



## Security Council

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### Letter dated 12 June 2023 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

The Security Council, in its resolution [2643 \(2022\)](#), requested that I present a review of the United Nations Mission to Support the Hudaydah Agreement (UNMHA) at least one month before the expiration of its mandate on 14 July 2023. The Mission, established pursuant to paragraph 1 of Council resolution [2452 \(2019\)](#), supports the implementation of the Agreement on the City of Hudaydah and the Ports of Hudaydah, Salif, and Ra's Isa, as set out in the Stockholm Agreement ([S/2018/1134](#), annex).

Since my previous review, submitted on 14 June 2022 ([S/2022/484](#)), UNMHA has continued to pursue the priorities set forth therein, namely: (a) incrementally intensifying its monitoring of the ports and the governorate-wide ceasefire; (b) restoring communication and liaison channels between the parties; (c) re-establishing avenues for de-escalation; and (d) prioritizing entry points for confidence-building and mine action, while working with the parties to calibrate implementation of the Agreement.

The Mission enhanced its monitoring of the governorate-wide ceasefire and intensified its patrolling in the ports of Hudaydah, Salif and Ra's Isa. Monitoring visits to conflict-affected districts on both sides of the front line in the south of Hudaydah Governorate were an important milestone, particularly in areas that the Mission had not previously been able to access. The increased frequency of patrolling in the ports underscores the primacy placed by the Mission on supporting the functioning of the ports of Hudaydah, Salif and Ra's Isa and ensuring their civilian character. The Mission continued to play an important supporting role as part of United Nations efforts to enable the flow of essential goods and humanitarian assistance into Yemen. Despite the progress made, freedom of movement remains one of the greatest challenges to the Mission's effective operation, particularly in monitoring the civilian nature of the Red Sea ports.

The advancements since June 2022 were, in part, the outcome of the Mission increasing its direct engagement with the parties at multiple levels. In this regard, an important breakthrough was achieved in March 2023, when a meeting between UNMHA and government representatives of the Redeployment Coordination Committee took place for the first time since the Government of Yemen suspended its participation in the Committee in 2020. Frequent engagement with representatives of the Houthis (who also call themselves Ansar Allah) also continued throughout the period under review. In addition, the Mission, in coordination with the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, engaged regional actors in support of advancing its mandate and building a common purpose behind the implementation of the Hudaydah Agreement.



As the Mission sought to calibrate its support to the parties in their implementation of the Agreement within a shifting political and operational environment, mine action coordination and civil affairs became increasingly integral to building the confidence of the local population in the positive impacts of the Hudaydah Agreement. Progress within these areas also opened space for increased collaboration with United Nations humanitarian and development actors operating within the governorate. These efforts were bolstered by the Mission's enhanced presence in government-controlled areas, which has been in place since 4 June 2022.

While the situation was relatively stable throughout the reporting period, UNMHA was required to respond to a number of incidents. The Mission expressed its deep concern over a large military parade held by the Houthis in Hudaydah City on 1 September 2022, in violation of the Agreement. The Mission also registered daily violations of the governorate-wide ceasefire, although hostilities between the parties in Hudaydah did not amount to major or sustained escalation.

The nationwide truce, and the subsequent period, had a positive impact on the people of Hudaydah, the worrying humanitarian situation in the governorate notwithstanding. The reduction in the intensity of military confrontation between the parties in Hudaydah and the increased flow of goods through the Red Sea ports brought tangible benefits for the local population. These must be sustained, together with efforts that are supportive of the Yemen-wide political process.

### **Military and political dynamics**

The United Nations-brokered nationwide truce (April–October 2022) continued on a de facto basis and provided a semblance of normalcy and stability in large parts of Hudaydah Governorate and beyond. Since the truce expired, the efforts of the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen have focused on bringing the parties to an agreement on the implementation of economic and humanitarian measures, a nationwide ceasefire and the resumption of a political process to end the war. These efforts have been supported by discussions between regional and Yemeni stakeholders. In addition, a release of almost 900 detainees in April 2023 was a sign of the benefits that compromise between the parties can bring to the Yemeni people.

The front line established in southern Hudaydah Governorate following the November 2021 withdrawal of the Government of Yemen joint forces, now a contested area about 100 km south of Hudaydah City, settled into a relatively stable pattern of low-level hostilities. Nevertheless, the threat of military escalation persisted owing to continual clashes between the parties. Hays and Tuhayta' districts were most affected by the conflict, with the Mission receiving daily reports on the use of small arms, mortars, artillery and drones for both reconnaissance purposes and for conducting air-to-ground strikes.

Since 14 June 2022 and as at 1 June 2023, the Mission had received reports of 310 civilian casualties in Hudaydah Governorate due to the impact of the conflict, including 207 people injured and 103 people killed. Women constituted 6.5 per cent and children 44 per cent of casualties. In total, 16 per cent of the casualties were a direct result of hostilities, while the remaining 84 per cent were victims of landmines and explosive remnants of war. Hudaydah Governorate remains the area of Yemen most affected by the blight of landmines and explosive remnants of war, with Hays, Tuhayta', Durayhimi and Bayt al-Faqih districts the locations where civilians are assessed as most at risk of harm.

On 6 December 2022, in Hali district, a UNMHA armoured vehicle that was part of a convoy accompanied by the Houthi de facto governor of Hudaydah detonated a landmine, damaging a mission vehicle. While no mission personnel or civilians were

injured in the incident, it further highlighted the prevalent risk of landmines and explosive remnants of war facing the people in Hudaydah. The Mission subsequently reviewed its security procedures and discussed with the Houthis measures to address the threat of landmines and explosive remnants of war facing Yemenis, including the expansion of mine risk education projects.

On 1 September 2022, the Houthis held a substantial military parade in Hudaydah City, in violation of the stipulation in the Hudaydah Agreement that the parties shall be committed to remove any military manifestations and not to bring any military reinforcements to the city, the ports of Hudaydah, Salif and Ra's Isa, and the governorate. The parade included the participation of Houthi military personnel and equipment, including naval forces and materiel. The Mission communicated its concern to the Houthis and publicly identified the parade as a violation of the Agreement. On 22 March, UNMHA noted that Houthi de facto military authorities had conducted an additional parade in Hudaydah City featuring uniformed personnel and statements by Houthi officials, reportedly without overt display of arms or equipment. A smaller-scale naval military exercise was also conducted by the Houthis between 27 and 28 March 2023 in waters in proximity to the ports of Salif and Ra's Isa, and Kamaran Island in the Red Sea.

In this context, the parties attempted to consolidate their authority in the respective areas under their control. On both sides of the front line, the parties sought to promote initiatives in such areas as infrastructure development, health care, education, water and sanitation, income generation and the rule of law. In this regard, the Presidential Leadership Council Vice-President Brigadier General Tareq Saleh appeared to increase his efforts to project a more visible profile in Hudaydah Governorate and on the west coast in general, attending and sponsoring political and military events in Khawkhah and Hays districts, in a continuation of activities noted in the previous review. He called for unity among government-affiliated political and military factions, including those based in Hudaydah and Ta'izz Governorates.

Even as the parties focused on internal consolidation, they blamed each other for the continued dire situation in Hudaydah Governorate. The Houthis organized demonstrations and sit-ins, held press conferences and issued public statements, emphasizing civilian casualties and damage to infrastructure allegedly caused by government-affiliated forces. The Houthis also repeatedly raised complaints about damage to Hudaydah's ports and airport and the resultant economic and civilian impact in their interactions with the Mission in the context of the Redeployment Coordination Committee and during patrols in the ports. Meanwhile, the Government and the authorities in districts under its control alleged that the Houthis repressed the population, illegally seized land, destroyed essential infrastructure and diverted funds and assistance intended for the population to military activities. The Government also called for the reopening of roads across the front line to alleviate humanitarian needs, which it raised with the Mission in the context of the Redeployment Coordination Committee and engagements of the Mission with military, social and political officials and women leaders from Hudaydah Governorate.

The situation in neighbouring Ta'izz Governorate has had an ongoing impact on Hudaydah Governorate. Frequent clashes observed in Maqbanah district in Ta'izz, which borders Hudaydah Governorate, were often mirrored in the frequency and severity of clashes in southern Hudaydah Governorate. A military escalation by the Houthis in Ta'izz Governorate between February and March 2023 was a reminder of the fragile nature of the current situation. Efforts to gain military control over terrain in Ta'izz may directly affect the posture of the parties in southern Hudaydah and lead to an increase in hostilities.

### **Redeployment Coordination Committee and its de-escalation mechanisms**

The Mission made progress in its efforts to secure a sustained resumption of the Redeployment Coordination Committee, the Hudaydah Agreement's core implementation and coordination mechanism. These efforts centred on: (a) re-establishing dialogue between the parties through a joint meeting; (b) addressing the issues barring the participation of the Government of Yemen in the Committee; and (c) enabling the Mission's equal access to both sides of the front line in Hudaydah Governorate.

The Mission continued regular bilateral engagement with the Houthi delegation to the Redeployment Coordination Committee to address freedom of movement in relation to monitoring of the ports and conflict-affected areas in the southern districts, mine action activities, and engagement and consultation with communities. Through the Redeployment Coordination Committee de-escalation mechanism, the Mission continued to receive ceasefire violation reports from the Houthis and discussed observations from its regular patrols in the Red Sea ports. Throughout these engagements, the Houthis expressed their commitment to the Hudaydah Agreement and requested that UNMHA, as well as the United Nations country team, increase support and cooperation on the delivery of humanitarian assistance and mine action efforts. The Mission conducted regular meetings with Houthi officials in Sana'a in support of its work with the Redeployment Coordination Committee and the implementation of the Hudaydah Agreement.

Since August 2022, mission leadership has intensified engagement with representatives of the Government of Yemen. This engagement served to address the concerns raised by the Government regarding the killing of its liaison officer on a front line in March 2020, an incident that prompted the Government to suspend its participation in the Redeployment Coordination Committee, and to seek agreement to conduct monitoring visits in government-controlled areas of the governorate. In parallel, the Mission, in close consultation and coordination with the Special Envoy, intensified engagement with regional actors and diplomatic partners to help to address challenges facing mandate implementation.

In February and March 2023, these consultations culminated in the Head of Mission and the Deputy Head of Mission undertaking separate visits to the Hays and Khawkhah districts, which are under government control, a significant step towards achieving the Mission's objective of establishing a footprint on both sides of the front line. In conjunction with his visit, on 13 March 2023, the Head of Mission held a meeting with the government delegation to the Redeployment Coordination Committee for the first time in three years, during which the latter expressed willingness to resume cooperation with the Mission and appointed a liaison officer to this end. The establishment of regular monitoring visits in government-held areas of Hudaydah Governorate as well as potential avenues to restore the Redeployment Coordination Committee as a mechanism for coordination, confidence-building and de-escalation were also discussed. In the weeks following the meeting, the Government began to provide occasional reports on ceasefire violations to the Mission and facilitated joint visits to the sites of alleged ceasefire violations.

The Mission continued to encourage the parties to resume the Redeployment Coordination Committee through various modalities. To date, the parties have not agreed to reconvene. Reinstating the Redeployment Coordination Committee as a joint forum for de-escalation remains one of the Mission's priorities.

### **Monitoring the ceasefire and maintaining the civilian nature of the ports**

On 1 February, the Head of Mission conducted a visit to the southern districts of the governorate under the control of the Houthis, following over eight months of

advocacy amid persistent denials of access. This enabled UNMHA to access several districts for the first time, including Zabid, Tuhayta' and Jarrahi districts, and to observe the security situation and impact of the conflict on the population there. The report of the visit was shared with the United Nations country team to facilitate its consideration of humanitarian programming in these locations. Access to the southern districts continues to be central to the implementation of the mandate of UNMHA since the front line shifted following the withdrawal of the Government of Yemen from Hudaydah City in November 2021. The Houthis have not granted the Mission access to this area for subsequent visits despite repeated requests.

On 13 March 2023, the Head of Mission visited Hays and Khawkhah districts, which are under government control, and discussed the Mission's freedom of movement across the front line, ceasefire violations, and mine action support with government-affiliated stakeholders. The local authorities called for UNMHA to establish a permanent presence in Khawkhah to enable regular visits to the front line and support ceasefire monitoring. Previously, the Deputy Head of Mission visited the area in February 2023 and met with local authorities to discuss collaboration between the Government and UNMHA, as well as with local women's organizations. The Deputy Head of Mission also met and offered condolences to the family of the Government's liaison officer who died in March 2020. The visit represented a step towards restoring cooperation between UNMHA and the Government. The considerable progress made within the Mission's operations in government-controlled areas is a positive step that was enabled by an increased and sustained UNMHA presence therein.

UNMHA also progressively strengthened its activities in support of the women and peace and security agenda. In December 2022, in Aden, the Deputy Head of Mission of UNMHA engaged with women community figures and the leaders of women's organizations based in Hudaydah to discuss means of promoting women's participation in the implementation of the Hudaydah Agreement. In March 2023, UNMHA engaged with women's organizations in Khawkhah and Hays districts with a view to implementing quick-impact community projects in support of building confidence in the Agreement. These initiatives were part of a broader advancement of the Mission's community engagement in Hudaydah Governorate, particularly with a diverse range of women community leaders and grass-roots figures. These interactions paved the way for significant progress, including the conduct of monitoring visits to Khawkhah and Hays, while highlighting the importance of integrating the women and peace and security agenda into the Mission's operations.

The Mission conducted an unannounced patrol in Bayt al-Faqih district in Houthi-controlled territory in September 2022 following reports of the forced displacement of civilians by Houthi representatives to make way for military installations. Similarly, two visits were conducted to locations in Hays district in March 2023 to ascertain the circumstances around reports of Houthi artillery fire and drone strikes targeting civilian objects. Repeated requests to both parties to enable the systematic monitoring of their compliance with the governorate-wide ceasefire in all districts have not yet been met with agreement.

The Mission continued to conduct regular patrols in the ports of Hudaydah, Salif and Ra's Isa to monitor the maintenance of their civilian nature. The Mission did not observe any military objects or manifestations during the conduct of its patrols; however, Houthi restrictions on the Mission's freedom of movement continued to limit its ability to assess the situation more broadly, independently and comprehensively at Hudaydah's ports.

### **Coordination with Stockholm Agreement stakeholders**

UNMHA continued to reinforce coordination with Stockholm Agreement stakeholders, with a view to building unified intent and support behind the Hudaydah Agreement. UNMHA, working through an established forum for regular exchange of information with the United Nations country team, regularly provided situational awareness briefings and took an active part in coordination bodies overseen by the United Nations country team. These efforts bolstered collaboration with United Nations agencies, funds and programmes across numerous areas of work. One such area has been the offer of potential logistical, situational awareness and crisis management support, where appropriate, to the FSO *Safer* vessel salvage operation that was an outcome of continuing cooperation with the Office of the Resident Coordinator for Yemen and the United Nations Development Programme.

Mine action and civil affairs are other areas in which UNMHA has strengthened coordination with the United Nations country team and Stockholm Agreement stakeholders. The Mission has continued its mandated mine action coordination role in Hudaydah Governorate and expanded the local mine action coordination mechanism comprising the Yemen Executive Mine Action Centre (Sana'a), the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the International Committee of the Red Cross and Save the Children. UNMHA has also worked to build partnerships with the Yemen Executive Mine Action Centre (Aden) and other relevant actors in government-controlled areas in Hudaydah Governorate. Coordination and engagement with non-governmental organizations undertaking demining activities (e.g. the Danish Refugee Council, Norwegian People's Aid, the HALO Trust, Humanity and Inclusion, and Project Masam) have also been important developments in the past year. The Mission has successfully provided targeted technical expert advice to mine action actors in both Houthi- and government-controlled areas and assisted in efforts to develop and implement a coherent strategic plan to support demining activities. This includes support for efforts to promote information-sharing on mine and explosive remnants of war incidents, identify and survey mined areas and amplify explosive ordnance risk education with a focus on women and children.

The expanding civil affairs work of UNMHA includes potential quick-impact projects that aim to build relationships with communities in Hudaydah. In this regard, UNMHA is coordinating its activities with the United Nations country team and relevant coordination clusters, as well as with the Office of the Special Envoy, in order to maximize impact and avoid duplication of effort. By sharing its monitoring visit reports on conditions in conflict-affected districts of Hudaydah, UNMHA contributes to the facilitation of United Nations interventions in locations that have often thus far remained difficult to reach for humanitarian and development programming. These efforts aim to strengthen a collective approach to supporting communities within Hudaydah Governorate and engendering stability that supports the implementation of the Hudaydah Agreement. The Mission also continues to advocate other initiatives, such as party requests for the opening of civilian crossing points on the front line. Such activities are done in close consultation with the Office of the Special Envoy and the United Nations country team.

Paramount among the Mission's coordination efforts remains its relationship with the Office of the Special Envoy. At the technical level, innovative approaches to information-sharing, where appropriate, have been institutionalized, while, more broadly, UNMHA remains fully dedicated to fostering confidence-building measures in Hudaydah Governorate that support the Special Envoy's efforts to achieve a comprehensive and inclusive negotiated political settlement to end the conflict.

## Observations

As the fifth anniversary of the signing of the Hudaydah Agreement approaches at the end of 2023, the military and political landscape in which UNMHA operates is defined by two key trends. First, following the tangible benefits of the nationwide truce period and its aftermath, the current situation at the national level appears to present clear opportunities to reach a peaceful, comprehensive and inclusive negotiated settlement of the conflict. On the other hand, the front line in Hudaydah Governorate remains active and the risk of escalation, given the persistent ceasefire violations, remains concerning, particularly in the light of the strategic nature of the ports in the economic and humanitarian functioning of Yemen.

In this context, supporting the parties' efforts to maintain the civilian nature of the ports of Hudaydah, Salif and Ra's Isa remains a critical priority for the Mission. Approximately 90 per cent of the country's staple food and nearly all other essential goods are imported, and the majority arrive through the Red Sea ports. In 2022 the monthly average consignments of foodstuffs discharged at the ports of Hudaydah (including both commercial and humanitarian assistance) increased by over 10 per cent, and fuel consignments increased by 300 per cent, compared with 2021. In particular, the six-month truce period saw a 358 per cent increase in fuel imports through the ports of Hudaydah compared with the same six-month period in 2021. While these developments have been significant, the magnitude of the humanitarian challenge in Yemen underscores the importance of this trend continuing and the ports remaining open and operational. The Mission's continued presence in Hudaydah City and its intensified monitoring of the ports therefore remain essential.

The contested southern districts, particularly Hays and Khawkhah, are seeing some of the highest numbers of newly displaced households per week in Yemen. Moreover, the parties have made explicit their efforts to maintain military readiness and the ability to resume operations. Any deterioration or return to conflict in Hudaydah would represent a grave setback in a governorate that has, in the past year, seen relative stability in the military situation and an increased flow of goods and fuel through the ports of Hudaydah, which is particularly critical as the humanitarian situation in Hudaydah and throughout Yemen remains dire.

The impact of the countrywide truce in Hudaydah Governorate and the apparent respect of its central provisions despite its expiry helped to improve the situation in the governorate and bring much-needed relief to the population. Notwithstanding the many challenges noted above, the reduction in hostilities and casualties and the restraint demonstrated by the parties as observed in Hudaydah Governorate over the past year are welcome. However, it is essential that the Houthis allow UNMHA increased, unfettered and independent access to the ports of Hudaydah to instil further confidence in their sustained civilian character. This would help to ensure that the entry of essential goods and humanitarian assistance can continue unimpeded and that the ports do not re-emerge as zones of military confrontation. The facilitation of access throughout the governorate by both parties, including to areas of alleged ceasefire violations and near the front line, remains critical for mandate implementation. In this context, UNMHA stands ready to expand its ceasefire monitoring activities to support the parties in further de-escalating tensions, under the Hudaydah Agreement or any other arrangements to which the parties may agree.

Second, the impact of landmines and explosive remnants of war on civilians in Hudaydah Governorate continues to be dire, and incidents in which civilians, including children and women, are injured and killed remain an all-too-frequent occurrence. The 6 December 2022 incident, in which a UNMHA vehicle struck a landmine, is but one more incident that serves as a stark reminder of the dangers that civilians face daily. This is due in part to the population's increased access to areas

that were formerly part of the front line and where mined areas are unmarked. The intensification of the mine action coordination efforts of UNMHA will continue to help advocate for renewed action and reduce the risk of death or injury among the most vulnerable in Hudaydah Governorate. Collective efforts to build on those initiatives, including support for efforts in government-controlled territory, will be paramount to protecting more of the local population. UNMHA has also been instrumental in advocacy efforts to allow international demining non-governmental organizations to operate in Houthi-controlled areas. The Mission will also bolster the delivery of quick-impact community projects, the increased need for which became apparent during visits to front-line and conflict-affected districts in February and March 2023.

The parties' facilitation of access of UNMHA to the southern districts in February and March 2023 represented an important step towards adjusting the Mission's footprint to reflect the altered context. However, persistent restrictions placed on UNMHA by the Houthis obstruct the Mission's ability to implement its mandate and to play an impartial role in supporting the parties in implementing the Hudaydah Agreement. The Houthis also objected to the Mission's establishment of a presence in areas under government control, in line with its mandate, an issue on which the Mission will continue to engage. The Mission's access throughout Hudaydah Governorate, pursuant to its mandate, must be facilitated by the parties, including through the timely and systematic issuance of visas and permits for entry to Yemen. The approval of several visas by relevant authorities in late 2022 and early 2023 facilitated a substantial increase in the number of monitors able to deploy to Yemen, which served the parties' shared interest in the independent monitoring of the ceasefire and in retaining the civilian character of the ports.

While the front line has stabilized, freedom of movement for civilians throughout Hudaydah Governorate remains restricted, leading to serious hardship, economic distress and obstacles to daily life. The restoration of freedom of movement throughout the governorate is a pillar of the Hudaydah Agreement that remains unfulfilled. UNMHA stands ready to support the parties in examining all options available to restore this fundamental right.

The United Nations remains steadfast in its commitment to facilitate communication through the Redeployment Coordination Committee, the revitalization of which is critical to the implementation of the Hudaydah Agreement and remains unfulfilled. The continued engagement of Houthi representatives of the Committee, as well as the resumption of government engagement with UNMHA, represents a vital step in the achievement of this objective. The Houthis' stated willingness for the Redeployment Coordination Committee to resume operations should be encouraged. The Mission will continue to work with the parties bilaterally and stands ready to facilitate the re-establishment of joint forums for cooperation and de-escalation between the parties at any level.

I should be grateful if you would bring the present letter to the attention of the members of the Security Council.

*(Signed)* António **Guterres**