



# Security Council

Seventy-fifth year

**8704**<sup>th</sup> meeting

Thursday, 16 January 2020, 10 a.m.

New York

*Provisional*

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<i>President:</i>	Mr. Dang . . . . .	(Viet Nam)
<i>Members:</i>	Belgium . . . . .	Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve
	China . . . . .	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Dominican Republic . . . . .	Mr. Bencosme Castaños
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	Niger . . . . .	Mr. Abarry
	Russian Federation . . . . .	Mr. Safronkov
	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines . . . . .	Ms. King
	South Africa . . . . .	Mr. Van Shalkwyk
	Tunisia . . . . .	Mr. Baati
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . . . . .	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America . . . . .	Ms. Norman-Chalet

## Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.*

### **Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

### **The situation in the Middle East**

**The President:** In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Yemen to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Martin Griffiths, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, and Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham, Director, Coordination Division, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Mr. Rajasingham is joining the meeting via video-conference from Geneva.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mr. Griffiths.

**Mr. Griffiths:** Since I last spoke to the Council (see S/PV.8672), our region has been going through a crisis, the consequences of which have threatened the gains we have been observing in Yemen. Fortunately, the immediate crisis seems to be over and I venture to say that through the actions of many people, Yemen has been kept safe from such crisis for now. This achievement — and it is a real achievement — is based on a consensus that Yemen must not be affected by regional tensions.

Most importantly, at this time of crisis we have seen no major acts of military provocation in Yemen. This is remarkable. Indeed, it has been one of the quietest weeks in Yemen since the war began, with only one air strike, very limited military movement on the ground and no drone or missile attacks on neighbouring States. I therefore hope that it is not premature to say that Yemen has emerged at this moment unscathed. This achievement has not come by chance. Yemeni leaders and leaders in the region have deliberately exercised restraint and withheld from acts of provocation.

I would like to add my condolences upon the death of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said on 10 January. There is no doubt that Sultan Qaboos was an inspiring leader in the field of peace and reconciliation. I wish

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq Al Said success in leading Oman in the coming years. That will be of great importance to all of us who are focused on the issue that we will be discussing today.

The regional crisis has tested the resilience of the various efforts being undertaken by the parties. These endeavours must make progress if we are to realize the ambition that 2020 will bring peace to Yemen. I would like to draw the Council's attention to these efforts: the de-escalation of military hostilities and the implementation of the agreements made in Stockholm and Riyadh. I would also like to refer to the efforts on the ancillary measures being undertaken by the parties, which have value in themselves, while also building confidence between the parties in their other endeavours. Where do we stand on each of these tracks?

First, with regard to the de-escalation of military operations, I said to the Council in November that the air war in Yemen had been reduced by 80 per cent. This was a remarkable achievement at that time, and I think that it is even more remarkable now that it has been sustained and even improved upon. Since the beginning of January, there have been nine days with no air strikes at all. It is certainly and tragically true that some fronts remain active and that there are still far too many civilian deaths. Nevertheless, the movement of forces and military on the ground has been reduced. I hope that it is true and will remain so that we are witnessing one of the quietest periods of the conflict. That is no small thing, and the fact that, as I mentioned, it has been sustained even during a period of crisis is notable.

These efforts should be judged not by whether they achieve a perfect ceasefire, but by whether the parties' energies are directed thereto and away from war. Experience, however, tells us that military de-escalation cannot be sustained without political progress among the parties, and that has become the next challenge.

Secondly, I would like to comment on progress in implementing the Riyadh agreement. I want to praise the Government of Yemen and the Southern Transitional Council, which made that agreement, supported by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, for their diligence and their commitment to implementing those commitments. The relative improvement in security in Aden also bodes well for their efforts. The parties' recommitment to time-bound measures to support the implementation of the Riyadh agreement is a very positive sign.

I know first-hand that there are daily detailed negotiations, as we sit here, and I hope that we will see key appointments in Aden in the coming days. I am fairly confident that the implementation of that agreement is moving in a positive direction. Overall, that is good news, not least because it is also a starting point for opening a new page to be dominated, highlighted and shaped by sincere consultations among the Yemeni parties to reach a political solution to end the Yemeni crisis.

With regard to the Stockholm Agreement, in particular as it refers to Al-Hudaydah, none of us should be satisfied with the record of its implementation, but we can take comfort in the fact that the United Nations and the parties remain committed and as active as ever in implementing the commitments they made more than a year ago in Stockholm. The parties work together on a daily basis aboard the United Nations Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement (UNMHA) vessel, moored in the port of Al-Hudaydah, as well as at the joint observation posts, and continue with efforts to further the implementation of the Agreement.

Although violence unfortunately continues in the southern districts of the governorate, the relative calm at the front lines in the city of Al-Hudaydah shows that the measures to enhance the de-escalation and ceasefire mechanism are working, and that is something we can and should build on.

The Redeployment Coordination Committee that was established by the Agreement has engaged in discussions on a road map for opening humanitarian corridors that will improve access for humanitarian agencies — Mr. Rajasingham will focus on that later — and civilian movement in the governorate. I hope that they can reach an agreement on those corridors in the coming weeks to pave the way for further discussions on the implementation of the redeployment of forces.

I should note that, despite the achievements in Al-Hudaydah, the persistent restrictions on the freedom of movement of UNMHA personnel remain a concern. I raised that in Sana'a before Christmas 2019. The restrictions of UNMHA's patrols to the city and the ports, together with their logistical and support activities, contradicts the spirit of the Stockholm Agreement, and I reiterate my call, together with those of others, for their immediate resumption.

I mentioned before to the Council (see S/PV.8672) that we have seen considerable progress related to the entry of fuel ships into Al-Hudaydah and the collection of revenues, as agreed in the Stockholm Agreement. From the establishment of that mechanism in November 2019 until the end of the year, more fuel has been delivered to Al-Hudaydah than in any other equivalent period in 2019 and the taxes have been collected and deposited in an account in the Central Bank in Al-Hudaydah. We are working with the parties to reach an agreement on how those revenues can be used urgently to contribute to paying the salaries of civil servants, as set out in the Stockholm Agreement.

Turning briefly to further confidence-building measures, the proposal for so-called mercy flights refers to a World Health Organization (WHO) project negotiated by WHO with the Government of Yemen and Ansar Allah over many months. Those flights will transport patients who need medical attention unavailable in Yemen to agreed locations abroad.

In recent weeks, WHO has benefited from an extraordinary array of diplomatic support to make those flights happen. Indeed, the coalition has provided its own support for the project in a statement of 26 November 2019 and a number of Member States have intervened at the highest levels to clear away any obstacles to that project. We thank them for their diligence. We are very close to seeing the first flight move 30 patients, who are waiting in Sana'a, for their treatment. I truly hope that, by the time we meet next month, we will have seen the first flight completed.

Certainly, the release of six Saudi detainees by Ansar Allah on 1 January is further evidence of good will between the parties. I thank Ansar Allah for that important humanitarian gesture and the International Committee of the Red Cross for its support in moving the detainees from Yemen to Saudi Arabia. However, it falls short of the aspirations of the parties under the Stockholm Agreement and discussions on the release of many thousands of prisoners and detainees. We continue to hope that the parties can make that happen soon, and, for our part, I intend to convene the prisoner-exchange committee created under the Stockholm Agreement in the coming days with the intention of achieving substantive numbers of prisoner releases.

All of these initiatives and the measures associated with them support the urgent search for a political solution and the end of the conflict in Yemen. That

pursuit is not dependent on the success of any one of them but reinforced by the success of all of them. With each positive step, we are brought closer to formally launching political consultations between the Government of Yemen and Ansar Allah. I have spoken about that in the Council on a number of occasions, with the hope that we see that happen soon.

Indeed, the significance and meaning of the initiatives to which I have alluded will become real only in the context of such a political solution to end the conflict. We have discussed in this Chamber and at consultations the need for impatience in that respect. Yemen has recently been brushed by potential tragedy from regional tensions and, so far, appears to have emerged unscathed. That is evidence of the leaders' desire to keep Yemen safe from such tensions, but it is a fragile safety and one that needs our diligent and continuing attention if we are to deliver on our promise to the people of Yemen so that, this year, they may see the peace they so evidently deserve.

**The President:** I thank Mr. Griffiths for his briefing.

I now give the floor Mr. Rajasingham.

**Mr. Rajasingham:** Every month, we brief the Security Council on five priority issues in Yemen: first, respect for international humanitarian law and the protection of civilians; secondly, humanitarian access; thirdly, funding for the United Nations aid operation; fourthly, the Yemeni economy; and, lastly, progress towards achieving peace. Last year, we saw improvements on many of those issues. The Special Envoy also outlined earlier important steps forward on the political track, but events over the past two months remind us how volatile the situation remains.

First, with regard to the protection of civilians, Yemen is on the whole less dangerous for civilians than it was before the Stockholm Agreement a year ago. Civilian casualties in 2019 were approximately 35 per cent lower than the previous year, and civilian fatalities are down by almost half. However, it is still a very dangerous place. In recent weeks, we have seen hostilities flare up once again along several front lines, particularly in Al-Dhale'e, Al-Hudaydah and Shabwah. Although clashes have been mostly contained, we continue to see mass-casualty incidents across the country.

On 25 December, a market in Sa'ada was attacked for the third time in a month, killing at least 8 civilians,

while 89 civilians have been killed or wounded in attacks at the same market since November 2019. Every day, we receive reports of civilians killed or injured when shells land on their homes; snipers fire on their communities; or landmines or other munitions explode. Such smaller-scale incidents occur in a constant stream and receive less attention than they should. Critical civilian infrastructure is not spared either. On 26 December 2019, mortars once again struck the Red Sea Mills in Al-Hudaydah, forcing the World Food Programme to temporarily suspend milling.

It is unacceptable that civilians should so disproportionately bear the brunt of this conflict. At all times, the parties must uphold their obligations under international humanitarian law to avoid harm to civilians and civilian infrastructure. The best way to end such harm is to build on the de-escalation measures the Special Envoy has described and to move as quickly as possible to a nationwide ceasefire.

The second issue is also an obligation under international humanitarian law: unhindered humanitarian access. Our most recent data show that access constraints are affecting 6.7 million people who need assistance across the country. This figure has never been so high. In recent briefings, Council members have heard about the bureaucratic impediments, harassment and violence that humanitarian agencies are facing in northern Yemen. Serious problems persist. Too many staff are harassed and threatened. Others are arbitrarily detained or unable to move freely, sometimes for extended periods. Humanitarian premises have been forcibly entered. Missions continue to be delayed or cancelled, which means people do not receive the help they need on time. We are engaging continuously with the Ansar Allah authorities on these concerns and hope to find practical solutions to ensure we can deliver assistance in accordance with humanitarian principles. Our donors have made it clear that they are watching this issue very closely as they make funding decisions for this year.

On a separate note, we were encouraged that senior Ansar Allah officials recently agreed, without conditions, to the assessment of the *FSO SAFER* oil tanker, which is decaying off the coast of Al-Hudaydah and at risk of rupturing. We were therefore disappointed when other Ansar Allah officials later reversed this position. We are following up with the authorities now to confirm how we might proceed.

In the south, humanitarian agencies also face constraints, and we are concerned that these recently seem to be intensifying. Ongoing volatility remains an issue. Periodic clashes in Shabwah have prevented aid convoys from travelling along the southern coast several times, including just two weeks ago. The recent opening of Mukalla airport to humanitarian flights will go a long way towards addressing this challenge.

Humanitarians have also been directly targeted. Over several days in late December, the premises of four international humanitarian organizations in Al Dhale'e were attacked with rocket-propelled grenades. These unprecedented attacks wounded one person and damaged property. As a result, 14 organizations suspended programmes benefiting 217,000 people in the area, although some of the most critical activities continued without interruption.

We are grateful to the Government of Yemen, local authorities and other stakeholders for working closely with us to improve security. Humanitarian organizations in the area are now working to resume their activities safely. We are also seeking the Government's support on several proposed regulations that would, we believe, hinder the delivery of humanitarian assistance. In parallel, we continue to advocate faster procedures for project approvals and importation of key assets. We look forward to continuing this dialogue.

Despite all the challenges I have just described, we are still able to deliver the world's largest aid programme in Yemen. The results speak for themselves. We pay tribute again to United Nations staff, as well as the staff of the non-governmental organizations and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, for their incredible work.

The World Food Programme and its partners are providing food assistance to more than 12 million people every month across the country. With support from humanitarian agencies, 7 million people are able to access drinking water. Some 1.2 million medical consultations take place every month, and more than 2,000 health facilities are receiving support. There are many other examples.

The foregoing is only possible thanks to our generous donors, which brings me to my third point: funding for the aid operation. With nearly \$3.5 billion received — or 83 per cent of our requirements and about a billion dollars more than in 2018 — last year's response plan was relatively well resourced. This year,

Yemen will remain the world's largest humanitarian crisis. We are doing everything we can to mitigate the impact of this crisis, including adding new programmes to boost the incomes of families facing famine conditions. However, key assessments are being delayed in the north. We are hoping these assessments can move forward in the weeks ahead. Because of our strong financial footing coming into the new year, we expect that we will be appealing for less than 2019. Altogether, we aim to assist 15.6 million people this year, which represents about half the population. To do so, we need all our donors to maintain their support. As always, flexible funding early in the year will make an enormous difference.

The fourth issue is the economy. Because Yemen imports nearly everything, maintaining adequate commercial import flows is crucial to ensuring people can access the goods they need to survive. Commercial food imports have remained stable, and fuel imports have recovered since severe shortages in the north last September and October. In December, nearly 260,000 metric tons of commercial fuel entered Al-Hudaydah — about a third more than usual and the second highest figure all year. Fuel imports have been able to recover thanks to the parties' willingness to work with the Special Envoy to establish a new mechanism to manage these imports. We commend the parties for this work.

We hope similar progress can be made regarding the Yemeni rial, which is again losing value. Recent depreciation is at least partially due to a dispute over bank notes printed after 2016. In mid-December, Ansar Allah authorities issued a decree banning use of these notes in the north. This decision is causing newer bank notes to pool in the south, and exchange rates are now diverging. In Aden, rates have been reported as high as 640 rial to the United States dollar versus about 580 rial in the north. Both these figures are far higher than the 215 rate that prevailed before conflict escalated five years ago, which means that essential goods remain unaffordable for millions of people across the country.

Following the Ansar Allah decree, the Government announced that payments to civil servants and retirees in the north could not be made. We estimate that about a quarter of the population rely on these payments to make ends meet. With a rapidly depreciating rial and disrupted salary payments, therefore, we are again seeing some of the key conditions that brought Yemen

to the brink of famine a year ago. We must not let that happen again.

With foreign currency reserves running very low, a first step is to establish a regular programme of foreign-exchange injections, which would, as it did in the past, help bring the exchange rate down and, by extension, make it easier for people to afford what they need to survive. It would also buy more time to resolve the currency dispute without unravelling the entire economy. We hope Yemen's partners will consider this approach as a matter of urgency.

My last point is about the progress towards peace. The Special Envoy has briefed the Council on several encouraging, if still fragile, developments. Certainly, we are closer now to peace than we were before the Stockholm Agreement last year. That does not mean peace is a foregone conclusion — far from it. But after five years of conflict, millions of Yemenis are hoping that this time, with the support of the Security Council, peace may finally come.

**The President:** I thank Mr. Rajasingham for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

**Ms. Pierce** (United Kingdom): I wish to welcome once again the Special Envoy to the Security Council. I also welcome the Director. I thank both of them for their briefings and for their tireless efforts and those of their teams on this very acute problem.

I think it is clear from what we have heard today that the political settlement is the only way to bring long-term stability to Yemen and also to address the humanitarian crisis. The Security Council has a vital role to play in supporting the peace process. I would therefore like to begin by welcoming the unanimous adoption of resolution 2505 (2020) on Monday renewing the mandate of the United Nations Mission to Support the Hudaydah Agreement (see S/PV.8701).

There are a number of things I would like to say, so I will break them down into different headings. Starting with the Riyadh agreement, we strongly support this Saudi-brokered agreement, which is vital to stabilizing the south and key for an overall peace process. Therefore, the announcement on 9 January of a military agreement to make progress on the Riyadh agreement, together with the reports of prisoner exchanges, is very welcome. I was interested in what

Special Envoy Griffiths had to say about reconvening the prisoner-exchange committee. Let us therefore hope that it goes well. Announcements do need to be followed by implementation on the ground, and the formation of a new Yemeni Government is critical to progress.

On de-escalation, it is very welcome that there has been a tangible decrease in inflammatory rhetoric and an apparent decrease in violence around the Saudi border, which are good demonstrations of political will. The announcement on 20 September that the Houthis would cease strikes on Saudi Arabia is particularly welcome, but obviously that needs to be properly enforced and carried out. We must not allow this small window of hope to close. That is one message I took away from what Mr. Griffiths was saying. It is vital that Yemen does not become hostage to a wider regional crisis, and we do hope that the international community can come together to press the Houthis not to become a vehicle for wider retaliation from Iran in the region.

Ultimately, though, as we know, any sustainable peace process needs to be underpinned by a comprehensive security agreement, and brazen strikes, such as the Iranian missile strike on the ARAMCO facilities last year, place that prize in jeopardy.

On the humanitarian side, I thank Director Rajasingham for his briefing. The core message that stands out there is that this is still the largest humanitarian crisis. It was alarming to hear that some of the factors that brought Yemen to the brink of famine are returning. We therefore share the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs' sense of urgency in that regard. We also hope that humanitarian workers can be allowed to do their work properly, and we pay tribute to the work of the Humanitarian Coordinator and the country team.

What Mr. Griffiths told us about World Health Organization mercy flights is obviously extremely important and a bit of good news. I understand that there has been intimidation of humanitarian workers and that it is not limited to Houthi areas. I want to take this opportunity to support the statement that the Emergency Relief Coordinator issued on 23 December 2019, condemning attacks on the premises of several humanitarian organizations in Al-Dhale'e that month. Aid workers must be allowed to deliver their life-saving support in safety.

Concerning the oil tanker, we can only echo what Director Rajasingham said. We do need the issue to be

resolved. The consequences of a rupture or explosion would be phenomenal. Accordingly, we urge the Houthis to let the United Nations assessment team have access to the tanker. Continued inaction can only be described as reckless; therefore, we hope that this can be resolved soon.

The economy is obviously a very difficult issue. We continue to encourage constructive engagement on the economy. We look forward to an ongoing injection of hard currency and greater public financial transparency because the foreign currency shortfall faced by the central bank is extremely concerning and could have serious implications for the humanitarian situation.

To come back to where I started, all of this is obviously leading up to an expression of support for Mr. Griffiths as he tries to take the broader political process forward. However, it is clear from what we have heard today that we cannot afford any let-up in our support for that and the Special Envoy's work.

**Ms. King** (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines): I thank Special Envoy Martin Griffiths and the Director of the Coordination Division of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham, for their timely and insightful briefings.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is delighted that, since assuming the chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 2140 (2014), the mandate of the United Nations Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement has been renewed and that there have been efforts towards de-escalation.

We wish to reaffirm our commitment to the peace process and agree with fellow Council members that the only solution is a political one, inclusive of all Yemenis. In that regard, we wish to stress the need for women to be included in the political process and for the process to reflect the aspirations of youth. That is the only way for us to achieve a durable solution. We must also emphasize the need for the Stockholm, Hodeidah and Riyadh agreements to be fully implemented. In that vein, we commend the efforts of the Government of Yemen and the Southern Transitional Council towards implementation of the Riyadh agreement, noting the deal reached by both parties, which provides for the withdrawal of forces from Aden within three weeks. We encourage further steps towards full implementation.

Five years on, Yemen is still regarded as the world's worst humanitarian crisis. It is not our intention to be

grim, nor do we wish to take anything away from the progress that has been made on the humanitarian front. However, more must be done, and it must be done as a matter of urgency. The *Global Humanitarian Overview 2020* emphasizes that the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance will remain close to 2019 levels of 24 million. The influx of the migrant population has further compounded the situation.

It is imperative that parties do not actively obstruct the work of humanitarian personnel. There is an urgent and critical need for unimpeded humanitarian access. For many people, that is literally the difference between life and death. We also underscore that the facilitation of unimpeded humanitarian relief is enshrined in international humanitarian law, and to deliberately obstruct it is an infraction of a well-established law of our rules-based system. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines strongly condemns any action that breaches international law and further condemns the act of obstructing humanitarian access. We call upon all parties to allow and facilitate full, safe and unhindered access of humanitarian personnel and the delivery of humanitarian assistance to all persons in need.

To conclude, we wish to recall the recent open debate, during which we reaffirmed our commitment to upholding the Charter of the United Nations (see S/PV.8699 *et seq.*). The situation in Yemen does not exemplify those aims. If we sit by and allow large-scale suffering in Yemen to continue, the immutable principles of the Charter of the United Nations will become nothing more than hollow talking points ventilated in patent isolation and disconnected from a reality of ongoing struggle and hardship felt by too many. In that connection, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines reiterates its commitment to the principles of international law and stresses that they must be vigorously upheld. Our adherence must remain steadfast, as we endeavour to address global problems through collective collaboration. We hope that 2020 will bring peace to Yemen.

**Ms. Norman-Chalet** (United States of America): I thank Special Envoy Griffiths and Director Rajasingham for their briefings and for the dedicated work of their teams.

The United States welcomes the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement, with full Council support. With the renewal of the mandate, we hope to see further

progress on the commitments made in Stockholm, along with efforts to reach a broader political solution. The Security Council's unanimous position on this issue is noteworthy and signifies a strong collective support of the United Nations and the role it plays in Yemen, both politically and in delivering humanitarian assistance. We thank the United Kingdom for its efforts in facilitating a smooth mandate renewal.

The United States views ongoing de-escalation efforts and reports of progress by the Yemeni parties in implementing the Riyadh agreement as encouraging. In particular, we welcome reports that work on security arrangements for Aden is under way, and we look forward to the announcement of a governor and a security chief in Aden. Those are important steps on the path to a broader political settlement. A more inclusive Cabinet is in the best interest of all Yemenis and will contribute to a sustainable resolution for this devastating conflict.

While we are heartened by those positive developments, the United States remains extremely concerned about the state of humanitarian access and the treatment of humanitarian workers, particularly in the north. The recent strike on the Red Sea Mills, a critical source of food for thousands of vulnerable Yemenis, is unjustifiable. We would like to recognize the significant efforts of the World Food Programme in restoring operations at the Mills.

We call on the Houthi authorities to reduce the significant and detrimental impediments to the delivery of humanitarian assistance, including by lifting access restrictions and eliminating illegitimate levies on aid projects, both of which heavily delay the delivery of essential assistance and place an undue burden on humanitarian partners attempting to provide critical and life-saving aid.

The United States stands by the efforts of the United Nations and non-governmental organizations to continue to provide humanitarian aid based on the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence, despite the increasingly restrictive environment. To the Houthi authorities we say that, as a principled humanitarian donor, we want to continue to provide aid in the areas they control. We believe that all Yemenis in need deserve life-saving assistance. Please do not make it impossible for us to continue doing that.

We also note that no progress has been made on securing clearance to allow United Nations officials to

access the site of the *FSO SAFER* oil tanker, which is still floating off the coast of Al-Hudaydah, under Houthi control, with 1.14 million barrels of oil and in a rapidly deteriorating condition. The Council should work together to prevent what could be an environmental and humanitarian disaster. The Houthis must grant the United Nations the necessary visas and clearances to access the site to conduct vital inspection and provide necessary maintenance.

In conclusion, the United States continues to encourage the parties to capitalize on recent progress and move towards broader political talks. Even as regional tensions persist, we are encouraged by the recent signs of progress and hope the parties maintain this path of restraint and de-escalation. In keeping with that path, they must stop jeopardizing the lives of ordinary Yemenis and allow humanitarian workers to do their work. Too many have suffered from this conflict and the time has come for a solution.

**Mr. Baati** (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Martin Griffiths, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, and Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham, Director of the Coordination Division of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), for their valuable briefings.

We share the sentiments expressed by Mr. Griffiths towards His Majesty the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said, and I thank him for the optimism conveyed in his briefing. We are determined to participate with all parties to make 2020, as he said, the year of peace in Yemen. That sentiment was also echoed by Mr. Rajasingham.

Tunisia continues to closely follow developments in Yemen. We call on all parties to prioritize the country's best interests and to promote dialogue and negotiations as the only way to overcome differences and reach a political settlement to end the suffering of the Yemeni people and preserve the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Yemen. In that context, my delegation welcomes the positive steps taken thus far, which constitute signs of hope to build upon, especially the Riyadh agreement and endeavours to implement the Stockholm Agreement. We also reiterate the need to support confidence-building measures and commitments by all parties to continue to work to overcome the current situation and reach a political solution in accordance with the Gulf Cooperation Council Initiative and its Implementation Mechanism,



the outcome of the comprehensive National Dialogue Conference and all relevant Security Council resolutions.

Tunisia welcomes the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement. At the same time, we call for concerted efforts to lay the political foundations for the resumption of the negotiations towards a comprehensive solution leading to a transitional period. Parties should also commit to the outcome of the Stockholm talks, which are the Al-Hudaydah Agreement, the prisoner-exchange agreement and the memorandum of understanding on Taiz.

Tunisia supports the efforts of the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy for Yemen, especially the consultations with all parties to advance the political process and reach a comprehensive, durable and peaceful solution.

On the humanitarian situation, my delegation expresses its solidarity with the brotherly Yemeni people in view of their suffering as a result of the severe humanitarian crisis, and commends the role of OCHA and all humanitarian organizations in addressing the crisis. Tunisia stresses the need to provide vital funding to ensure the humanitarian response in Yemen. We urge the Yemeni parties to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance to all beneficiaries in an expedited, safe and unfettered manner. We call on all parties to the Yemeni conflict to respect international humanitarian law and international human rights law. In the same vein, we commend the efforts of the legitimate Yemeni Government and members of the coalition, as well as donors, to mitigate the humanitarian suffering in Yemen.

In conclusion, Tunisia reiterates the need for the political settlement to gain traction in Yemen, as it is the only way to overcome this crisis. We also welcome the fact that all parties are leaning towards calming the situation and highlight what Mr. Griffiths said earlier today in that regard. We therefore call for capitalizing on the achievements made, in accordance with a common vision of the Security Council based on the agreed terms of reference.

**Mr. Heusgen** (Germany): I would like to thank Mr. Martin Griffiths and Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham for their briefings.

I would like to start on a positive note. First, from what has been said so far in the Council, we see some

agreement between us. That was expressed earlier this week (see S/PV.8701), when all 15 members agreed to extend the mandate of the United Nations Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement (resolution 2505 (2020)). The agreement on the situation in Yemen is slightly reminiscent of the one we reached in this organ on Colombia a couple of days ago (see S/PV.8702).

I thank Mr. Griffiths for his briefing. He also struck a positive note and I think we need to recognize that so far it has indeed been possible to isolate Yemen from the escalation in the region. That is very positive. He mentioned the military de-escalation and some political progress in Al-Hudaydah with regard to the prisoner release.

Nevertheless, there is no reason for complacency. I was appalled when I heard about the attack on the Red Sea Mills, a site we have been discussing over the past couple of years and which my American colleague also mentioned earlier today in her statement. Those responsible for these kinds of attacks show an incomprehensible degree of cynicism and barbarism. The OCHA Director, my American colleague and the Ambassador of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines all reminded us that we are still facing the largest humanitarian crisis on the globe, with more than 15 million people in need of humanitarian aid. We therefore continue to be concerned. I would like to highlight the comments made by my Tunisian colleague and the Ambassador of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. The lack of respect for international humanitarian law that we have witnessed in Yemen and in other areas is something we all need to be concerned about. Germany has highlighted that point for the past two years while it has been a member of the Security Council.

I would like to encourage OCHA and Mr. Griffiths to continue their work and demand that access be granted to humanitarian workers for the purposes of opening up humanitarian corridors and starting mercy flights. People who are severely injured need help and there are hospitals around the world ready to treat them. It is unacceptable to prevent them from flying there. What kind of barbarism is that?

With regard to respect for humanitarian aid workers, there are reports that humanitarian aid agencies have been bombed. Prisoner releases continue. We are also very concerned about reports of ever-increasing violence against women and of the repression of women. As we

do at almost every meeting, we encourage Mr. Griffiths to insist on the participation of women in political talks.

I would like to commend OCHA for all its work. At this stage, I would also like to commend all humanitarian aid workers and non-governmental organizations for continuing to do their very important work in extremely difficult conditions. Let me end by supporting and highlighting Mr. Griffiths' optimism. I hope that he is right when he says that 2020 will bring peace to Yemen. I hope that a political solution is reached so that, as Mr. Griffiths said, we can launch a formal political track.

Germany will continue to support Mr. Griffiths and OCHA. We will remain one of the main humanitarian donors. We will also continue to contribute substantially to the Yemen humanitarian response plan. On the political track, we are also ready to support the process by facilitating meetings at various levels.

**Mr. De Rivière** (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Special Envoy, for whom I reiterate our full support, and the representative of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for their briefings.

The urgency of finding a political solution to the crisis remains and that necessity becomes more pressing each day. Efforts to de-escalate tensions in the region must remain everyone's priority and continue to be pursued. Yemen must not be a source of regional tensions. In that regard, attacks on the territory of Saudi Arabia are at odds with those efforts. The Houthis must respect their commitment to refraining from carrying out such attacks.

In the south, the Riyadh agreement must be fully implemented as soon as possible. We again welcome the efforts of Saudi Arabia in that regard. A new Government, including representatives from the south, must now be formed as soon as possible.

The Al-Hudaydah Agreement must be fully implemented. We welcome the Council's unanimous renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement. United Nations mediation efforts must remain at the heart of the political process and guide the various initiatives to achieve an inclusive political solution as soon as possible.

Given the humanitarian disaster, we must focus on two priorities. First, we must focus on the protection of civilians, including the protection of humanitarian and medical personnel and civilian infrastructure.

We condemn the attacks on the Al-Raqw market. The increase in the number of attacks against humanitarian personnel is extremely worrisome.

Secondly, comprehensive humanitarian access must be guaranteed. All parties to the conflict must allow humanitarian access. The restrictions imposed by the Houthis prevent millions of people from benefiting from humanitarian aid and must stop immediately. Respect for international humanitarian law is not negotiable and applies to everyone.

It is becoming more urgent by the day for the United Nations to obtain access to the FSO Safer oil tanker, which poses a serious threat to the environment.

France will remain fully committed to achieving peace in Yemen. The French authorities will continue to act in support of de-escalation in the region and a lasting solution to the conflict.

**Mr. Safronkov** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, Martin Griffiths, and the Director of the Coordination Division of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Raj Rajasingham, for their briefings on the political and humanitarian situation in Yemen. We highly value Mr. Griffiths' work of and professionalism. We pay tribute to the courage and dedication of our humanitarian colleagues, who deliver assistance to the Yemeni people in very difficult conditions.

The situation in the Republic of Yemen remains of extreme concern. Despite intense mediation efforts, the Stockholm Agreement has still not been fully implemented. The implementation of the Riyadh agreement on the south of Yemen is supposed to make a considerable contribution to stabilizing the situation. Russia, which has historically had friendly relations with Yemen, views Yemen as an independent, sovereign State with territorial integrity. We reaffirm our full support for Mr. Griffiths in his task of convincing the parties to the Yemeni conflict that there is no alternative to a political settlement and encouraging them to develop confidence-building measures and establish a comprehensive ceasefire.

From the beginning, we have advocated for an exclusively political and diplomatic solution to the crisis in Yemen, based on inclusive dialogue among all Yemeni forces, without exception. We will continue to support United Nations mediation efforts

in Yemen, including through contacts with all political stakeholders in the country and all interested parties, both in our national capacity and as a permanent member of the Security Council.

As in other regional conflicts, a unified position among all external players is required in Yemen as we come together in support of our Special Envoy. Early this week, the Security Council unanimously voted to extend the mandate of the United Nations Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement (see S/PV.8701). We firmly believe that a greater international presence in the country will facilitate the disengagement of opposing forces in the city itself, help stabilize the situation in Yemen overall and allow for the start of discussions on a framework for a comprehensive settlement. We call on all sides to support the efforts of Mr. Griffiths on that track.

It is thanks to United Nations mediation efforts that we see an overall decrease in fighting and in the number of air raids. Despite a few isolated incidents, the ceasefire regime has held. Thanks to the agreement reached on the use of customs revenues from the port of Al-Hudaydah to pay the salaries of civil servants, ships have resumed entry and the unloading of commercial cargo in the port, which opens up additional avenues for providing humanitarian assistance.

We believe that the political will to find common ground, demonstrated by the parties in Yemen, will help to achieve an expeditious political settlement to the protracted conflict. In that regard, we call on the parties to the conflict to do all in their power to ensure that such positive developments lead to a full cessation of hostilities as soon as possible and, consequently, save human lives and launch a comprehensive peace settlement in Yemen, exclusively under the auspices of the United Nations. That solution would meet the interests of all that Arab country's main political forces and religious and social groups. Ensuring an inclusive process is one of the determining factors in achieving lasting stability.

The international community must continue to make collective efforts to put the conflict on a political track and provide the necessary assistance to millions of Yemeni citizens, who, as we have heard today, are in dire need of assistance and experiencing one of the worst humanitarian crises. We are convinced that such a development would serve to not only benefit Yemen,

but also to ensure the security of all neighbouring States of the region.

While we undertake efforts on the political track, we must not forget that war, chaos and internal conflict only help terrorist groups. We call on all Yemenis to unite in combating that destructive scourge and to suppress terrorism together with a view to restoring State stability, ensuring the smooth functioning of Government institutions and returning the country to the path of progressive development in an atmosphere of cooperation with all its neighbours, including Arab States and Iran.

In that regard, we recall resolution 598 (1987), which requested the Secretary-General to develop a regional security architecture, in consultation with States of the region. We once again draw attention to the Russian concept of collective security in the Persian Gulf region, which seeks to resolve conflict situations and develop confidence-building and control measures. The escalation of aggressive, accusatory rhetoric and the artificial stoking of anti-Iranian sentiments are destabilizing the already tense situation in the entire Middle East region.

We will mark the fifth anniversary of the outbreak of the war in Yemen in April. We believe that this tragic landmark should impel the people of Yemen and all regional stakeholders to set their differences aside and reach agreement on a political settlement. It is high time for States in the Middle East, which possess rich history, traditions, cultures and vast natural resources, to take the issues of regional security into their own hands and engage in a mutually respectful dialogue, while casting aside negative external influences that are antagonizing inter-State relations and hampering prospects for peaceful coexistence and cooperation under various pretexts. Russia will actively contribute to the peaceful settlement of regional disputes, including in Yemen, based on deep trust with the States of the Middle East.

**Mr. Syihab** (Indonesia): I would like to begin by thanking Special Envoy Martin Griffiths and the Director of the Coordination Division of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham, for their very important briefings today.

We are pleased that the Special Envoy and the parties concerned are working tirelessly to resume the peace talks and to hear that there has been no major

act of military provocation recently. We hope that this will continue, and, most importantly, that there are no setbacks from the existing agreed upon commitments.

In response to the briefings, Indonesia would like to underscore the following points.

First, we reiterate our full support for the efforts of the Special Envoy to bring the parties towards the resumption of peace talks, including the plan of the Special Envoy to reconvene the prisoner-exchange committee in the coming days. It is critical that Yemenis own the process and the outcome. To that end, Indonesia advocates an inclusive process, facilitated by the United Nations, with the participation of women and youth. We also support the visit to Yemen, which we hope could bring positive momentum towards the peace process. We are also happy to observe some progress in the implementation of the Riyadh agreement, and that key countries of the region are playing a pivotal role towards the peace process, resulting in some encouraging tangible progress.

Secondly, we remain deeply concerned, however, about the humanitarian situation in Yemen. In that regard, we condemn the attacks on 21 and 22 December in Al-Dhale'e, which targeted the premises of the United Nations and international humanitarian organizations, posing a security risk to humanitarian workers. The attacks violated international humanitarian law and resulted in the suspension of some aid programmes. Indonesia calls on all to respect international humanitarian law. Given that more than 12 million people rely on that assistance every month, we also call on the authorities to ensure safe and unhindered access for humanitarian workers across the country.

Thirdly, my delegation stresses the critical importance of the implementation of previously agreed upon commitments, as that is key to broader progress in the political process. We will therefore continue to monitor the implementation of the Stockholm Agreement, moving in parallel with the resumption of the political process. As we have repeatedly mentioned, we also expect progress on the Al-Hudaydah Agreement, maintaining the ceasefire and demilitarizing the area and the ports. Any setback in the implementation of that Agreement is dangerous, as it constitutes the lifeline for humanitarian assistance. It is a source of hope for millions of Yemenis.

As a result, Indonesia welcomes the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Mission to Support

the Hodeidah Agreement (UNMHA) for another six months to enable the monitoring of and support for the implementation of the Al-Hudaydah Agreement. We reiterate our call for unhindered access for UNMHA personnel to conduct patrols and effectively monitor the ceasefire. As the Secretary-General has said, the Mission brings calm to the people in Al-Hudaydah.

In closing, my delegation urges harder work and commitment in 2020 to ensure a monumental year for peace and stability for all Yemenis.

**Mr. Wu Haitao** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The Chinese delegation wishes to thank Special Envoy Griffiths and Director Rajasingham for their briefings.

China commends Special Envoy Griffiths for his vigorous efforts to advance the political process in Yemen and supports the hard work of the United Nations and relevant agencies to improve the humanitarian situation in Yemen. We hope that in the new year, the international community, including the Security Council, can achieve breakthroughs in the political settlement of the Yemeni issue. With respect to this year's work, we would like to share the following perspectives.

First, the parties in Yemen need to stay the course towards a political solution and continue to advance the implementation of the Stockholm Agreement and the Riyadh agreement, with a view to reaching an early relaunching of the United Nations-led comprehensive political settlement. Despite twists and turns in the implementation of the Stockholm Agreement, it has played a vital role in easing tensions in Al-Hudaydah and promoting dialogue among Yemeni parties and must continue to be implemented.

The implementation of the Riyadh agreement bears directly on the political negotiations in the next step. China has taken note of the recent consensus reached between the Yemeni Government and the Southern Transitional Council on military and security sectors, in addition to many other provisions of the agreement. We applaud Saudi Arabia and other countries in the region for their continued good offices. We encourage Yemeni parties to jointly maintain solidarity and stability in the south, in order to safeguard the country's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity.

China supports Special Envoy Griffiths' preparations for the new round of peace talks anchored in the existing agreements. We support another renewal

of the mandate of the United Nations Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement (UNMHA) and hope that the Mission will remain committed to its mandate and support the implementation of agreements for the maintenance of overall stability in Al-Hudaydah.

Secondly, the Security Council, countries in the region and the rest of the international community must carry out robust good offices, work in synergy and create the conditions for dialogue and negotiation among Yemeni parties. The members of the Council must remain seized of the issue of Yemen and discuss how to promote dialogue and negotiation among Yemeni parties through a variety of means. They must exchange views on how to further implement the existing agreements, attenuate the situation in Aden and deliver a complete ceasefire across the territory, among other such measures. Countries in the region need to continue to exercise their positive influence on Yemeni parties to encourage them to build up mutual trust through the exchange of prisoners and other measures and uphold the momentum of the ceasefire and dialogue.

China has maintained contact with all Yemeni parties. On 2 January, the Chinese Ambassador in Yemen met with President Hadi Mansour of Yemen. At this meeting, the President reiterated his political will to spare no effort to advance the implementation of the Riyadh agreement and actively participate in the United Nations-led peace process. China will continue with its diplomatic efforts to encourage the parties to bridge gaps and broaden consensus.

Thirdly, the international community should improve the livelihood of the Yemeni people with a more tailored approach, prioritize the secure supply of oil, food and drinking water, stabilize currency and commodity prices, contain cholera and other diseases, assist in development and reconstruction projects, focus on education and training for children and youth, and increase employment.

Given the dire humanitarian situation in Yemen and the fact that the people of the country have long borne the brunt of the war, it is imperative for Yemeni parties to fully coordinate with the humanitarian operations of the United Nations and other relevant agencies to prevent further deterioration of the humanitarian crisis. China has consistently provided humanitarian assistance to the Yemeni people through bilateral and multilateral channels while upholding the view that peace and stability in countries in conflict should

be promoted through development. China signed an agreement on economic and technical cooperation with the Yemeni Government. On 15 January, China signed a further agreement with the Ministry of Health of Yemen under which China will send a consignment of medical equipment to the country valued at ¥ 9.8 million.

China stands ready to continue to do more practical work for the benefit of the Yemeni people, engage in Yemen's economic reconstruction and play a constructive role for the prompt achievement of lasting peace and stability in Yemen.

**Mr. Jürgenson (Estonia):** I thank Special Envoy Griffiths and Director Rajasingham for their briefings.

Estonia fully supports Mr. Griffiths in his efforts to find a peaceful solution in Yemen. We also commend United Nations agencies for their efforts aimed at improving the humanitarian situation in Yemen and welcome the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement (UNMHA) (resolution 2505 (2020)).

I was glad to hear that there have been positive developments and a reduction in violence. However, in the context of rising regional tensions, it is important that all stakeholders remain committed to de-escalation. Fighting will not bring about a solution; that can only be achieved through inclusive dialogue among all relevant groups and civil society in the region, including women and youth. I call on the parties to resume discussions on a comprehensive political solution without delay or preconditions.

We welcome all efforts to de-escalate tensions, including the implementation of such confidence-building measures as the recent prisoner exchange in Taiz governorate. However, it is unacceptable that the civilian population continues to be harmed by the attacks across the country. We are also concerned about reports of gender-based violence, the repression of women, the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, and arbitrary detentions. We call on all parties to fulfil their obligations under human rights law and international humanitarian law and to hold all perpetrators of violations accountable.

Even though we heard that there was considerable improvement in 2019, the scale of the humanitarian crisis in Yemen, as set forth by the briefers, remains extremely critical, and the human cost of the war is immense. Some 24 million people still depend on

humanitarian assistance. It is therefore crucial that unimpeded access for humanitarian assistance be guaranteed throughout the country.

We commend the Government of Yemen and the Southern Transitional Council for the steps already taken towards implementing the Riyadh agreement. The next phase, involving military and security steps, is undoubtedly challenging, but we urge the parties to make efforts to fulfil their agreed obligations. Implementation of the agreement is crucial in order to move towards a comprehensive political settlement in Yemen.

The recent renewal of the mandate of the UNMHA shows that the Security Council is united in its efforts to help solve the conflict (see S/PV.8701). We call on the authorities in Al-Hudaydah to ensure the freedom of movement of the Mission. I would also like to reiterate the importance of full implementation of the Stockholm Agreement in building confidence between the parties.

Finally, with regard to the decaying *FSO SAFER* oil tanker, we call on the authorities in Al-Hudaydah to allow the United Nations assessment team to have access to the ship in order to prevent an environmental disaster in the Red Sea.

**Mr. Bencosme Castaños** (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank Mr. Griffiths and Mr. Rajasingham for their briefings this morning, which painted a very full and detailed picture of the political and humanitarian situation in Yemen. We express our gratitude to both of them for the immense efforts made in their respective fields to achieve peace and meet the pressing needs of the affected population.

At the outset, I should like to recognize the progress being made in the talks between the Government of Saudi Arabia and the Houthis, which have led to a partial de-escalation in hostilities. Notwithstanding that observation, we condemn the recent attacks, especially those targeting humanitarian infrastructure in Al Dhale'e on 22 December. We reiterate as we have on other occasions that all parties to the conflict have an obligation to respect international humanitarian law and refrain from this type of indiscriminate attacks, which have greatest effect on the civilian population. We have listened very carefully to the reports of progress in implementing the Riyadh agreement and we understand that we must maintain the momentum to reach a broad and inclusive political agreement

based on mutual respect and full implementation of the commitments undertaken.

With regard to the implementation of the Hodeidah Agreement, we commend the ongoing work of General Guha together with the parties to improve humanitarian access. We urge the parties to continue cooperating under the auspices of the Redeployment Coordination Committee, and, in this regard, we stress that the parties must ensure there are no restrictions on the movement of Mission personnel within the city. Such restriction undermines the overall implementation of the mandate of the United Nations Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement, recently renewed by the Security Council unanimously in resolution 2505 (2020) (see S/PV.8701).

We acknowledge the progress made in the prisoner exchange, with the release of 200 detainees by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as part of implementation of the Stockholm Agreement. We also welcome the announcement of the facilitation of flights for health reasons from Sana'a airport to countries where patients can receive badly needed treatment.

The humanitarian situation remains alarming. In particular, we are concerned at the alerts issued by humanitarian organizations on the ground about a possible epidemic of dengue-related diseases. The climate situation, combined with the virtual collapse of water and sanitation services as a result of the conflict, has made it difficult to control this type of disease, which primarily affects children.

We are further concerned at reports about food security in the country. The conflict in Yemen continues to restrict access to livelihoods and prolong the food- and nutrition-insecurity situation of the population for generations to come. According to reports from specialized agencies, agricultural production is well below average, and the prices of food and non-food commodities remain significantly elevated compared to pre-conflict levels.

We also wish to echo the representative of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines by expressing that any political process in Yemen must include the participation of women as well as men and fully take into account their needs. It is therefore crucial to provide safe spaces for women to make their valuable contributions.

We are likewise concerned by reports about food security in the country. Against a backdrop of reduced access to income and decreased purchasing

power, most Yemenis cannot meet their essential food and non-food needs. Under these circumstances, malnutrition remains a serious concern in many areas. We encourage the parties to commit to the implementation of the Stockholm Agreement and a definitive ceasefire, while working on an inclusive peace process that will permanently open the door to new paths leading towards development and prosperity for the Yemeni people.

**Mr. Van Shalkwyk** (South Africa): We thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, Mr. Martin Griffiths, and the Director of the Coordination Division of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham, for the information that they provided to us today.

My delegation would like to address the following two points in our statement today, namely, the political situation and the humanitarian situation.

With regard to the political situation, South Africa wishes to welcome the ongoing talks between the Houthis and Saudi Arabia. We urge all parties to the conflict to continue efforts aimed at undertaking dialogue and confidence-building measures that will contribute to a comprehensive political solution for Yemen. South Africa remains firm in the belief that sustainable peace in Yemen will come only through assertive efforts at dialogue, instead of continued armed conflict, which has led only to devastation and a profound humanitarian crisis in the country.

In addition, South Africa calls for the speedy implementation of the Riyadh agreement between the Yemeni Government and the Southern Transitional Council. We call on the Yemeni Government and the Council to agree on forming a joint delegation as called for by the Riyadh agreement. South Africa also wishes to reiterate its call for the full implementation of the December 2018 Stockholm Agreement, including demilitarizing the port of Al-Hudaydah, and for all parties to carry out their respective obligations in accordance with responsibilities under the Stockholm Agreement.

We welcome the efforts already undertaken to adhere to the Hodeidah Agreement, which we believe could be built on in order to create trust and instil confidence in fulfilling other aspects of the Stockholm Agreement. Similarly, South Africa welcomes the exchange of prisoners that has taken place between

the Saudi-led coalition and the Houthis since October 2019. These confidence-building measures are to be commended and should continue to receive the sustained support of the Security Council and the broader international community.

Secondly, with respect to the humanitarian situation, South Africa remains extremely concerned about the serious crisis in Yemen. The unprecedented humanitarian crisis in the country is a strong indicator of the human toll of continued military action and conflict that requires an urgent commitment to a ceasefire and the pursuit of a negotiated peaceful and inclusive solution to the crisis.

In this regard, South Africa wishes to call on all parties to the conflict to allow the free, regular and unimpeded passage of food and other humanitarian relief and not to take actions that will deprive civilians of their right to food and health. In this context, South Africa welcomes the initiative of the coalition, in cooperation with the World Health Organization, that medical flights be permitted from Sana'a airport, which has been closed to civilian air traffic since August 2016.

South Africa also emphasizes that all necessary measures should be taken to respect the Geneva Conventions. More broadly, we reiterate our call on all parties to abide by their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

We wish to reiterate that the only sustainable solution to this conflict is a negotiated, Yemeni-led political settlement that is inclusive and fair and puts the interests and well-being of all the citizens of Yemen first.

**Mr. Pecsteen de Buyswerve** (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I thank Special Envoy Martin Griffiths and the Director of the Coordination Division of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham, for their briefings.

We encourage pursuing de-escalation efforts in order to achieve a cessation of hostilities throughout the country. The statistics of the most recent report of the Civilian Impact Monitoring Project show a decrease in the total number of civilian casualties in 2019 compared to 2018 — from 2,049 in 2018 to 1,104 in 2019. That is mainly owing to a decrease in air strikes, which have

entailed mass casualties, as well as in the number of deaths caused by shelling and landmines.

We hope that those trends will continue and that the next steps in the political process will be able to begin as soon as possible under the auspices of the United Nations. This process must be inclusive, with the meaningful participation of women and young people, and reflect the ethnic, geographical, social and political diversity of Yemen's population. Let us not forget, however, the already-concluded agreements, whose implementation is encountering difficulties, as in the case of the Riyadh agreement. We once again call on all parties to fully implement the Stockholm Agreement, including the Hodeidah Agreement, the agreement on the exchange of prisoners and the statement of understanding on Taiz.

As we heard earlier, humanitarian access remains difficult. The operating environment for humanitarian actors in Yemen remains one of the most restricted of its kind in the world, entailing interference in humanitarian operations and restrictions on movement, which only add to the conflict and continuing insecurity. It is imperative that all parties facilitate humanitarian access and respect international humanitarian law. Belgium is particularly concerned about reports that the Houthis are now demanding 2 per cent of the budget of every humanitarian project as a precondition for their assent.

As we also heard, the economic and financial situation remains of particular concern as well. The Central Bank stands in need of a foreign-exchange injection to stabilize the rial. Corruption in Yemeni institutions is not helpful and, according to the Panel of Experts of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 2140 (2014), it could jeopardize peace and security. The announcement of 19 December 2019 that the Houthi authorities in Sana'a had banned the use and exchange of the new bank notes in the areas under their control places a new strain on already heavily burdened civilians, in particular in northern Yemen, and further worsens their economic situation. We also encourage the Houthis to finally provide access to the *FSO SAFER* oil tanker in order to facilitate a review of the situation and avoid the possibility of an environmental disaster.

Lastly, all parties must uphold their obligations and commitments under international humanitarian law and international human rights law. We are particularly concerned about the continuation of serious violations of children's rights and reports that the Houthis are

systematically using sexual violence against women who are politically active in the areas under their control. That is entirely unacceptable and must stop.

**Mr. Abarry** (Niger) (*spoke in French*): First of all, I thank Mr. Martin Griffiths, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, for his important briefing on the recent developments in the situation in Yemen. I share his optimism stemming from the recent de-escalation. I also thank the Director of the Coordination Division of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) for his briefing on the humanitarian situation in Yemen.

This morning, the Security Council is considering the situation in Yemen following the unanimous adoption, on Monday, 13 January, of resolution 2505 (2020) on the extension of the mandate of the United Nations Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement (see S/PV.8701), which is to be commended. My delegation welcomes this development, as the consensus that was reached attests to the international community's awareness of the need to resolve the humanitarian crisis that the Yemeni people, particularly women and children, are enduring with a level of resignation that must compel us to act. Although complex in nature, the conflict in Yemen and the parties involved require the Council's special attention until a definitive and lasting political settlement is reached.

The decrease in violence in recent days, and the consequently reduced number of victims, is good news on which to build. Attention must be paid to respecting international humanitarian law, in particular the protection of personnel responsible for delivering assistance to those in need throughout the country. In that regard, my delegation would like to stress the need to provide substantial support for the implementation of the Mission's mandate in order to ensure the unimpeded delivery and distribution of humanitarian assistance to the population.

The Niger hopes that the positive developments since the signing of the Riyadh agreement, as noted in the two briefings, which have led to a decrease in the level of violence in the south of the country, will be consolidated so as to serve as a stepping stone for the full pacification of the country. Finally, we strongly urge the parties to the conflict to resume dialogue and to apply the various provisions of the Stockholm Agreement. The exchange of prisoners is a welcome step in the right direction.



In conclusion, we support the Special Envoy in his tireless efforts to help Yemen find through dialogue the peace and security that it enjoyed not so long ago. We also call on OCHA to continue its excellent work to ensure that the current acute humanitarian crisis in the country does not thwart the return to normalcy that we all wish to see.

**The President:** I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Viet Nam.

At the outset, I would like to thank the two briefers for their briefings and updates.

Viet Nam notes with deep concern the complicated humanitarian situation in Yemen. Attacks continue, causing severe casualties among civilians and destroying civilian infrastructure. The delivery of humanitarian aid is impeded. In that regard, we call on all parties concerned to exercise restraint and facilitate the humanitarian work of the United Nations and its relevant partners so that international assistance can reach the Yemeni people in need in a timely manner.

We welcome the signing of the Stockholm and Riyadh agreements and stress the importance of their full implementation. That would contribute to de-escalation and thereby create favourable conditions for all parties concerned to engage in constructive dialogue with a view to achieving a comprehensive and sustainable political solution to the situation in Yemen, in accordance with international law, including the Charter of the United Nations and relevant Security Council resolutions, and with due respect for the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Yemen.

To that end, we note with appreciation some recent progress over the past few months, including a decrease in acts of hostility in Al-Hudaydah governorate and southern Yemen, the indirect talks between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis in Oman and the release of detainees by Saudi Arabia and the Houthis. We join other delegations in calling on the parties concerned to show more political will and build mutual trust by implementing confidence-building measures.

We highly appreciate and support the efforts made by the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy for Yemen. In that regard, we commend the adoption of resolution 2505 (2020) on Monday, renewing the mandate of the United Nations Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement (UNMHA), as well as the work of

the Redeployment Coordination Committee to support the implementation of the Stockholm Agreement, including substantive monitoring of the ceasefire and the redeployment of forces from the city and port of Al-Hudaydah and elsewhere. It is also critically important that the safety of UNMHA and its personnel be ensured so that the Mission can effectively carry out its mandate.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Yemen.

**Mr. Al-Saadi (Yemen)** (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to thank Mr. Martin Griffiths, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, for his briefing. I would also like to thank Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham, Director of the Coordination Division, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). I also welcome the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement.

The Houthi militias have pursued their persistent policy of stubbornness and stalling regarding the implementation of their commitments since signing the Stockholm Agreement under the auspices of the United Nations in December 2018. Their policy demonstrates that those militias are not serious about achieving peace; rather, they defy the efforts of the United Nations and the Council. Meanwhile, any attempt to circumvent the implementation of the agreement would not serve the desired political process but would threaten the road to achieving peace altogether. Therefore, we reiterate the Government of Yemen's insistence on the importance of implementing all the components of the Stockholm Agreement, especially the Al-Hudaydah Agreement regarding the local security forces and local authority, the withdrawal from the ports and city of Al-Hudaydah and the exchange of prisoners and detainees. That should not be subject to any political bids. In the meantime, the siege on Taiz should be lifted.

The Government of Yemen would like to express once again its support for the efforts of the Special Envoy, Mr. Martin Griffiths, to achieve a comprehensive political settlement of the conflict based on the agreed terms of reference, namely, the Gulf Council Initiative and its Implementation Mechanism, the outcomes of the inclusive national dialogue and the relevant Security Council resolutions, especially resolution 2216 (2015).

The serious escalation and violations committed by the Houthi militias, including targeting the premises of the Redeployment Coordination Committee last month, the Médecins sans frontières hospital and the Red Sea mills, are totally deplorable and unjustifiable. The Security Council should condemn them as an egregious challenge to all efforts to realize peace.

The Government of Yemen is making major efforts, as duly instructed by His Excellency President Abdrabuh Mansour Hadi and under the supervision and follow-up of our brothers in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, to overcome the obstacles impeding the implementation of the Riyadh agreement. The Government is very eager to implement the provisions of the agreement according to the chronological order agreed therein and without any selectivity. In recent days, a matrix of security and military arrangements has been signed under the tireless supervision of His Excellency the President of Yemen and the leadership of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In that regard, we highly appreciate the fraternal role and endeavours of our brothers in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in providing ongoing support to Yemen consistent with the principles of fraternity and good-neighbourliness, and based on historical relations with Yemen. Their work laid the foundation for Riyadh agreement and a new phase of partnership, reform and consolidation of efforts aimed at thwarting the Houthi-Iranian project in Yemen, which has caused all the destruction and chaos in the country. Our goal is to build a new federal Yemen, in line with the outcome of the inclusive national dialogue conference.

The interference by the Iranian regime and its subversive role in Yemen, through its close ties with the Houthi militias, are unequivocally conspicuous and constitute a threat to the security and stability of Yemen and the region, as well as regional and international peace and security. The Yemeni people will never allow Yemen to become a field for the adventures and projects of the Iranian regime, as our people have grown more determined than ever to continue to thwart the Houthi-Iranian project.

The Government of Yemen spares no effort to normalize economic and humanitarian conditions and to operationalize the State institutions in order to promote the livelihoods of citizens. It is dedicated to defining the tasks of those institutions and developing the mechanisms needed for the next phase, including reorganizing the work of those institutions and expanding the payroll system. The Government has

taken a number of measures to implement major reforms in the area of anti-corruption and to operationalize the national integrity and anti-corruption system, as well as to reconstitute and operationalize the national committee to combat money-laundering and the financing of terrorism.

In their efforts to exacerbate humanitarian suffering and destabilize the national economy and the exchange rate, the Houthi militias have prohibited the circulation and use of the new national currency in the areas they control. That decision will not only deprive tens of thousands of civil servants and retirees of their salaries and money transfers, but will also completely paralyse economic activity in the areas controlled by those militias, which will have catastrophic consequences.

The Government of Yemen therefore calls on the international community, the United Nations, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to shoulder their responsibility regarding such procedures, which exacerbate the humanitarian crisis caused by the Houthi militias. Those militias have subverted the aspirations of the Yemeni people, thwarted national unanimity and taken State institutions hostage. International organizations operating in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen are subjected to obstacles and extortion. Humanitarian workers are being harassed while the militias attempt to divert the programmes and aid of those organizations to specific places and areas in order to generate financial gains and impede the delivery of assistance to those in need.

The Government of Yemen reiterates that it stands ready to facilitate all procedures necessary to ensure that those international organizations and agencies working in Yemen can carry out their work. Moreover, it pledges to continue working in partnership with them in order to address the humanitarian situation, which is deteriorating due to the war. In that regard, we express the gratitude of the Yemeni people for the enormous humanitarian tasks undertaken by those organizations to mitigate the humanitarian suffering experienced by the Yemeni people, who are living in grim and bleak circumstances.

The Houthi militias are contriving and fabricating a fuel crisis in the areas they control in order to enhance the black market so as to enrich their leaders and finance their military and political activities, thereby commodifying the suffering of the Yemeni people. That is taking place despite the fact that fuel imports to

Yemeni ports from 1 October 2019 to 10 January 2020, of which Al-Hudaydah port received 60 per cent, could cover the fuel needs in the Houthi-controlled areas until mid-March 2020.

We once again sound an alarm with regard to potential environmental hazards that might result from the leakage of the *FSO SAFER* oil tanker, as such an event could lead to an unprecedented environmental catastrophe affecting Yemen, the region and international navigation. We call on the Security Council and the international community to shoulder their responsibility and to bring pressure to bear on the Houthi militias in order to force them to give access to the United Nations technical team so that it can carry out a technical assessment of the tanker, including the

damage it sustained, and to undertake the necessary maintenance as soon as possible in order to avert certain calamity.

In conclusion, the Government and people of Yemen aspire to peace. They look forward to bringing this war and coup to an end. However, the Houthi militias, which are supported by Iran and claim the divine right to either govern or kill the Yemeni people, reject peace.

**The President:** There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

*The meeting rose at 11.45 a.m.*