

Libya has 'lurched from one emergency to another,' high-level UN official tells Security Council

The status quo in Libya is "untenable," Ghassan Salamé, Head of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) told the Security Council on Wednesday.

The UN Special Representative pointed to the violence in the capital, Tripoli, that began on 26 August as shattering "the façade of calm that had prevailed since May 2017," relaying that tanks and heavy artillery were deployed into residential neighborhoods, leaving 61 Libyans dead and injuring nearly 160.

"Many of those who died were civilians, including children. Families were forced to flee their homes. Looting and crime became common place as gangs took to the streets. Hundreds of criminals broke out of prison. Migrants were either trapped in detention centres, or turned onto the street," he detailed.

Against the backdrop that the city was "on the brink of all-out war," he said that on 4 September, UNSMIL brokered a ceasefire between the major parties to the conflict, halting the fighting and restoring some order.

Mr. Salamé said that as a first step for peace to take root, the Mission was offering technical assistance and its good offices in support of the ceasefire.

"Groups that violate the ceasefire must be held to account," he stated, adding that the UN and the international community are watching. "The time for impunity is behind us."

He noted that in recent weeks, "the nation has lurched from one emergency to another." Fearing that it "may become a shelter for terrorist groups of all persuasions," he asked the Council for more help at this critical juncture.

Groups that violate the ceasefire must be held to account – *Special Representative Ghassan Salamé*

Alerting the Council that the presence and operations of the terrorist group ISIL are spreading, he cited an attack that claimed the lives of four police officers on 23 August claimed by the extremists; as well as on 10 August when armed groups forcibly evicted displaced Tawerghan families from the Tariq al-Matar IDP Camp; and a 2 May attack on the High National Elections Commission.

The Special Representative highlighted fighting between Chadian Government

and opposition forces operating from Southern Libya, underscoring that “the recent Agreement signed between Chad, Sudan, Niger and Libya needs to be implemented, so Libya does not also become an alternative battleground for others.”

Meanwhile, he continued, the country’s citizens suffer “deteriorating standards of living,” and for many, “every day is a personal emergency.”

In tackling the underlying causes, he stressed the need for strong, unified civilian and military institutions, explaining UNSMIL’s dual track approach.

“First,” he said “we are working to revise the security arrangements in Tripoli” to reduce armed groups and work with Libyans to identify steps towards reshaping security in the capital and develop sustainable arrangements.

“The Mission’s second priority is to address the economic issues, which underpin the crisis and erode the daily lives of citizens across the country,” he informed the chamber, noting that if the plundering continues, there is little chance to move either the economic reforms or political process.

“We are also committed to advocating for a more equitable distribution of wealth in Libya focused not on appeasing groups based on their military strength, but on providing for citizens based on their need,” stressed Mr. Salamé.

He maintained that Libyans want change in their political leadership: “I will not mince words. Many members of the House of Representatives are failing to do their job,” he stated. “They simply have no intention of relinquishing their positions. They have put in place legal provisions to maintain their authority in perpetuity.”

He said that Libya needs the “unified, determined and vocal position” of the Council, to find the peace and tranquility it is desperately looking for.