

Yemen backs Iranian arms embargo extension

Mon, 2020-08-10 23:51

AL-MUKALLA: The internationally recognized government of Yemen has demanded the UN to extend the arms embargo on Iran, saying that Iranian arms have fueled the conflict in the country.

Yemen's Information Minister Muammar Al-Aryani said war-torn Yemen and other Arab countries have borne the brunt of Iranian expansionism through proxy conflicts.

"Yemen and Arab countries like Iraq, Lebanon and Syria have paid heavy prices for hostile policies adopted by the Iranian regime and the Revolutionary Guards," he said.

Iran's supply of weapons to Houthis in Yemen and other militias in the region had fueled the war, he added.

"Selling and supplying arms to Iran inflames conflicts in the region through the smuggling of weapons to sectarian militias and terrorist organizations like the Houthis, Hezbollah, Al-Qaeda and Daesh."

His appeal came as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) called for an extension to the embargo, just two months before it is set to expire.

The GCC sent a letter to the UN Security Council urging an extension to the deal that has prevented Iran from buying foreign-made weapons, including jets, tanks and warships.

The GCC said Iran had "failed to cease or desist from armed interventions in neighboring countries, directly, and through organizations and movements armed and trained by the country."

Even before the Houthi takeover of Sanaa in late 2014, consecutive Yemeni governments accused Iran of fueling the conflict by providing rebels with advanced weapons, military training and financial support.

The government and Arab coalition have intensified attacks on Iran in recent years after intercepting arms shipments to Yemen.

Al-Aryani warned that lifting the embargo could give the Iranians free rein to cause chaos in the region.

"We warn against lifting the embargo, which would be a free gift to spread chaos and terrorism in the region, and would provide Iran with financial resources to expand its activities, and threaten the security and stability of the region and the world," the minister said.

In a recent speech during Eid Al-Adha, Yemeni President Abed Rabbo Mansour

Hadi renewed his commitment to challenging Iran's designs in Yemen by defeating the Houthis, and liberating the capital and other areas under their control.

He accused the rebel group of "turning Yemen into a den of Iranian extremism and terrorism."

When the US killed Qassem Soleimani in January, the Yemeni government praised the strike, accusing the Al-Quds Force commander of spearheading Iranian military activities in Yemen.

Yemeni military and political analysts said that advanced weaponry supplied by Iran has shored up the Houthis on the battlefield, encouraging them to reject calls for peace.

"The Iran-backed Houthis are the main engine of the war. They expanded across Yemen. Stopping the flow of Iranian weapons to them is the most important step for stopping the war in Yemen," Yasser Al-Yafae, an Aden-based political analyst, told Arab News.

He added that the Houthis would likely accept peace deals if their arsenal of weapons is depleted.

Fighting has raged in recent days on the front line in several contested provinces across Yemen.

Yemen's Defense Ministry said army troops and allied tribesmen pushed back Houthi attempts to gain ground in the provinces of Marib and Al-Bayda.

Fighting intensified despite repeated appeals from the UN and local health workers for a humanitarian truce to help deal with the coronavirus pandemic.

The Aden-based national coronavirus committee reported seven new cases, three deaths and three recoveries in the provinces of Hadramout and Taiz on Sunday, bringing the total number of cases to 1808, including 515 deaths and 913 recoveries.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Yemen](#)

[Houthi](#)

[Iran](#)

Yemen's UNESCO-listed Old Sanaa houses collapse in heavy rains
UAE reunites Yemeni Jewish family after 15 years apart

[UN chief calls for independent inquiry into Beirut explosion](#)

Mon, 2020-08-10 23:24

NEW YORK: UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has called for a “credible and transparent” investigation into the causes of the explosion at Beirut’s port last week that killed dozens of people and left thousands injured.

His comments echoed the demands of protesters who took to the streets throughout the weekend and on Monday. They blame years of government corruption and incompetence for the blast.

Amal Mudallali, Lebanon’s ambassador to the UN, likened the blast to “15 years of war in 15 seconds, the darkest 15 seconds we have ever seen.”

In an emotional keynote speech during a UN virtual briefing on the humanitarian situation in Lebanon, she added: "People are demanding, and deserve, justice – and rightly so."

As he opened the international gathering on Monday, Guterres saluted the spirit of the Lebanese people in the aftermath of the massive explosion, giving the example of "neighbors helping neighbors, people clearing their streets of broken glass and opening their homes to those who have lost theirs."

He urged international donors to provide aid "speedily and generously" to help the devastated country, but also stressed the importance of implementing longer-term political and economic reforms in the country that address the needs of the Lebanese people.

The UN has sent search-and-rescue experts to assist first responders in Beirut, along with desperately needed medical supplies to treat the injured. In addition, the organization has provided \$15 million to help fund urgent needs such as temporary shelters for families whose homes were damaged, and the import of wheat flour and grain for bakeries to help address food shortages across the country after grain silos at the port were destroyed.

Opinion

This section contains relevant reference points, placed in (Opinion field)

Guterres urged world leaders to build on the efforts of French President Emmanuel Macron, who on Thursday was the first world leader to visit Beirut after the explosion.

Mudallali evoked the words of former French President Charles de Gaulle as she said of the visit: "The Lebanese hearts were truly beating to the rhythm of France's heart as we saw Macron and the French come to the rescue of Lebanon."

On Sunday, Macron co-convened a virtual donors' conference to solicit international assistance for Lebanon, during which world leaders and international organizations pledged \$300 million.

Donors said the humanitarian aid will be coordinated by the UN and delivered directly to the Lebanese people, a clear indication of their concerns that any money delivered to the government will not be used properly. They also warned that investment in rebuilding the city will be contingent on the full commitment of the authorities in the country to "timely measures and reforms expected by the Lebanese people."

Macron has insisted on reforms, in co-ordination with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), to tackle deep-seated corruption and restore order to Lebanon's crippled economy and the banking system. The IMF has criticized the ruling elite in the country for a "shortage of political will to adopt and

implement meaningful reforms.”

More than 50 countries participated in Monday’s UN briefing. They unanimously expressed solidarity with the Lebanese people and promised a prompt response to their urgent needs.

David Beasley, the executive director of the World Food Program, warned that Lebanon is facing bread shortages within two weeks, and said efforts are being made to import grains to avoid this. He said he met Lebanese President Michel Aoun and cabinet ministers and asked them for “absolute cooperation. No obstacles. People on the streets have been asking us to please make sure the aid goes directly to the people.”

Mudallali highlighted the priorities in Beirut: medicine, food, construction materials, and the rebuilding the city’s port. She urged the international community to “remain with us for the whole journey, and not only help with the emergency stage of the catastrophe. I appeal to you to stay with us for the second, most important stage: the rebuilding and rehabilitation stage.”

Despite the tragedy and the challenges facing Beirut as it recovers and rebuilds, the envoy concluded her speech on an upbeat, optimistic note.

“Lebanon, one of the countries that met in San Francisco 75 Years ago and founded the UN, promises you that it will rise again,” she said. “We will rebuild better. We will continue to offer a message of coexistence and tolerance, and we will continue to uphold the principles and values enshrined in the UN charter.

“But we have to do it together.”



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Antonio Guterres](#)

[Beirut explosion](#)

[Amal Mudallali](#)

UN food chief: Beirut could run out of bread in 2 1/2 weeks
Lebanese artist auctions viral painting of Beirut blast to help people in need

[Alexandra Najjar: The face of Beirut's man-made tragedy](#)

Mon, 2020-08-10 01:11

LONDON: In an ideal world, Alexandra Najjar should have been able to enjoy the rest of a pleasant Mediterranean summer with her family. Once the coronavirus outbreak in Lebanon had been tamed, she should have been able to experience her first day of school.

She would have made many new friends and begun to absorb all the knowledge that a three-year-old is capable of when they first enter kindergarten.

And as the days turned into weeks, which turned into months, which turned into years, Alexandra's parents would have watched her grow into a young girl, enjoy life, dream big and perhaps achieve greatness in some field.

Alas, in the harsh real world of a crisis-wracked Lebanon, the dreams of Alexandra's parents will remain just that.

Some 2,750 tons of ammonium nitrate haphazardly stored in a warehouse at the Port of Beirut exploded as Alexandra was playing with a friend on the evening of August 4, leaving her severely injured.



Photos and videos of Alexandra were shared widely on social media and tributes poured in online. (Reuters)

Shockwaves from that blast devastated Beirut, its streets blanketed in rubble and shards of glass with many of its residents caked in grey dust and crimson-red blood.

Three days later, after being in a critical condition in a hospital and suffering internal bleeding in her brain, Alexandra succumbed to her wounds.

“You killed us in our own home, in a place where I thought I could leave my family, protect my family . . . where if crimes are happening and we don’t have anything in this country, then at least we have our home where we can be safe,” said Paul Najjar, Alexandra’s grief-stricken father, in a TV interview on Saturday evening, assailing Lebanon’s leaders.

“What you did is a crime at the cost of our family that is so very united and this for me, at the most, is a crime at the cost of love because if there’s anything I should believe in, it’s this – which was the foundation of our family, it still is and will continue to be so.”

As the pain of the Najjar family’s loss sank in, photos and videos of Alexandra – or “Alixou,” the name by which parents called her – began to be shared widely via social media platforms and WhatsApp groups, both in Lebanon and outside it.

Tributes poured in online, testifying to the despair and anguish Lebanese across the world felt in the aftermath of the explosions. Alexandra’s untimely death had put a human face on Beirut’s horrible tragedy.

In one of the pictures, Alexandra is seen sitting atop her father’s shoulders as he took part in a march during last year’s October 17 “revolution,” demanding an end to Lebanon’s twin bane of corruption and sectarianism.

The protesters were calling for a better world for all Lebanese – and a brighter future for Alexandra.

The captions accompanying the photos point to the impact of the Najjar family’s tragedy on the Lebanese people and diaspora.



Photos and videos of Alexandra were shared widely on social media and tributes poured in online. (Reuters)

“This is a photo of Alexandra protesting for a better Lebanon to remove the

corrupt government and no one listened and now she's in heaven," former Miss USA Rima Fakhri wrote below a post on Instagram.

Another caption says: "Alexandra, you are in each of our hearts and prayers today and always. Your death will not be in vain . . . we will make sure of it!"

Alexandra was one of the youngest victims of the Beirut explosions, whose human cost so far includes 150 deaths, nearly 6,000 injured and another 300,000 homeless.

After citizens and residents independently organized and cleaned up the streets and homes of the areas most affected by the blast's impact, shock turned to anger.

"My message to the Lebanese is a message of unity," Paul Najjar said in the interview. "They killed us – they didn't kill Christians or Muslims or politically-affiliated or not politically-affiliated. There is none of this anymore – a message to all the people who are still following these people.

"Please, enough. We need to stand together. We need to stand united so that we can make the change, so we can revolt for the sake of Alexandra and every child and every family that wants to live in this country like we had hope for."



Photos and videos of Alexandra were shared widely on social media and tributes poured in online. (Reuters)

Paul Najjar said he and his wife returned to Lebanon and set up a company in an effort to help the country.

“We had hope that we would help the country. We also hoped that Alixou would grow up in Lebanon,” he said.

On Saturday, thousands of Lebanese made their way to Beirut’s Martyrs’ Square demanding accountability for the explosions, and the resignation of all government officials. Many of them carried nooses, which they used for

symbolic hangings of Lebanon's principal political actors, including Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah.

The government responded by deploying riot police and the army, who used rubber bullets and tear gas to subdue similar protests in front of the parliament in Riad Al-Solh Square and the nearby Beirut Souks.

Lebanese Red Cross and the Islamic Emergency and Relief Corps figures showed that the clashes left 728 more Lebanese injured, of whom 153 were taken to hospital and 575 treated on site.

"For your information, rubber bullets could kill and cause permanent damage. If necessary, it should be aimed at legs only. Yesterday, and in one hospital, there were seven open surgical eyes and a ruptured abdominal spleen," Mohammad Jawad Khalifeh, a former Minister of Health, said on Twitter.

Meanwhile, little light has been shed by the government on why such a huge quantity of a highly combustible chemical was stored next to the Beirut Port Silos building after being confiscated from a Russian-leased ship six years ago.

"The incident might be a result of negligence or external intervention through a missile or a bomb," President Michel Aoun said on Friday.

Whatever the truth, UNICEF has warned that almost 80,000 of those displaced by the "incident" are children whose families are in desperate need of support.

One children's hospital in the Karantina area, which had a specialized unit treating critical newborns, was destroyed.

Across Beirut, at least 12 primary health care facilities, maternal, immunization and newborn centers have been damaged, disrupting services for nearly 120,000 people.

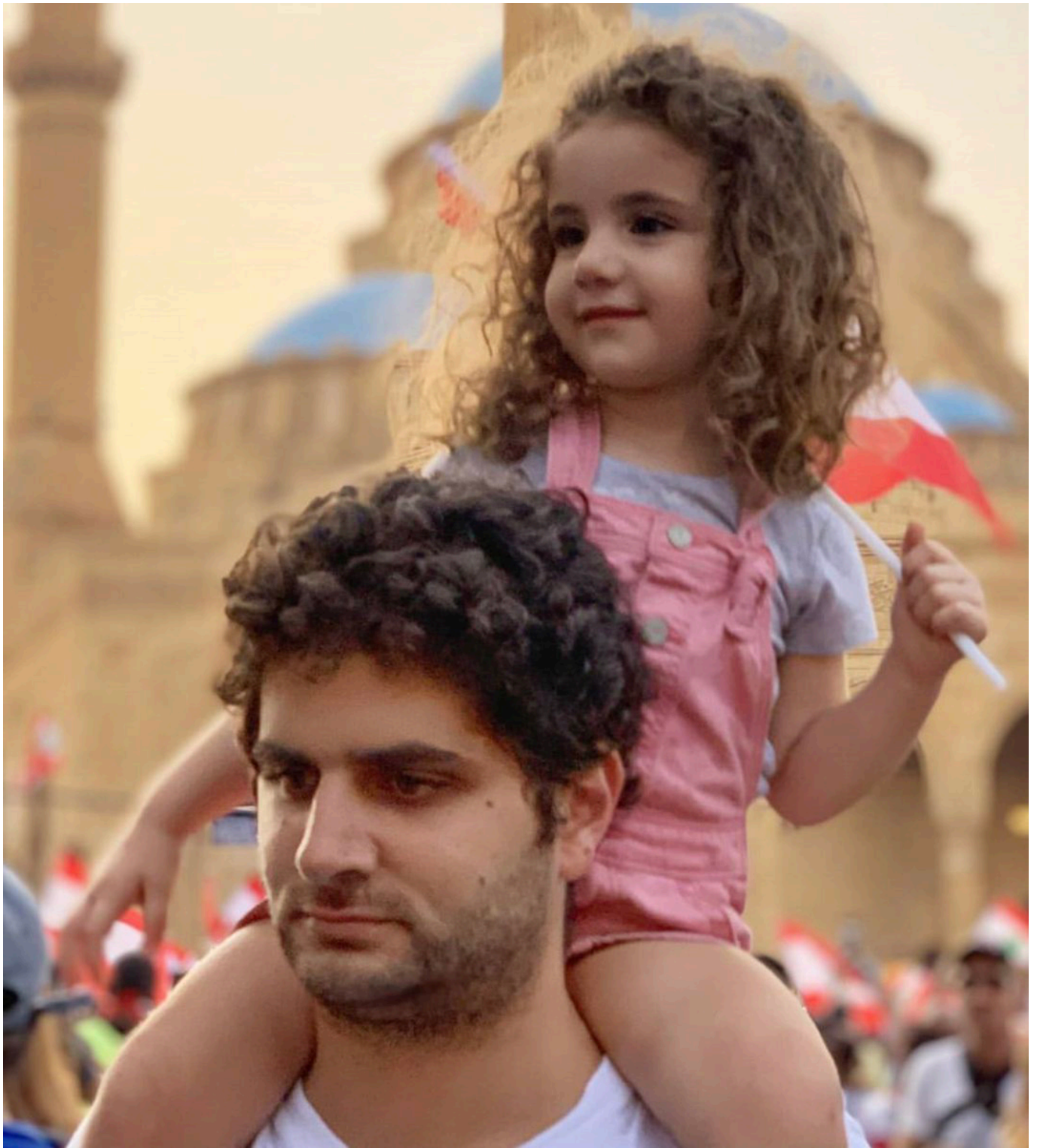
Against this grim backdrop, Paul Najjar and his wife are hoping that Alexandra's death will not be in vain but will have a positive impact when the nation rebuilds itself.

Twitter: @Tarek_AliAhmad











Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Editor's Choice](#)

[Beirut explosions](#)
[Beirut](#)
[Lebanon](#)
[Beirut blasts](#)
[Lebanon explosions](#)

Lebanon minister Manal Abdel-Samad resigns amid 'will for change' after Beirut blast
Lebanese girls Nathalie Fanj and Nour Arida join protests in Beirut

[Starvation looms for Morocco's horses as tourism collapses](#)

Mon, 2020-08-10 01:06

MARRAKECH: Abdenabi Nouidi sold his favorite horse for \$150 to help feed the others on the team that pulls tourists in carriages through the buzzing streets of Marrakech, and he is still scared about the future for the others. The prospect of starvation looms for carriage horses and other animals normally used in Morocco's tourist mecca., since visitors have vanished during the coronavirus pandemic.

The Society for the Protection of Animals Abroad, or SPANA, says hundreds of Morocco's carriage horses and donkeys are threatened amid the collapsing tourism industry. They are among the estimated 200 million horses, donkeys, camels and elephants worldwide providing various livelihoods for over a half-billion people.

The North African kingdom closed its doors to outsiders after the first virus case was confirmed March 2. It also recently issued a ban on domestic travel to eight cities, including Marrakech.

Thousands of people in the city depend on the carriage horses for their livelihood. A single horse carriage in Marrakech supports four to five families, including owners, drivers and stable boys, driver Abdeljalil Belghaoute said.

He spoke from his carriage, waiting in a line near the famed Jemaa El-Fnaa Square, hoping that someone would want a ride.

'If you have a shop, you can close it. If you sell goods, you store them. But imagine having ... horses who need to eat, drink and get medical care,' said Abdeljalil Nouidi.

For two decades, the four Nouidi brothers have taken tourists on sightseeing jaunts in horse-drawn carriages. Now they have empty pockets and mouths to feed, both at home and at the rundown complex outside Marrakech where drivers stable their horses.

The brothers were forced to sell seven of their horses in July. Abdenabi Nouidi's favorite, Cocotte, was among them.

'This is not something I can easily forgive myself for,' he said, recalling a promise he made to Cocotte 15 years ago to keep him forever.

The Noudi brothers say their horses are visibly nervous and know an abrupt change in their lives may be coming. With no carriage work, the horses' routine has been disrupted, feed is running low and stablemates are leaving for good.

SPANNA helped carriage owners provide the basics for their horses when the COVID-19 pandemic reached Morocco. It delivered three months' worth of feed to almost 600 horses in the city and the neighboring town of Aït Ourir during the country's lockdown.

"It became very clear to us when the lockdown was first imposed that many of Marrakech's working animals would need our help or face a dire outcome," said the head veterinarian at SPANNA's Marrakech center, Hassan Lamrini.

NUMBER

200m horses, donkeys, camels and elephants worldwide are providing various livelihoods for over a half-billion people.

The center, in a working-class neighborhood, is a mecca for the city's thousands of working animals. Since 1988, the team of vets and technicians have cared for donkeys, mules and horses free of charge.

Lamrini said the center has treated an increasing number of cases of colic, an abdominal pain that causes complications in the digestive system, often due to malnutrition. Colic can be fatal.

"There is not much in the world that matters to me more than caring for these animals. They are my entire life," said Boujamaa Ninich, who has dedicated 50 years to working with SPANNA. He spends weeks on end sleeping in a little room at the center to ensure the animals are cared for after dark.

"They give so much to their owners. There is so little that we can give back," he said.

Marrakech was nearly at a standstill on a recent visit. The Jamma El Fnaa Square, a vast area with hawkers, food vendors and snake-dancers, was nearly deserted.

"Only tourism can save us from this catastrophe we're facing," said Belghaoute, the carriage driver hoping for a fare.

The Moroccan government earlier this year launched a social media campaign to encourage citizens to explore their country, but spiking numbers of COVID-19 cases led to the travel ban for eight of the country's top tourist cities.

Authorities counted 28,500 infections and 435 deaths as of Thursday, but experts say all counts in all countries understate the true toll of the pandemic, due to limited testing, missed mild cases and other factors.

"The longer this goes on, horses and families will struggle to survive. We're really scared by how bad this can get," Belghaoute said.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Morocco](#)

Morocco sees travel mayhem after snap movement restrictions Morocco shuts down major cities after spike in coronavirus cases

[Ethiopia says Renaissance Dam negotiations resuming Monday](#)

Author:

Sun, 2020-08-09 22:48

CAIRO: Negotiations about the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam will resume on Monday, Ethiopia's state news agency reported the country's Foreign Affairs Ministry spokesman as saying.

Talks among Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan about the controversial multi-billion dollar project have made little progress in resolving outstanding issues.

Egypt and Sudan both fear that the dam, which is being built about 15 km from the Ethiopian border with Sudan, could cause water shortages. Sudan is also concerned about the structure's safety.

Ethiopia's Foreign Affairs Ministry spokesman Ambassador Dina Mufti said that

the country could not sign an agreement that stipulated the passage of specific quotas of water from the dam to the downstream countries.

Ethiopia's proposal confirmed its commitment to taking into account the concerns of the downstream countries about droughts that may occur in the future, according to Mufti.

He told a media briefing that Ethiopia was anticipating such concerns and was taking droughts into account and dealing with them, adding that Ethiopia had also confirmed in its proposal that it would continue the stages of filling the dam and not address the issue of sustainable sharing of the Nile's water.

"Water sharing is not limited to the three countries, there are Nile Basin countries that you must be involved with," Mufti said.

He expressed Ethiopia's hope that the negotiations would be successful and that an agreement about the rules for filling the dam would be reached as soon as possible, as he stressed his country's commitment to continuing negotiations to resolve outstanding issues.

Last week Egypt and Sudan announced the suspension of meetings about the Renaissance Dam and plans to hold "internal consultations on the Ethiopian bid" instead after the release of a letter presented by Ethiopia's water minister, including draft guidelines and rules for filling the dam. Egypt confirmed that the Ethiopian letter contradicted what was agreed upon in the meetings headed by the water ministers.

Mohamed Nasr Allam, former Egyptian minister of irrigation and water resources, slammed Ethiopia and the African Union's handling of the current negotiations.

"The recent Ethiopian statements confirm Addis Ababa's insistence on obtaining a share of the Blue Nile water, deducting from the two downstream countries' shares, and that it will not sign an agreement to operate the Renaissance Dam," he told Arab News. "Ethiopia is behaving like a hostile country and is not ashamed of that, and the time has come for Egypt and Sudan to act accordingly.

"The African Union is incapable. My personal belief is that the last stop of the peace process is the Security Council," he said. "Hopefully the case will be referred to international arbitration while stopping the construction of the dam or issuing a decision to respect the old agreements. With the help of international experts, we can reach rules to reduce harm to Egypt and Sudan, whether in filling or operating the dam."

Muhammad Mursi, former assistant foreign minister, said the time had come for Egypt to return to the UN Security Council once more given Ethiopia's position on the dam.

Mursi described Mufti's statements as "revealing and indicative" even though there was nothing new in them.

"(His statement) reaffirms that Ethiopia is continuing in its defiance and

refusal to recognize any rights for Egypt and Sudan, other than what Ethiopia offers us and according to its estimates and interests and without any written commitment.”

The main dilemma with Ethiopia was its refusal to recognize Egyptian rights to the Nile’s waters, he added, and its refusal to sign any document of a mandatory nature with Egypt and Sudan to monitor any control or restrictions on Ethiopia’s complete freedom to build dams and to benefit from the waters of the Blue Nile in the manner that it did.

He believed that the process of filling and operating the dam reservoir was neither the main obstacle nor the most significant in these negotiations.

“We have no other peaceful alternative but to return to the Security Council, after we gave one opportunity after another to solve the problem within Africa, and prior to that dozens of opportunities over many years in the direct bilateral or tripartite framework negotiations,” he said.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Ethiopia](#)

[Egypt](#)

[Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam](#)

Egypt, Sudan, Ethiopia begin new talks over disputed dam Ethiopia, Egypt reach ‘major common understanding’ on Nile dam