

Constructive engagement in the UN-led process is needed to achieve peace in Yemen

Thank you, Mr President. Let me also thank Martin and Ramesh for their briefings. I find myself feeling a little, "Here we are again." We're thanking the two of you for your ongoing and painstaking efforts in extremely difficult circumstances – Martin, for your resilience in trying constantly and consistently to shepherd the parties into talks, and Ramesh, for you and your team's long-term efforts in what is one of the worst humanitarian situations in the world. So it's with a very genuine sense that I thank you on behalf of the United Kingdom and your teams for what you're doing.

Colleagues, at a time the Yemenis are reflecting and offering each other Ramadan blessings, they're being hit by the plight of COVID-19. Official figures, as Ramesh has said, told us that COVID-19 has caused well over 50 deaths. And UK-funded modelling suggests the number of Yemenis suffering from COVID-19 is already in the thousands. The United Kingdom has provided over \$940 million since the beginning of the pandemic to support the global response to COVID-19. And we've also pledged \$2 billion dollars to GAVI, the Vaccine Alliance, to vaccinate 75 million children against deadly infectious disease around the world.

But I want to encourage the government and the Houthi authorities to continue engaging with the United Nations to ensure an effective national response. We also call on the Houthi authorities to be transparent in reporting cases so that the World Health Organization can identify requirements, procure equipment and ensure supplies reach those in need.

Martin Griffiths's proposals for a political framework and a nationwide ceasefire really are the only game in town. There is no military option. We've proved that over several years. Those delaying agreements and delaying talks are simply prolonging the misery of the people of Yemen for no obvious strategic or tactical advantage. So the United Kingdom is resolute in supporting Martin Griffiths's efforts, and I welcome the close coordination of P5 Ambassadors to Yemen in this endeavour.

I welcome your update, Martin, that you have received responses to your most recent proposals from the government of Yemen. And so I urge also the Houthis to do the same. You said that they were engaged, but I think we need more than engagement. Yemenis cannot wait any longer. And constructive engagement in the UN-led process is the only way to achieve the peace they deserve. And I want to echo Martin's comments on the importance of the inclusion of women in both his Advisory Council but also in the talks process.

In the light of the COVID-19 outbreak, I want to welcome again the unilateral ceasefire and its subsequent extension announced by the Saudi-led coalition. It is important that fighting does not hamper efforts to tackle the outbreak.

This move, which has not been reciprocated, demonstrates the serious intent of the coalition to bring an end to this dreadful conflict.

And during this particularly crucial time in the peace process, I want to note with concern the evidence documented in the United States' letter of 21st of April to the Sanctions Committees is established under Resolutions 2231 to 2140. That letter outlines evidence collected during two interdictions of vessels containing significant amounts of weapons and arms of apparent Iranian origin. I welcome the sharing of such information; I encourage others to do the same. Such arms shipments pose a grave impediment to the cause of peace in Yemen, and they must stop.

The tragic situation in Yemen has been complicated further following, to say the least, the poorly timed declaration of the Southern Transitional Council. And I want to welcome the swiftly agreed Security Council statement on the 29th of April regarding that declaration and highlight the ongoing risk of violent clashes in the South. All parties have recommitted their support for the Riyadh Agreement, and so I call on them to engage with the Saudi-led efforts and de-escalate and implement their obligations under the agreement.

We welcome the announcement that a humanitarian pledging conference will take place virtually on the 2nd of June, and Ramesh gave us details of that. And we strongly urge all donors to step up and provide significant and timely humanitarian funding. The United Kingdom provided over a billion dollars in funding since the conflict began. And in this year, we will also be making a substantial pledge.

I note with concern, though, that across Yemen, unprecedented access restrictions remain. In the north, the Houthis must deliver on the minimum operating requirements that the international community has clearly set out. These include swiftly approving all sub-agreements, fully implementing the World Food Programme's retargeting and biometric pilot, and allowing humanitarian agencies to operate independently and freely. Donors will only be able to give funding if such restrictions are lifted and humanitarian organisations are able to deliver assistance effectively. And we are supportive of UN agency efforts to do everything they can to reduce risk and ensure aid is reaching those in need.

We remain extremely concerned that the Central Bank of Yemen will soon run out of foreign currency reserves, causing an economic collapse of humanitarian and political consequences. Significant external financial assistance to Central Bank of Yemen is urgently needed to keep imports coming in, and that risk is now even more unpredictable due to the secondary impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak. It is imperative that the government of Yemen urgently comes up with a credible plan that reassures potential donors the Riyadh agreement is enacted with the Central Bank of Yemen remaining operationally neutral as negotiations proceed.

We've talked previously in this Council about the devastating impact that an oil leak from the SAFER oil tanker would have on Yemen and the region. I urge the Houthis again to either allow the removal of the oil or to allow a repair mission to proceed. Continued inaction on this issue is reckless, dangerous

and threatens an environmental and humanitarian catastrophe.

I also want to note that prior to Ramadan, the Houthis promised to release members of the persecuted Baha'i faith. I call on them to do so, and all who have been wrongly detained – including journalists, as set out by Martin Griffiths today – and that is especially important in the context of COVID-19.

Finally, let me finish where I began. I want to thank Martin again for his continued efforts. He was right to talk at the beginning of his remarks of bringing us hope over progress, just as he is right to say that the hope is realistic. And I call on all in Yemen to bring real hope to the people of Yemen.

Thank you, Mr President.