

Speech: We may be losing the fight against famine in Yemen

Thank you very much indeed Madam President and thank you to you for scheduling this important briefing today.

Thank you to the Under-Secretary-General, and to pick up one of your points, Mark thank you very much for everything your work has to do on the ground but also all the other UN agencies. I was very struck by what you said about how large scale the relief effort is and also how it's Yemenis helping Yemenis and I think that's important. It was a very sobering briefing, coming on top of sobering briefings that we've had before. I was very struck by your phrases about lives on the line and how close we are to famine and that we may even be losing the fight. This is obviously extremely serious news. This is grave distress inflicted on the people of Yemen. We are following the escalation military fighting around Hodeidah city very closely.

I wanted to pick up on your statement and just highlight four areas. I think the first is to reiterate again, I think everybody on the Council has done this but it bears repeating: all parties to the conflict must do everything possible to protect civilians, protect civilian infrastructure and to demonstrate in practical terms their commitment to upholding International Humanitarian Law. I was extremely concerned to hear about the armed groups in the humanitarian facilities. I think the Council should demand that they leave. These facilities need to be kept for the protection of civilians. All parties have responsibilities under International Humanitarian Law and the Council looks to them to discharge those responsibilities to the full.

I think the second point is obviously around the flow of food, fuel and medical supplies into and throughout Yemen. It's critical that all parties facilitate this, that they work with OCHA and your partners on the ground. It's also important that civilians can move freely and safely so that those who can travel can get out of harm's way as necessary. We have been deeply concerned by reports that military action is making the Hodeidah-Hajjah road unsafe. This will hamper the flow of supplies on from Hodeidah to Northern Yemen. It's vital but onward supply routes remain operational. And I just want to echo what you said, this can't just be done through humanitarian assistance. We absolutely need the commercial route and the commercial supplies to be open and flowing. So this means that the Hodeidah and Saleef ports need to remain open and it means the mills and the storage facilities need to be protected so that the food supply is safe.

I wanted to echo what Mark said about urgent action on stabilizing the economy. Nearly since the end of July, the Yemeni Rial has depreciated over 20 percent. This has halved the buying power of the people for food and other staples – half in comparison with a year ago – so this is obviously increasing the vulnerability of families even to meet the basic needs and humanitarian aid as we heard is over-stretched and even that isn't enough because there are 29 million Yemenis liable to need our help. So we need to

collectively think further about how best the Council can help stabilise the humanitarian situation by helping stabilise the economic situation or by dealing with the relevant UN and other agencies and countries who can help in order to do that. But I think I would like to call on all sides to cooperate even more intensely with OCHA and the UN agencies on the ground to try and help steady this.

And I wanted to end where Mark ended, on the political situation. I won't rehearse the reasons why the Geneva talks the Special Envoy Martin Griffiths who is now trying to reconvene political talks. I'm sure that our ministers who are here next week for the UN General Assembly High Level Week will want to have a lot of conversations about Yemen in the margins of High Level Week and I think that will be important. But let me end by calling on all sides once again to get behind the process that the Special Envoy is leading and urge them all to find the flexibility it will require for the sake of the Yemeni people.

Thank you Madam President.