

Major UN push for peace to end Yemen's 'hot war' begins in Geneva

Efforts are under way to bring a “flicker of hope” to war-weary civilians in Yemen with UN-organised consultations between the Government and the Houthi opposition in Geneva set to begin, the [UN's Special Envoy Martin Griffiths](#), said on Wednesday.

“The time has come to begin a new process, to relaunch a process which will lead to a resolution to this conflict, which has so tragically marked the life of so many Yemenis and continues to do so,” he told journalists.

Speaking at UN Headquarters in the Swiss city, the veteran diplomat noted that it had been “two years; two years too long” since the belligerents had last met to discuss a peaceful end to the brutal conflict, whose roots date back to uprisings in 2011.

Yemenis need to resolve their differences in order to build their nation – *Martin Griffiths, UN Special Envoy*

“This is quite a hot war, as you well know better than me, and a lot of bad things happen in a hot war and that's not been absent in the last weeks,” Mr Griffiths said. “So, to come to the table and to talk to your opponents, requires quite a lot of courage and quite a lot of confidence that it is worth it.”

Fighting in Yemen escalated in March 2015, when an international coalition led by Saudi Arabia intervened militarily at the request of Yemen's President against “Houthi-Saleh” opposition forces – a reference to the now deceased former Yemeni President, Ali Abdallah Saleh.

Since then, thousands of civilians have died and around eight million are on the brink of famine, UN humanitarian agencies report. According to [UN Children's Fund, UNICEF](#), 76 youngsters have been killed in the war-torn country in July and August alone.

Martin Griffiths, UN Special Envoy for Yemen briefs the press on the Geneva Consultations on Yemen, Palais des Nations. 5 September 2018. □□□□□ UN Geneva/Violaine Martin

Although he was reluctant to share details of the agenda for the Geneva Consultations on Yemen, the Special Envoy explained that the aim of these meetings was “to lay the groundwork” for formal negotiations to be held at a future date. He added that the initial focus should be on building confidence between the parties.

By way of an example, Mr. Griffiths explained that the mass cholera vaccination programme carried out in Hudaydah governorate in recent weeks, had been shown to deliver “tangible benefits” to the people of Yemen.

Other trust-building measures will be explored in coming days, he added, including the issue of prisoner release “at scale” – something that both sides had been keen to see happen.

“What I think we can do this week, for example, assuming that the parties would agree to this, is agree on a way to do it together...Exchanges of prisoners obviously depends on cooperation, but it’s been remarkable how strongly the feeling has been conveyed to me that this must happen, and this must happen at scale.”

Asked about possible interference in the consultative process by other regional powers, Mr. Griffiths said he was guided by UN Security Council resolutions on Yemen.

Earlier in the day in New York, the UN Security Council members expressed their “full support” for the consultations to bring about a political settlement.

“There can only be a political solution to the conflict in Yemen,” the members of the Council said in [a Press Statement](#), which reiterated their call for full implementation of Security Council resolutions and statements, including [Resolution 2216](#) of 2015.

Back in Geneva, the UN Special Envoy insisted that the politics of Yemen was a matter for the Yemenis and the Council’s resolutions all pointed “in the direction of the reconstitution of the Yemeni state, based on an inclusive political settlement”.

“These are Yemeni-Yemeni discussions,” he said. “Yemenis need to resolve their differences in order to build their nation. It’s not for other countries to determine for them, their future.”