

'We cannot lose momentum' on the road to peace in Yemen, UN envoy warns

Martin Griffiths told Council members he was “under no illusion that these are very sensitive and challenging days” for both the Government coalition, and opposition Houthi leaders, “and for Yemen as a whole.”

Mr. Griffiths updated the Council that since the consultations in Stockholm, President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi and Abdelmalik Al-Houthi, leader of Houthi opposition movement Ansar Allah, have recognized the meetings “as an important step towards a comprehensive resolution to the conflict” and were determined to build on that progress through more dialogue.

Noting that the 18 December ceasefire in and around Hudaydah had been largely adhered to, Mr. Griffiths said the fighting was now “very limited” compared to the clashes beforehand, which threatened the lives of hundreds-of-thousands of civilians living inside the Houthi-held port and city.

“This relative calm, I believe, indicates the tangible benefit of the [Stockholm Agreement](#) for the Yemeni people and the continued commitment of the parties to making the agreement work,” he asserted.

The special envoy credited the Council’s “swift authorization” of December’s [resolution 2451](#), and rapid deployment of ceasefire monitors as “a clear signal to the parties and the Yemeni people of the international community’s desire to turn the agreement into facts on the ground” and hoped that security arrangements and the humanitarian access routes agreed in Stockholm will be implemented swiftly.

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Turning to the major city Taiz where the two sides have battled for control for more than three years, the UN envoy recalled its “enormous historic significance” and called its people a driving economic and cultural force.

“Civilians in Taiz have suffered far too much for too long, and the destruction in the city has been terrible”, he underscored. “The flow of humanitarian aid needs to increase, and people need the chance to rebuild”, he added, pointing out that the Stockholm consultations provided a platform for this.

On the prisoner exchange agreement, Mr. Griffiths said that although implementation has been “gradual and tentative”, the UN was working with both parties to finalize the lists each submitted in Stockholm and would follow up with talks on 14 January in Amman, Jordan.

“I hope these talks will allow many thousands of prisoners to go home and be

reunited with their families”, he said, asking for the Council’s support in encouraging the parties to “overcome any challenges that may be encountered along the way.”

Mr. Griffiths lamented that no consensus was reached on the Central Bank of Yemen or opening the Sana’a airport, which would significantly contribute to the economy and help relieve humanitarian suffering.

“I continue to work with the parties to resolve them,” he maintained, urging both sides to “exert restraint in their media rhetoric”.

With the goal of reaching a lasting political settlement, Mr. Griffiths said “Sweden was just a start” and that it was important to keep up the momentum in moving the process forward.

Calling speedy implementation “crucial”, he stressed that a lot of work needs to be done “before the parties can reach a comprehensive peace agreement”.

The UN envoy spelled out: “We need to convene the next round, but we need substantive progress on what was agreed in Stockholm”.

“Progress in Sweden is a basis for confidence. It would be conducive to further progress at the next round of consultations”, he concluded.

‘Implement what was agreed in Sweden’

UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock was next to brief the 15-member Council and began with positive news that the Stockholm Agreement, and resolution 2451, “is already having an impact”.

Civilians in Hudaydah “are a little more confident and a little less afraid that they will be victims of air strikes or caught in crossfire as they go about their lives” he said, although, he added that the wider humanitarian situation in Yemen “remains catastrophic”.

Mr. Lowcock laid out what humanitarian agencies are doing to meet Yemen’s needs, including the [World Food Programme’s \(WFP\)](#) December operation, providing a record 9.5 million people with emergency food assistance.

“WFP will expand operations to reach 12 million people a month, including the 10 million most at risk of famine, and two million acutely-vulnerable Internally Displaced People (IDPs)” he elaborated.

Humanitarian agencies continue to roll back what was the world’s worst cholera epidemic last year, improve IDP living conditions, and mitigate hunger and malnutrition for 240,000 people facing catastrophic levels of food insecurity. “Altogether, operations in Yemen this year will, if funding is available, reach 15 million people – about half the population,” he informed.

He acknowledged the seriousness of WFP’s recent strong statement against the theft of food intended for civilians, seeking [action](#) from *defacto* authorities

over food aid misappropriation, saying “Steps to improve targeting and delivery mechanisms are being taken as we speak”.

Security Council resolution status

The relief chief also updated the Council on humanitarian issues related to Resolution 2451, beginning with access.

“The humanitarian scale-up that Yemenis need will not be possible if aid workers and supplies cannot travel safely and freely to where they are needed”, he said, pointing out that enough grain for 3.5 million people had been sitting unused, possibly spoiling in the Red Sea Mills and humanitarian warehouses of Hudaydah.

“All parties must allow and facilitate safe, timely and unhindered humanitarian access, in line with international humanitarian law and the requirements of Security Council resolution 2451,” he said, saying that WFP still had nearly 500 containers stuck in Aden port.

Situation at a glance:

- More than 24 million people, or 80 per cent of the population, need humanitarian assistance.
- Nearly 10 million of them are one step away from famine.
- More than 3.3 million have been displaced, 600 in the last 12 months.
- Only half of health facilities are fully functioning.
- Millions of Yemenis are hungrier, sicker and more vulnerable than a year ago.

Regarding the economy, he said: “Your resolution also points out that paying pensions and civil-servant salaries across the country is another key element of strengthening the economy.”

The resolution calls also on the parties to strengthen the economy and the Central Bank.

Mr. Lowcock noted that the Yemeni rial is losing value, and without intervention, the International Monetary Fund ([IMF](#)) estimates that the exchange rate is likely to slide further – devastating for the millions of people who need “food, fuel and medicines.”

Turning to additional funding for the 2019 UN Coordinated Humanitarian Response Plan, he recalled that last year, \$2.4 billion, or 83 per cent of requirements, were eventually raised.

“In response to the deterioration in the situation we have seen especially over the last six months, humanitarian agencies will need even more money,” he argued.

He outlined that on 26 February, the Secretary-General would convene a high-level pledging conference in Geneva where “We are counting on all our donors

to announce even more generous funding”.

“Millions of Yemenis are looking to us for assistance and protection, and we need to see more and faster progress on all the humanitarian elements of your resolution to make any practical difference to their lives” concluded the Humanitarian Coordinator.