Jews, Christians, Muslims and others, including the top leadership of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation, all declaring their utter opposition to hatred of any kind.

"I am afraid, however, that in the months since Pittsburgh we have had more reasons for profound concern," lamented Mr. Guterres, noting that last month, headstones in a Jewish cemetery in Strasbourg were defaced with swastikas; this month, rocks were thrown through the windows of the central synagogue in Sofia; and for some time now, anti-Semitic attacks in the United States and Europe have been on the rise.

Statistics and polls paint a deeply worrying picture, he said, explain that anti-Semitic incidents in the United States increased by 57 per cent in 2017. One European poll reported last year that 28 per cent of Jews had experienced some form of harassment for being Jewish. Another revealed the strong persistence of classic anti-Semitic motifs.

"The old anti-Semitism is back – and getting worse," said the UN chief, warning that Nazi symbols and slogans remain widespread, as anti-hate organizations track hundreds of neo-Nazi, pro-Nazi and white supremacist groups.

"And as we know all too well, where there is hatred of Jews, hatred of others is also near at hand," he said, noting that indeed, the world was witnessing a disturbing increase in other forms of bigotry: attacks on Muslims were on the rise; intolerance was spreading at lightning speed across the Internet and social media; and hate groups were using social media to link up with like-minded bigots across borders.

"Hate is moving into the mainstream – as major political parties incorporating ideas from the fringes and parties once rightly considered pariahs are gaining influence," he said, adding: "We should not exaggerate

the comparisons to the 1930s, but equally we should not ignore the similarities.”

“This is the painful backdrop for today’s observance marking the anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp. We are together to honour the memory of the six million Jews and millions of others who were systematically murdered.

“As the number of survivors dwindles, it falls to us to carry their testimony to future generations,” he said and the United Nations was strongly committed to being at the forefront of that work and teaching “our children to love before others teach them to hate.”

He said the UN’s [Holocaust Outreach Programme](#) has activities in dozens of countries. He had also recently asked his [Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide](#) to devise a global plan of action to deepen the world body’s efforts to counter hate speech.

“We are also striving at a deeper level to address the roots of the fears and anger that make people susceptible to populism and the divisive appeals of opportunistic political figures. That means working for a fair globalization and building democratic societies.”

“And it means ensuring that Governments and international organizations show they care about people and are attuned to their needs and aspirations. I include the United Nations in this. And this is a job for all societies, everywhere, Mr. Guterres said.

Echoing the Secretary-General, Arthur Schneier, Senior Rabbi of Park East Synagogue, said: “Anti-semitism does not just target Jews. It is an indicator of how societies treat other minorities.”

“If you want to judge a society, look at how the majority treats the minority,” he said, stressing that “we have to make sure we are on the side of good and of peaceful coexistence.”

[UN Security Council convenes urgent meeting to discuss political turmoil in Venezuela](#)

The United Nations political chief told an urgent meeting of the [Security Council](#) on Saturday that the protracted political crisis in Venezuela is a cause for serious concern and is having a grave impact on the population, with high levels of political polarization, growing humanitarian needs and serious human rights concerns.

“We must [do all we can to prevent a worsening](#) of tensions,” Rosemary DiCarlo, UN Under Secretary-General of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs told Council members: “We must try to help bring about a political solution that will allow the country’s citizens to enjoy peace, prosperity and all their human rights.”

The Urgent meeting was requested late last week by United States Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in the wake of days of upheaval in Venezuela and popular protests that erupted after the leader of the legislature, Juan Guaidó, declared himself interim president on Wednesday, a direct challenge to President Nicolás Maduro, who had been sworn in to a second term in office just two weeks previously.

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