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Seventy-fifth year

8725th meeting

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New York

Provisional

President: Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve/Mrs. Delieux (Belgium)

Members:

China	Mr. Zhang Jun
Dominican Republic	Mr. Singer Weisinger
Estonia	Mr. Jürgenson
France	Mr. De Rivière
Germany	Mr. Schulz
Indonesia	Mr. Djani
Niger	Mr. Abarry
Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	Ms. King
South Africa	Ms. Tayob
Tunisia	Mr. Ladeb
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Ms. Pierce
United States of America	Mrs. Craft
Viet Nam	Mr. Dang

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President (*spoke in French*): 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 Mr. Martin Griffiths, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, and Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, to participate in this meeting.

Mr. Griffiths is joining today's meeting via video-conference from Geneva.

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

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear briefings by Mr. Griffiths, Mr. Lowcock and Her Excellency Ms. Inga Rhonda King, Permanent Representative of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, in her capacity as Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 2140 (2014).

I now give the floor to Mr. Griffiths.

Mr. Griffiths: We are witnessing in Yemen what we have long feared. Since October, I have briefed the Security Council several times on the signs of hope and momentum towards peace. But, at the same time, we have all been acutely aware that renewed violence could reverse the gains made, render peace more difficult and inflict even more severe humanitarian consequences on the population.

Since we last met (see S/PV.8704), the military situation over the past month has grown increasingly dire. Both sides have announced expansive military goals and exchanged fierce rhetoric. Most of the heavy fighting has taken place in the Niham district of Sana'a governorate and in Al-Jawf, Ma'rib and Sa'dah governorates. Front lines that had been quiet for several months have been drawn into the escalation. Reports of airstrikes and cross-border aerial attacks have increased considerably.

I am distressed — as we all must be — by reports of dozens, and perhaps hundreds, of civilian casualties, displacement of families and damage to schools and hospitals. Women and children continue to suffer the most from several attacks. Yemeni journalists and civil-society activists have also continued to face severe pressure and restrictions.

The parties have reassured me many times of their belief in a peaceful, political solution to the conflict. But peace cannot be taken for granted. It requires continuous commitment and the nurturing of a political process to make it happen. The escalation I just described directly contradicts the parties' desire to move in that direction.

The leaderships of both parties have the ability and responsibility to rein in the violence, scale down the rhetoric and commit to a more sustainable de-escalation. Prior to the recent increase in violence, the parties — as we observed in the Council — had considerably reduced the number of airstrikes and cross-border aerial attacks. That de-escalation had a strong, positive impact on the prospect of peace, and indeed can do so again if the parties are committed.

I am concerned that the escalations may also threaten the progress made in Al-Hudaydah, where the situation is vulnerable to an increase in violence. In December 2018, the parties reached the Al-Hudaydah Agreement in Stockholm based on the shared goals of avoiding military operations in the city and ensuring the passage of humanitarian and commercial goods through the three ports. We must not lose sight of those goals.

The escalations on other fronts have raised tensions and led to greater volatility in Al-Hudaydah but have not yet had a major impact on the overall military situation — a small blessing, but one we must be happy for. The United Nations Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement (UNMHA), led by Lieutenant General Guha, is striving to maintain cooperation between the parties, despite continued operational challenges and restrictions on the freedom of movement. However, I fear — and I know this would be true of my colleague Lieutenant General Guha as well — that the escalations elsewhere could pose a challenge to his efforts to maintain calm in Al-Hudaydah and distract the parties from the implementation of the Agreement.

Despite the unrelentingly dire military situation, the parties have made significant progress in their

efforts to build confidence and provide relief for those who are suffering. Between 10 and 16 February, the parties met in Amman and agreed to exchange prisoners and detainees, in line with the executive mechanism agreed in Stockholm 14 months ago. That is a firm commitment from the parties to the families that they will be reunited with their loved ones. And it is a sign that the parties are prepared to progress towards their commitment to eventually release — “all for all” — all those deprived of their liberty in relation to the conflict. I heartily commend the Government of Yemen and Ansar Allah for their positive engagement and for making the concessions required to make progress. I was present during those discussions; the atmosphere to enable those concessions was unmistakable. I also thank the coalition, of course, but also the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan for hosting the meeting. We all look forward to the implementation of the agreed releases as soon as possible. I should add that, as usual, that process benefits from the unique value of the International Committee of the Red Cross, with which we are very proud to be partners.

That positive step follows the release from prison by Ansar Allah, supported by our colleagues in UNICEF, of 68 boys encountered during military operations. The boys are now in interim care and — I am glad to say — being united with their families. I encourage Ansar Allah to continue to engage with the United Nations and UNICEF in order to make progress in addressing violations of children’s rights.

Furthermore, during the first half of February, the first two medical air bridge flights transported 28 patients from Sana’a for medical assistance abroad. I once again commend the commitment of the parties and the support of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for that humanitarian measure. I am also grateful to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the Egyptian Government, which will host additional patients.

Despite that small but significant sign of hope, many thousands of patients in need of medical care abroad remain in Sana’a, where such care is not available. For their sake, the medical air bridge must operate regularly and not just as a temporary solution. I know that my good friend and colleague, Ms. Lise Grande, United Nations Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator for Yemen, and Mr. Altaf Musani, the World Health Organization’s representative in Yemen, are working very hard to make that happen.

I am sure Council members will join me in hoping that those efforts bear fruit.

Overall, the progress on those humanitarian measures shows us that, even in this bleak situation, the parties can work together and situation across the table from one another to relieve the suffering of the Yemeni people. We must hope that the confidence they have built has not completely gone to waste. However, my fear is that, as this briefing suggests, such confidence, trust and relationships are becoming increasingly fragile.

I am also acutely alarmed by the lack of progress in addressing the threat posed by the *FSO SAFER* oil tanker, which we have discussed on previous occasions in the Chamber. The tanker’s condition is deteriorating by the day. Any rupture could spill more than 1 million barrels of oil into the Red Sea, causing an environmental and economic catastrophe for Yemen and its neighbours. We are all on notice of that potential catastrophe.

That threat — which we discuss every time we visit Sana’a — must be dealt with on a purely technical basis, without politicization. The United Nations is committed, ready and prepared to send objective technical experts to undertake an assessment and initial repair, to be immediately followed by permanent arrangements to address the threat and make that vessel safe.

In my briefing last August (see S/PV.8598), I informed the Council, to my slight shame, that a date had been agreed for the assessment to occur later that month, but it never happened. The assessment mission must take place immediately and unconditionally, without further delay.

Everything I have heard from Yemeni leaders in the almost two years that I have had the privilege of serving the Secretary-General and the Council in this assignment points to a core principle that I wish to emphasize today — peace in Yemen can emerge only from a political compromise between both parties through a process mediated by the United Nations, our process, which we discuss each time we meet. It will not be dictated or successfully resolved from a position of military dominance. Engagement in the United Nations process must be unconditional. It cannot be secondary to territorial gain, particularly when — as we have so vividly seen in Yemen — there is no military solution to the conflict.

How do we move from here to the launch, at last, of that process? With the encouragement of the

Council, we are actively working towards that goal and the re-establishment of truly inclusive de-escalation arrangements, but we realize that a reduction in violence is not enough. That has been the lesson of the past two months. We need the parties to unite around a vision for a post-conflict Yemen that is in line with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

It is perhaps timely to recall those elements — a genuinely inclusive Government and a political transition process; a military and security arrangement and sector that safeguards all Yemenis; the chance for reconstruction and the revitalization of the country's institutions and economy; and, finally, an acceptance that enmities must end even while differences remain. Those are reasonable, achievable goals, and they are no secret. I insist that it is time for us to recall them here and to hope that we will soon see their realization when the political will is truly there.

I am sometimes accused of impatience, but now we see why. Hesitance on the political track allows the war drums to beat louder and allows provocations to spiral and multiply. The hard work of the parties is at grave risk of being undone. The parties must display the courage that I know they have to set aside short-term military goals and make a sustained, tangible and irreversible commitment to the political process.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Griffiths for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Lowcock.

Mr. Lowcock: Every month, I brief the Security Council on five priority issues in Yemen — first, the protection of civilians and respect for international humanitarian law; secondly, humanitarian access and delivery; thirdly, funding for the United Nations aid operation; fourthly, the Yemeni economy; and, fifthly, progress towards peace.

As Mr. Griffiths just outlined, we are now going through an extremely worrisome period in Yemen. That is equally true for the humanitarian operation. Let us start with protection of civilians. Hostilities have escalated significantly along several fronts, most notably in the governorates of Ma'rib, Al-Jawf and Sana'a. As Mr. Griffiths just noted, those areas have been mostly quiet over the past two years.

Fighting in those areas has displaced more than 35,000 people since January. That escalation, in addition to clashes in other places, has reversed the

trend seen in previous months of decreasing civilian casualties. In January, assessments suggest, more than 160 civilians were killed or wounded across Yemen. On Saturday, air strikes reportedly killed dozens of civilians in Al-Jawf. Humanitarian Coordinator Lise Grande issued a statement about that incident the same day, and I associate myself with what she said.

Ten days ago, hostilities badly damaged two hospitals in Ma'rib and injured a health worker. Those hospitals had already closed because of fighting in the area, depriving 15,000 people of medical care. And in Taiz, Al-Hudaydah, Sa'dah and other places, we continue to hear daily reports of civilians killed, homes destroyed, farms damaged, children shot by snipers and other horrors. For months, I have called for a nationwide ceasefire. That call is even more urgent today when the violence, as Mr. Griffiths has said, is at very real risk of spiralling out of control.

The second issue is humanitarian access. Let me remind everyone that international humanitarian law requires the parties to facilitate access to people in need. Access is essential if we are to continue saving millions of lives across Yemen. Yet the space in which we need to do that work has been narrowing from all directions.

In the south, humanitarian agencies have to wait too long to get projects approved. We estimate that approximately 30 per cent of non-governmental organization (NGO) projects were not taken forward last year because the Government failed to agree them. Efforts to carry out a multisectoral needs assessment have recently stalled. We also remain concerned about proposed Government regulations that would hinder humanitarian agencies' ability to move around the country as necessary in order to meet urgent needs.

This past week, the Government returned eight trucks with medical supplies, held by Government forces in Ma'rib since 30 January. However, after initial inspection, it appears that up to 70 per cent of the supplies are missing. We appreciate the ongoing dialogue with the Government on all those issues, but it is important to be clear that we have much more serious problems in the areas controlled by the Ansar Allah authorities.

Last year, those authorities issued more than 200 regulations on humanitarian action. By the end of the year, the number of reported incidents disrupting assistance had risen by a factor of six. Approximately

half of those incidents constrained movements of relief supplies or staff, while approximately a quarter of them involved attempts to influence decisions on who receives help or otherwise interfere with programmes.

The Ansar Allah authorities asked NGOs to sign agreements that would not be consistent with humanitarian principles. Approximately 40 per cent of NGO projects last year went unapproved — 10 per cent more than in the south. It has also been suggested that NGOs pay a 2 per cent tax to fund the authorities' aid-coordination body. The situation is unacceptable. Stopping the world's largest aid operation would be fatal for millions of people.

The Secretary-General issued a statement last week about that. He reiterated the importance of sustaining the humanitarian operation, and he supports continued dialogue with all the interested parties to ensure that help reaches all those who are in need of it, in accordance with humanitarian principles. There was also a valuable meeting in Brussels last week involving United Nations colleagues, leading international NGOs and some of the large donors to discuss how we can maintain life-saving assistance in a principled way, including the measures that may need to be taken as a result of the interference and blockages that we are seeing.

The United Nations is seeking to intensify dialogue with the Ansar Allah authorities at all levels and through all the channels available to us. Last week, the Ansar Allah authorities returned food that had been taken from a World Food Programme (WFP) warehouse in Hajjah. They also announced that they were dropping the proposed 2 per cent levy and informed WFP that they would implement a long-pending agreement on biometric registration and other issues. We welcome all those announcements and look forward to seeing them implemented.

There are several other issues, including, first, project approvals, especially agreements with NGOs; secondly, moving forward with urgently required assessments, including updating food security assessments; and, thirdly, approving more monitoring missions, all of which continue to require progress. Those are activities that the humanitarian principles require humanitarian agencies to conduct. Important discussions are ongoing with the relevant parties to cover all those and other points.

I also want to reiterate what Mr. Griffiths said about the *FSO SAFER* oil tanker. I have raised this issue in my briefings to the Council on 10 occasions over the past 12 months. It needs to be resolved. Nothing can happen without the United Nations assessment mission. Once again, therefore, like Mr. Griffiths, I urge rapid action on that.

Amid all those challenges, the humanitarian operation has continued to deliver. The World Food Programme reports that it continues to provide food assistance to more than 13 million people every month; the World Health Organization is carrying out more than 1.5 million medical consultations a month; and UNICEF and others report that support to water networks benefited an average of nearly 4 million people a month from September to December in 2019. I want to commend once again the humanitarian workers, especially the Yemeni staff, who are delivering that response. They are unquestionably saving millions of lives.

No one has suggested that the emergency in Yemen has improved over the past year, but key assessments remain blocked, complicating efforts to adjust programmes based on the latest evidence. That makes it difficult to know with certainty whether there are large pockets of unmet needs throughout the country. To date, we have not heard reports of famine-like conditions returning in high-risk areas. In late 2018, we heard such reports from many sources even before the formal assessments had been completed. I believe that high levels of aid delivery have helped, but it is clear that without the assessments we cannot be confident of the position. Let me, finally on this point, thank everyone who has contributed to the medical evacuation of the 28 patients whom Mr. Griffiths mentioned. Like him, I would like to see a more sustainable solution put in place soon.

Humanitarian agencies have been able to continue saving millions of lives because our donors have provided the money to do so. That brings me to my third point: funding for the United Nations aid operation. I once again want to thank the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United States, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, Germany, the European Union, its States members and all our donors for their support. All humanitarian agencies take very seriously the accountability for those funds.

We know that the choice over whether or not to provide assistance is a voluntary one. The donors have shown much generosity in financing the Yemen humanitarian operation. In my experience, that generosity is based on just two things: first, the belief that there are real needs and, secondly, the belief that if they provide resources, they will get to the people who need help. Therefore, anybody currently or potentially hindering humanitarian agencies' work with regard to those two points needs to understand what a big risk they are taking with donors' continuing generosity.

I turn now to the Yemeni economy. As Yemenis depend almost entirely on commercial imports for food, fuel, medicine and other basic goods, it is essential to keep all ports open. Most food and fuel imports continue to come in through Al-Hudaydah or Saleef. Commercial supplies through those ports have remained stable in recent months. Thanks to a mechanism for commercial fuel imports managed by the Special Envoy, fuel volumes have been higher than the previous average every month since October 2019.

It is equally important to ensure that imports are affordable. The Yemeni rial is losing value, meaning fewer people can afford the goods, above all food, that they need to survive. A dispute between the parties over bank notes is still driving a disparity between the exchange rate in the south, which is approximately 650 rial to the dollar, and the north, where it is at approximately 595 rial to the dollar. In late 2018, the rapid depreciation of the Yemeni rial was a key factor in bringing the country to the brink of widespread famine. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has played a crucial role in stabilizing the rial. I thank that country once again for that, including the recent release of an additional \$227 million for those purposes. I expect that such support will continue to be necessary.

The last point is progress towards peace. Peace is the only way to end the humanitarian crisis in Yemen. Mr. Griffiths just briefed the Council on the serious risks that we now see. We are now entering the sixth year of this war. Enough is enough.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Lowcock for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ambassador King.

Ms. King (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines): I have the honour to report to the Security Council on the work of the Committee established pursuant to

resolution 2140 (2014), pursuant to paragraph 19 (e) thereof. The last such briefing took place on 15 May 2019 (see S/PV.8525); this briefing will therefore cover the period from 16 May 2019 to date.

From 16 May to 31 December, the Permanent Representative and then the Deputy Permanent Representative of Peru served as Chair of the Committee. During that period, the Committee held one informal consultation on 23 August to discuss the mid-term update of the Panel of Experts. Four recommendations were addressed to the Committee, two of which were referred to the Panel for further information, with action on the other two having been agreed to by the Committee.

I would also like to recall that, for the sake of comprehensiveness, during this time period my predecessors also took action, as agreed upon by the Committee, on three recommendations contained in the final report (see S/2019/83) of the Panel of Experts under resolution 2402 (2018). Those recommendations concerned engagement with the Head of the United Nations Verification and Inspection Mechanism for Yemen and the Head of the United Nations Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement (UNMHA), respectively, with a view to facilitating the establishment of an information-sharing protocol between the Mechanism and the Panel of Experts and between UNMHA and the Panel of Experts.

The recommendations also concerned engagement with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs on the possibility of introducing the analytical capacity of the Mechanism to identify networks using false documentation to evade vessel inspections.

Action on the third recommendation involved the dispatch of a joint letter to the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the United Nations Global Compact, seeking their views on the possibility of organizing a conference to support the Government of Yemen in implementing due-diligence mechanisms to best manage cash flow and the import of goods under the principles of the United Nations Global Compact.

Lastly, during that time period the Committee received two implementation reports, from Panama and Portugal. The Committee also continued to receive vessel inspection reports from the Mechanism.

Since I took over as Chair, the Committee has held one informal consultation, on 10 January, to discuss

the final report (see S/2020/70) of the Panel of Experts under resolution 2456 (2019), which was transmitted to the Security Council on 27 January.

Of the 11 recommendations contained in the report, five were addressed to the Security Council and six to the Committee. The Committee agreed to take action on two of the six recommendations. It therefore agreed that, during this briefing, the Committee would call on all parties to the conflict in Yemen to strictly adhere to international humanitarian law and to investigate and prosecute their members who commit international humanitarian law violations, and I am doing so via this periodic report.

The Committee also agreed to refer back one recommendation to the Panel, requesting further information, and concluded the process of considering a delisting request submitted by the legal representatives of Mr. Khalid Ali Abdullah Saleh, through the delisting focal point in the Secretariat, for the delisting of his father Mr. Ali Abdullah Saleh. The latter's name remains on the Committee's sanctions list.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Ambassador King for her briefing.

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

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I would like to thank Mr. Griffiths and Mr. Lowcock, as well as Ambassador King, for their briefings. I want to state on record, once again, that we fully support the United Nations-led process and the United Nations efforts to bring peace to Yemen. We once again take this opportunity to urge all the parties to engage in good faith and work closely with the United Nations to bring the conflict to a close. In that regard, we welcome the 16 February announcement of an initial agreement on an exchange of prisoners, and, as ever, its implementation is key.

We heard from Mr. Griffiths about the need for violence and suffering to stop if peace is to thrive. The decrease in violence that began in October was welcomed by the international community and by Yemenis, but as the emergency Security Council meeting of 28 January acknowledged, the recent violence in Al-Jawf and Niham is of very grave concern. Regardless of who started the violence, it is clear that the Houthis have sought to exploit the situation and that is unacceptable.

Moreover, to pick up on something Mr. Lowcock said, the violence serves to underscore the fact that the conflict will continue until we can find a political solution. We therefore encourage the parties to redouble their efforts towards beginning political discussions. In order to ensure the effectiveness of the peace talks in Yemen, as well as the sustainability of the peace, we encourage the development of a context-specific approach to women's participation in the process, as called for in resolution 2493 (2019).

I want to turn now to humanitarian access. We very much share the concerns that Mr. Lowcock outlined. His briefing on the reversal of the trend towards decreasing civilian casualties was sobering. We endorse his remarks on international humanitarian law, and I think that his warning about donors was also very salutary. The United Kingdom is increasingly concerned by access constraints and obstructions in Houthi-controlled areas in the north. Houthi restrictions have increased significantly over recent weeks, with increasingly severe intimidation of United Nations and non-governmental organization (NGO) humanitarian workers. In line with resolution 2451 (2018), humanitarian workers need to be able to conduct their work safely and without harm.

Unless those restrictions and obstructions are lifted and intimidation ceases, there is a real risk that United Nations agencies and NGOs will not be able to deliver life-saving aid over the coming months. Urgent action is needed, and I also support what Mr. Lowcock said about the needs assessment. The Secretary-General's statement on 12 February reiterates the importance of the humanitarian operation. I want to place on record how grateful we are for the work that the United Nations is doing to ensure that vital humanitarian work can continue. In those increasingly difficult conditions, it is vital that we as the international community continue to support those efforts in a coordinated and coherent manner.

I would also like to put on record our concerns about the Central Bank of Yemen and the fact that it will imminently run out of foreign currency reserves, which will cause major economic, humanitarian and political consequences in Yemen. Significant financial assistance, on a scale of \$1 to \$2 billion, is urgently needed to prevent that. We look to the Government of Yemen to urgently develop a credible plan that reassures potential donors of their investments in the Yemeni people.

I would like to thank and pay tribute to the Panel of Experts for its tireless work over the last year and to say that the United Kingdom will work with others on the Council and the Committee established pursuant to resolution 2140 (2014) to take forward its recommendations. The United Kingdom notes with concern the findings of the final report (see S/2019/83) of the Panel of Experts regarding weapons of Iranian origin in Yemen. We also recognize the Panel's findings on the Abqaiq Aramco attack — the Houthis simply did not have the capability to conduct such an attack. The report's findings on instances of intimidation and sexual violence against women in Houthi-controlled areas are also deeply troubling. That is unacceptable, and I hope that the Council will reiterate our condemnation of such actions today.

We would also like to place on record our concerns about the *FSO SAFER* oil tanker and the vital necessity of dealing with the issue. We urge the Houthis to allow either the removal of the oil or a repair mission to proceed, so as not to hold the environment hostage. Continued Houthi inaction on the issue is nothing short of reckless.

Ms. King (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines): I thank our briefers for their valuable updates this morning. I also take this opportunity to reaffirm Saint Vincent and the Grenadines support for Mr. Martin Griffiths and his team in their dedicated efforts towards a solution to the challenging situation in Yemen, as well as for their continued cooperation and coordination with the Security Council.

Mr. Griffiths began his briefing this morning by stating that we are witnessing in Yemen what we have long feared and that the situation has become increasingly dire. His words were chilling. Like Mr. Griffiths, we are distressed. Last month, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines pointed to the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Yemen and expressed our concerns over the restrictions on the delivery of humanitarian aid (see S/PV.8704). It is unfortunate that we return to the Council to hear such chilling reports one month later, as we remain troubled by the unprecedented threats that continue to persist.

At the same meeting, Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham informed us that access constraints affect 6.7 million people in need of assistance across the country. We have all heard, on several occasions, the various complaints about the treatment of humanitarian personnel and

listened to briefings that emphasize the ways in which those restrictions are paralysing humanitarian operations. The people of Yemen have suffered enough and have lost too much. People have lost their livelihoods; children have lost their childhoods; and parents have lost children — that does not even begin to scratch the surface. Yemen has been mired in conflict for too long, and the people cannot lose their last shreds of hope. The importance of sustaining humanitarian assistance cannot be overstated, as the consequence of restricted access is the prolonged suffering of many.

We recall the obligations under international humanitarian law that demand unhindered humanitarian access. In times of conflict especially, there can be no derogation from those sacrosanct principles. The international community must continue to engage with all parties to encourage the active facilitation of safe and unhindered humanitarian access in accordance with humanitarian law.

In that vein, we welcome the efforts of the humanitarian community to collectively overcome the challenges I mentioned, in order to maintain the delivery of humanitarian assistance to millions of Yemenis. As such, we recognize the recent conference of aid agencies and donors that took place in Brussels, where the immediate removal of all restrictions, obstructions and interference violating humanitarian principles was called for. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines wholeheartedly supports and reiterates that sentiment. We welcome and encourage all actions by parties that contribute to the easing of impediments to that life-saving assistance.

While humanitarian aid is critical, it is not a panacea — such assistance merely treats one of the symptoms of the conflict. What is needed for a sustainable and tenable solution is a comprehensive peace agreement. We call for the resumption of the desperately needed peace process, which must be inclusive and reflective of all groups across the various categories in society. That is the only way to avoid a further unravelling of the conflict, which remains fragile, as evidenced by the stark deterioration in circumstances and intensification of tensions. Yemen remains an extremely multifaceted and complex conflict with a wide range of actors, all of whom must come to the negotiating table with the requisite political will to achieve the much-needed lasting peace that Yemenis deserve. We echo Mr. Mark Lowcock's sentiment that the situation is unacceptable.

Allow me to note Saint Vincent and the Grenadines concern about the *FSO SAFER* oil tanker. The potential environmental risks that we face are unprecedented and far too great to allow inaction. There is an urgent need to address the issue. We urge the immediate facilitation of the required access to the tanker.

Allow me to end on a positive note by recognizing the efforts that are being made, as our acknowledgement of such is also critical in encouraging the parties to act. The facilitation and official commencement of mercy flights is commendable, as is the finalization of a plan to implement the prisoner exchange as per the Stockholm Agreement. Such acts, which reflect a willingness to engage, are those that kindle and sustain the hope that Yemen can achieve peace.

Mr. Ladeb (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, my delegation thanks Mr. Martin Griffiths, Mr. Mark Lowcock and Ambassador King for their invaluable briefings.

Despite the delicate situation that Yemen has endured for years, efforts made by the international community — especially the United Nations — since the signing of the Stockholm Agreement have led to de-escalation and the emergence of positive indicators over the past few months, with a focus on ways to resume comprehensive political negotiations between the parties. However, we are deeply concerned by the recent exacerbation of violence and intensifying clashes, particularly in the areas of Al-Jawf, Ma'rib and Nihm, with negative impact on civilians. There could also be implications for the advancement of the political process and the overall situation, particularly with regard to the humanitarian aspect.

Tunisia therefore calls on the conflicting parties to reach a ceasefire, de-escalate the situation, heed the voice of reason and make Yemeni interests a priority above all else. The military option cannot be a solution — rather, it would further complicate the crisis and deepen the suffering of the brotherly Yemeni people, especially given the potential for such escalation to spread to other fronts.

In that context, we reaffirm the need to continue and complete the implementation of what was agreed upon in Stockholm, including the Al-Hudaydah Agreement, the agreement on the exchange of prisoners and the statement of understanding on Taiz. We also stress the importance of adhering to the Riyadh agreement and implementing its provisions. We also call for concerted

efforts to create the necessary conditions for the resumption of negotiations for a political settlement and the establishment of a transitional period in accordance with the agreed terms of reference, namely, the Gulf Cooperation Council Initiative and its Implementation Mechanism, the outcomes of the inclusive National Dialogue Conference and the relevant Security Council resolutions, in order to put an end to the crisis, restore security and stability in Yemen and safeguard its sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity.

My country's delegation emphasizes once again our support for the efforts of Mr. Martin Griffiths and all his team to move forward the political process in Yemen. We welcome the agreement reached in Amman on a plan for prisoner exchanges under the auspices of the United Nations. It is a positive step in the right direction towards the full implementation of the Stockholm Agreement. In that regard, we encourage the relevant parties to go on with this constructive approach leading to confidence-building measures.

Despite regional and international efforts to reduce humanitarian suffering in Yemen, an assessment of the situation in the country points to deteriorating humanitarian conditions, in particular as hostilities continue. Today's briefings included many indicators and clues about the grave situation and the difficult humanitarian challenges in Yemen. My country underscores once again the need to quickly reach a solution to the issue of the *FSO SAFER* oil tanker, given its possible environmental risks to the region. We reject any politicization of the issue.

Tunisia calls for the stepping up of relief efforts and for continued humanitarian assistance, with unimpeded distribution and delivery to beneficiaries. We call on all parties to respect international humanitarian law and international human rights law. We also reiterate the need to ensure the safety and security of humanitarian workers.

Mrs. Craft (United States of America): I thank Special Envoy Griffiths and Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for their briefings and for the continued efforts of their teams. I also thank Ms. King for her comments.

The United States is troubled that the implementation of the Riyadh Agreement has been slow. We call on the Yemeni Government and the Southern Transitional Council to promptly implement the agreement, and we welcome continuing Saudi facilitation of that process.

We are dismayed about the ongoing escalation between the Houthis and the Saudi-led coalition and the potential loss of progress towards a political solution it portends. We urge the parties to exercise restraint and abandon the path of escalation, as it looked like they might just a few weeks ago. The United States is also concerned about the Houthis' purported ban on the new Yemeni rial notes in Houthi-controlled areas, which will have a devastating impact on the exchange rate and the overall Yemeni economy. That measure serves only to harm ordinary Yemenis, and the Houthis should resort reverse it.

Turning to sanctions, the report released last week by the Yemen Panel of Experts of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 2140 (2014) (S/2020/70) contains a number of findings with serious regional implications. The Panel concluded that the Houthis did not carry out the 14 September attacks against Saudi oil facilities. Furthermore, the Secretary-General noted in his report on the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015) that the unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) used in the attack contained components consistent with known Iranian UAVs. There is only one reasonable conclusion that can be drawn from those findings: Iran launched the attacks on Aramco facilities from Iranian territory.

Iran also continues to undermine the prospects for a political solution in Yemen. Just last week, the United States Navy interdicted 358 Iranian-made missiles and other weapons on their way to the Houthis. We have made that evidence available to the United Nations and other international partners.

While all of us around the table call for a return to talks, Iran shows its true colours by continuing to send advanced weapons to the Houthis, in violation of the Council's arms embargo. The United States is also extremely concerned about mounting Houthi interference with the work of aid partners in northern Yemen, which limits the ability of the United Nations and other humanitarian organizations to deliver assistance to the most vulnerable Yemenis. Houthi actions, including the imposition of 2 or 3 per cent per project levy amount to a flagrant rejection of a principled humanitarian response. For any who would point to reports that the Houthis have agreed to rescind the project levy, they should know that the Houthis have made clear to those on the ground that they expect funding, in some manner, from the non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

The United States applauds the efforts of the United Nations and other humanitarian organizations to keep vulnerable Yemenis alive in that restrictive environment. However, we understand that Houthi interference now prevents the guarantee of assistance delivery in the areas they control. In the light of those entirely avoidable circumstances, donors are faced with the difficult dilemma of how to continue delivering aid while remaining responsive to taxpayers. We may be forced to consider suspending or reducing our assistance in northern Yemen as early as March, unless undue Houthi interference ceases immediately and access to vulnerable populations improves. We continue to ask the Houthis to take steps towards ensuring minimum conditions for principled humanitarian operations. They include lifting access restrictions, eliminating illegitimate levies on aid projects, allowing unimpeded the assessment and oversight of projects, approving backlogged agreements with NGOs and implementing biometric registration.

The United States stands by the efforts of the United Nations and other aid agencies to provide humanitarian assistance based on the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. To the Houthis, we repeat our appeal from last month. All Yemenis in need deserve life-saving assistance. They must not make it impossible for us to continue providing aid in the areas they control. The conditions for doing so are clear.

In addition, we reiterate our call for the Houthis to allow the United Nations to board, inspect and maintain the *FSO SAFER* oil tanker, which experts assess poses a serious threat of creating a major spill. In their quest to extract benefit from the situation, the Houthis block United Nations efforts to assess and remedy the danger, while risking an environmental disaster that would quickly become an economic and humanitarian catastrophe. If that occurs, the Houthis alone will be to blame.

On a positive note, the United States is appreciative that the United Nations has been able to conduct two medical air-bridge flights, transporting 31 critically ill Yemenis to Jordan. We thank Jordan for its role in helping those vulnerable people receive care. Such life-saving measures are essential and should continue with the helpful support of Jordan and other regional partners.

We also welcomed the 16 February announcement that the parties have agreed on a plan to complete the first official large-scale exchange of prisoners since the beginning of the conflict. We encourage them to expeditiously complete the remaining steps that will lead to the exchange. We hope that those developments will bring the parties one step closer to resolving the conflict.

In conclusion, today we renew our call for leaders in Yemen to de-escalate hostilities. That is the only way to end the suffering and destruction that have plagued Yemen for far too long.

Mr. Safronkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We would like to thank Special Envoy Griffiths for his briefing on the political and humanitarian situation in Yemen. We also thank Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, for his briefing. Russia very much commends the courageous efforts of all humanitarian agencies working in the country. We would also like to thank Ambassador Rhonda King for her briefing on the work of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 2140 (2014).

We continue to closely follow the situation in Yemen. It is volatile. There are glimmers of hope for progress in the settlement process, as well as signs of escalating violence and a perpetuation of the crisis. Sides in Yemen are again in a stage of heated confrontation. We are concerned that stabilization efforts have stalled. Whereas at the beginning of the year we welcomed with hope the decrease in hostilities and airstrikes, today we have to note that armed hostilities have once again intensified, with dire humanitarian consequences.

We are convinced that there can be no military solution in Yemen. We agree with Mr. Griffiths and the Yemeni parties that the final settlement formula should be based on mutual compromise. We support the Special Envoy in all the tracks of his mediation efforts. We welcome peace initiatives to help assist the Yemeni parties in their dialogue. We consider it important for the United Nations to play the central role in the settlement of the conflict and for that role to be respected by the parties. The guiding principle should be that of respect for the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Yemen.

We note the steps taken by Saudi Arabia to transform the active phase of the conflict in Yemen into the negotiations phase. We consider it important

and necessary for all parties to strictly uphold its provisions. Let us not forget that the unity of Yemen is the achievement of the Yemeni people. We are convinced that the way forward to solving problems is possible through an inclusive dialogue among all Yemeni forces without exception. As is the case with other regional conflicts, we believe that the Yemenis themselves should determine the future of their country, taking into consideration the opinions of all segments of society.

We will continue to provide assistance to United Nations mediation efforts in Yemen, including through our contacts with all political forces in the country and interested parties, both in our national capacity and as a permanent member of the Security Council. Our work is facilitated by the historical friendly relations that Russia has with Yemen and its people.

We note the agreement between the parties to start a medical air bridge to transport Yemenis needing medical care. We deem this effort to be an important humanitarian initiative that not only provides practical assistance to a population in need but also can serve to be an important channel to build trust between the parties. Another similar measure was the progress achieved in the agreements on prisoner exchanges, which need to be built on. The parties to the conflict need to continue to move in that direction. We welcome the efforts of everyone involved in ensuring those agreements are successful.

At the moment there is a ceasefire in the Al-Hudaydah region. There is the continuing practice of entry of commercial ships and the unloading of their cargo in that harbour. We must not allow the positive operation undertaken in Al-Hudaydah, which was the result of long-term and gruelling effort, to fall victim to another wave of destabilization.

The international community must continue to make collective efforts to put the conflict on a political track and provide the necessary assistance to the Yemeni people, who are in dire need of humanitarian assistance. We are convinced that such a development will serve not only to benefit Yemen but to ensure security for all neighbouring States, because terrorist groups are the only beneficiaries of armed hostilities in Yemen. We call on all Yemenis to pool their efforts to fight the terrorist threat.

In April we will mark the fifth anniversary of the start of the bloody war in Yemen. The conflict needs to

be brought to an end. This tragic date should encourage all Yemeni parties to engage in a comprehensive political process and find a compromise on a set of fundamental conflict-settlement issues, as Mr. Griffiths just outlined in his briefing. We agree with the Special Envoy: all of these matters can be solved with the necessary political will. The Yemeni parties must find the strength to come together for the sake of the future of their own State in order to forge a modern, prosperous State that provides opportunities for sustainable development. The five-year-old war in Yemen must also inspire external players to consolidate their positions and more actively assist the Yemeni parties and the United Nations in finding a compromise.

Instead of pointing fingers, it is better to return to impartial diplomatic work, specifically to support the work of Mr. Griffiths in both word and deed. We consider it harmful and counterproductive to employ anti-Iranian rhetoric. In that regard, we would like to remind Council members of resolution 598 (1987), which requested the Secretary-General, in cooperation with States of the region, to develop a security architecture in the region. We therefore draw attention to the relevant Russian concept for collective security in the Persian Gulf region. We urge everyone to study it and develop joint measures to de-escalate tensions in the region.

French diplomats have proposed constructive ideas. We should take a closer look at them. We are all well aware of the proposal made by the leadership of Iran. A creative synthesis of those ideas would enable us to establish a genuine basis for international cooperation. Starting such cooperation would help to stop the war in Yemen, improve the situation in the Persian Gulf and establish dialogue between Arab States and Iran. We see no alternative to such an approach.

Mr. Singer Weisinger (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): We are grateful to Mr. Martin Griffiths, Mr. Mark Lowcock and Ambassador Inga Rhonda King for their briefings, which have given us a very complete picture of the political and humanitarian situation in Yemen. We reiterate our appreciation for the efforts they have made in their respective fields to achieve peace and address the pressing needs of the affected populations in Yemen.

First, we are very concerned about the increase in hostilities that began in mid-January, which has led to the displacement of almost 5,000 people in the

centre of the country. Today, more than ever, there is a need for a genuine truce that commits the parties to a national de-escalation. We reiterate that the parties to the conflict have an obligation to respect international humanitarian law and refrain from attacks on hospitals and other health-care centres. Such indiscriminate attacks particularly affect the civilian population, whose well-being depends on the services provided through that infrastructure. We recognize the importance of the talks between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis, on the understanding that they can bring about a ceasefire and a cessation of hostilities.

Secondly, we are very concerned about the deterioration of the current humanitarian situation. We reiterate that all parties to the conflict have an obligation to allow safe and unrestricted humanitarian access. This humanitarian crisis is made even more complex by the climate situation. The desert locust plague threatens to invade Yemen, which could have very severe consequences in a context where food security is already fragile. It is known that this plague can cause losses of up to 100 percent in both crops and fodder, triggering an extremely alarming and dangerous situation. Preventive measures are therefore urgently needed to prevent this pest from spreading in Yemen. We support the efforts of relevant organizations to prevent the worsening of a situation to which the Yemenis are already subjected, and we call for support from the international community to that end.

Now more than ever we must reach a broad and inclusive political agreement based on mutual respect and full compliance with the commitments undertaken. We therefore note the importance of making progress in the implementation of the agreements reached in Stockholm and Riyadh. In that regard, we are pleased to learn that the parties have agreed on a detailed plan to complete the first large-scale exchange of prisoners since the beginning of the conflict.

There is no military solution to the conflict in Yemen. We echo the words of the Secretary-General, who said that our mediation capacity and tools for maintaining peace need to be strengthened and that we need to place long-term development at the centre of our efforts.

We understand that the political process in Yemen must be inclusive of women and young people and reflect their needs. Indeed, because of the conflict, agricultural production has been increasingly taken on

by women in Yemen, thus enhancing their participation in the country's economy. That is why it is important to make it possible for them to be a part of the political process.

In conclusion, we welcome the start of mercy flights from Sana'a airport to neighbouring countries, where patients, the majority of whom are boys and girls, can to receive the treatment that they so desperately need. We welcome the release and transfer from detention centres to civilian actors of 64 boys who had been deprived of their freedom. Both of those measures are vital for trust-building among the population in the political process and to alleviate their suffering. We reiterate that only an inclusive, sustainable and credible peace process can once and for all open the way for all to development and prosperity for the Yemeni people.

Mr. Schulz (Germany): Let me first thank Martin Griffiths and Mark Lowcock for their comprehensive and insightful briefings. Let me also thank Ambassador Rhonda King for her work and her report as Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 2140 (2014).

I wish to say a few words on the situation in Yemen in general.

We strongly condemn the resurgence of violence in the north by all parties. We are deeply concerned about the continual fighting, especially in the region north-east of Sana'a, around Ma'rib and in Abyan. We call on all actors to break the cycle of violence and instead engage constructively and without delay in efforts to de-escalate the situation. In this regard, we welcome the recent agreement on a prisoner exchange between the parties, under United Nations auspices.

Such confidence-building measures, as well as mercy flights, and, equally, the invaluable work of the United Nations Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement, are critical elements on the path to political talks. We encourage Houthis as well as the Yemeni Government and the coalition to continue to follow this path. The Special Envoy has our full support in his tireless efforts to encourage the parties in that regard.

First and foremost, all parties must strictly adhere to international humanitarian and human rights law and protect civilians as well as civilian infrastructure. Women and children are the ones suffering most from the dire military and humanitarian situation. All actors should alleviate their suffering and put their needs first.

We are particularly appalled by reports of systematic sexual violence against women, especially in Houthi-controlled areas. This is unacceptable and should not go unpunished. As with all human rights violations in Yemen, accountability remains crucial.

Political leaders and their visions for a future Yemen must be judged on their ability to provide a safe, prosperous and healthy environment for the Yemeni people that takes into account the diverse interests and groups in the country. However, what we see now is the contrary. There is no time to spare to work together with the Special Envoy towards a political solution that allows Yemenis to live in peace.

I would now like to make a few comments on the once again sobering report that Mark Lowcock has provided us this morning.

We all know that Yemen and its people are in dire need of large-scale humanitarian assistance. Yet in some parts of the country, in particular in Houthi-controlled territories, humanitarian personnel are subject to inhumane treatment and humanitarian operations are systematically restricted, thereby depriving men, women and children of the desperately needed assistance. That is cruel and deplorable. We have witnessed these increasing restrictions for far too long. As a result, 8 million people in need cannot be reached. This is unacceptable. We must not wait any longer to send clear and hard messages to the authorities in Sana'a. Without respect for the humanitarian principles and the safety of humanitarian staff, as Mark Lowcock reminded us once again of this morning, life-saving assistance cannot and will not get in.

We therefore once more call all parties, but especially the Houthis, to uphold their responsibility to cease any harassment of humanitarian staff; facilitate safe, rapid and unhindered access; lift bureaucratic restrictions; and enable project agreements without further delay.

Mr. Dang (Viet Nam): My delegation wishes to thank Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator; Mr. Martin Griffiths, Special Envoy for Yemen; and Ambassador Rhonda King, Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 2140 (2014), for their briefings and updates.

A month ago, we discussed in this Chamber (see S/PV.8704) the Yemeni situation, with some

encouraging signs. Unfortunately, a surge in hostilities between the parties in Sana'a, Ma'rib, Al-Jawf and other areas during the past few weeks has further complicated the situation and cast a shadow over the fragile de-escalation process. In the meantime, the implementation of the important agreements signed between the parties continues to be delayed in some ways.

We share Council members' deep concern about the humanitarian situation in Yemen. Nearly 250,000 Yemeni people have died since 2015, including 100,000 as a direct result of hostilities and 130,000 from hunger and disease. An estimated 4 million people have been displaced within the country owing to the conflict. In recent weeks, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has continued to receive reports of mass-casualty incidents across the country.

Viet Nam therefore urges the parties to the conflict, especially the Houthi, to fulfil their obligations under international humanitarian law and international law and to facilitate the humanitarian work of the United Nations and its relevant partners. The necessary steps must be urgently taken to protect civilians and health-care facilities. The provision of humanitarian assistance should continue to be one of our highest priorities, in parallel with efforts to launch constructive dialogues among all Yemeni parties.

Access for humanitarian assistance must be provided without any obstructions. We commend the humanitarian flight operations, which, for the first time in three years, brought a group of Yemeni patients from Sana'a to Jordan for specialized medical assistance. In that connection, we would like to express our appreciation to the United Nations, the World Health Organization, Jordan, Egypt and other parties for their dedication and cooperation. We also welcome the recent agreement by the opposing parties in Yemen to implement the prisoner exchange.

Given the current fragile situation, we wish to reaffirm that a peaceful political settlement is the only way to resolve the conflict in Yemen. Here I would like to recall Mr. Martin Griffiths's recent statement to the effect that peace depends on political compromise between and among the parties. We call for further efforts to be made by the parties to implement the Stockholm Agreement and the Riyadh agreement, with the aim of returning to de-escalation and moving towards

a comprehensive and inclusive political process. In that regard, we would like to express our appreciation for the efforts of the Special Envoy, the United Nations Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement (UNMHA) and the Redeployment Coordination Committee. We call on the concerned parties to ensure the safety and mandate-based activities of UNMHA's personnel.

The resumption of peace talks is contingent on the political will and efforts of all parties involved in the conflict in Yemen. For its part, the Council should maintain its unity on, and firm support for, a comprehensive political solution while being committed to the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Yemen.

Mr. Jürgenson (Estonia): I thank Special Envoy Griffiths and Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for their briefings on the political and humanitarian situation in Yemen. I also thank Ambassador King for her briefing as Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 2140 (2014).

The situation in Yemen remains deeply worrisome. Unfortunately, during the past month the security situation in Yemen has deteriorated owing to another round of hostilities at the northern frontlines. We call on all parties to the conflict to ensure an immediate cessation of hostilities. The violence is causing further suffering to the Yemeni people, who are already facing the world's largest humanitarian crisis. Thousands more families have been forced to flee their homes. Both those issues — the hostilities and the dire humanitarian conditions — need to be addressed as a priority without any further delay.

We are extremely worried about the continuing attacks on civilian infrastructure. There can be no justification for bombing hospitals, as recently happened in Al-Jafra and Al-Saudi, leaving 15,000 people with limited access to medical care. In addition, the air strike in Al-Jawf province last Saturday killed at least 31 civilians. Such indiscriminate attacks are a clear breach of international humanitarian law. We call on all parties to the conflict to continue to make the protection of civilians a priority.

Secondly, the continuing restrictions on distributing humanitarian aid to the Yemeni people are another breach of international humanitarian law. Intimidating humanitarian workers, obstructing their work and even arresting aid workers must stop immediately. It is extremely worrying to hear from the aid agencies and

donors that they may be forced to scale down or stop aid distribution in certain areas. An indication that the Houthi authorities would cancel the 2 per cent tax on every humanitarian project would be a step in the right direction, as such a tax is contrary to the principles of humanitarian aid.

It is also increasingly worrying that United Nations officials have not been granted access to the *FSO SAFER* oil tanker. Access must be provided to prevent an environmental disaster in the Red Sea.

Despite those mostly negative tendencies, I am nevertheless glad to also hear about a few positive developments. We welcome the announcement of an agreement on a large-scale exchange of prisoners, as stated by the prisoner-exchange committee last Sunday. That would be an important humanitarian measure and a step towards implementing the Stockholm Agreement. We also welcome the beginning of mercy flights from Sana'a. We urge the parties to allow those flights to continue so that Yemeni patients can receive the treatment that they need.

Hopefully, such much-needed confidence-building measures may also contribute towards the resumption of formal political talks with the participation of the Yemeni Government. It is clear that the solution to this conflict can only be political. We call on the parties to begin discussions on a comprehensive political solution under the auspices of the United Nations without delay or preconditions. We support the efforts of Special Envoy Martin Griffiths in that regard.

We also urge the Government of Yemen and the Southern Transitional Council to overcome the obstacles in implementing the Riyadh agreement, which is crucial in order to move towards a comprehensive political settlement in Yemen.

Ms. Tayob (South Africa): We thank Special Envoy Griffiths, Under-Secretary-General Lowcock and Ambassador King, in her capacity as Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 2140 (2014), for their briefings. South Africa continues to reiterate its support for Mr. Griffiths, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, and for all his efforts to find a peaceful solution to the situation in Yemen. South Africa thanks the Panel of Experts for its comprehensive report covering the year 2019 (see S/2020/70).

My delegation would like to reiterate that a causal nexus exists between the political impasse, the dire humanitarian situation and the security situation. Our intervention will therefore focus on those three elements.

First, on the political process, South Africa urges the parties to commit to a political process, which can be achieved only through dialogue. There has been no further implementation of the Riyadh agreement. South Africa therefore wishes to reiterate its call for the implementation of that vital agreement between the Yemeni Government and the Southern Transitional Council, as well as the full implementation of the December 2018 Stockholm Agreement. Like Special Envoy Martin Griffiths, we call on the Yemeni actors to unite around a vision of Yemen addressing the conflict and restoring peace within the country.

Secondly, on the humanitarian situation, South Africa commends the work of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Yemen regarding the commencement of the medical air bridge evacuation between Sana'a and Amman. That agreement was achieved with the collaboration of all the parties to the conflict and highlights that progress can be made when the political will is strong. It is heartening to note that the spokesperson of the World Health Organization indicated that the organization was covering the costs of the victims' medical treatment, transport and accommodation.

However, of equal importance to note are the restrictions on humanitarian operations in the north, which continue to cause much frustration with regard to the reliable delivery of aid, further threatening to suspend aid altogether. We call on the parties to the conflict to allow the free, regular and unimpeded passage of food and other humanitarian relief and not to take actions that would deprive civilians of their rights to food and health care. In that regard, we remind the parties to the conflict that all necessary measures should be taken to respect the Geneva Conventions.

Thirdly, on the security situation, South Africa is dismayed that, after much political traction and relative calm, the recent escalation of fighting in Yemen has effectively reset the conflict resolution process. The number of fatalities continues to rise as the levels of violence and conflict escalate in Nihm, Ma'rib and Al-Jawf. In that regard, South Africa calls on the parties to observe the ceasefire in Al-Hudaydah and to contribute towards a nationwide cessation of hostilities.

A cessation of hostilities in Yemen, or even parts of Yemen, would greatly assist the negotiation process towards a political solution for the country.

In conclusion, this unprecedented humanitarian crisis necessitates an urgent commitment to a ceasefire and the pursuit of a negotiated, peaceful and inclusive solution to the crisis. We wish to reiterate that the only sustainable solution to this conflict is a Yemeni-led political settlement that is inclusive and fair and puts the interests and well-being of all the citizens of Yemen first.

Mr. Zhang Jun (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The Chinese delegation would like to thank Special Envoy Griffiths, Under-Secretary-General Lowcock and Ambassador King, Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 2140 (2014), for their briefings.

China has been closely following the security, political and humanitarian situations in Yemen. We commend the United Nations for its vigorous efforts to advance the political process and improve the humanitarian situation in Yemen. We support the 2140 Committee and the Panel of Experts in carrying out their mandated work.

Recently, there have been fighting in several areas in Yemen and an escalation of military operations, which is of concern. At the same time, we note that, against that backdrop, the Yemeni Government and the Houthi representative recently reached an agreement in Amman, the capital of Jordan, on a large-scale prisoner exchange. That demonstrates that both sides are willing and able to ease tensions in Yemen. China welcomes that development and commends the efforts of both the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross. We hope that the prisoner release will take place as soon as possible.

We also call on all parties to the conflict to engage in broad dialogue and consultations in order to make progress with regard to a ceasefire, the cessation of violence and the building of mutual trust, among other elements. Despite the many challenges, the political settlement of the Yemeni issue should continue. All parties in Yemen should strive to relaunch the United Nations-led comprehensive political settlement process at an early date. The conflict in Yemen has been continuing for five years, during which all parties have paid a heavy price.

In the past two years, after difficult negotiations, the parties reached the Stockholm Agreement and the Riyadh agreement. Those outcomes should be commended and the political commitments made must be fulfilled by all parties in order to maintain the momentum for a political settlement.

The situation in Al-Hudaydah remains tense. We support facilitating the work of the United Nations Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement in monitoring the ceasefire and fulfilling its mandate. We urge all parties to cooperate with the Mission.

The implementation of the Riyadh agreement has entered its second phase, which has a direct impact on the formation of a coalition Government and the next stage of political negotiations. We hope that all signatories to the agreement will implement the consensus in military, security and other key areas. In that process, it is imperative to pay attention to the views of the countries of the region and leverage their roles. Parties to the conflict in Yemen should focus on the future of the country and the interests of the people, avoid an escalation of hostilities and jointly safeguard the country's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity.

The humanitarian situation in Yemen is grim and deserves serious attention. All parties in Yemen should fully cooperate with the humanitarian relief operations of the United Nations and relevant agencies, avoid inflicting civilian casualties during military operations and avert the more serious humanitarian crisis that could result from a lack of humanitarian access. The humanitarian situation has affected all aspects of people's lives — the country's currency and prices are unstable; food and supplies of drinking water are insufficient and diseases such as cholera are not effectively prevented or treated. Last year, the country also suffered from plagues of locusts, which seriously affected its agricultural production.

China is deeply sympathetic to the suffering of the Yemeni people and has provided them with assistance through multilateral and bilateral channels. We advocate the promotion of peace and stability through development in countries affected by conflict. We hope that the international community, in addition to providing relief supplies to Yemen, will also support the country's development and reconstruction by helping to stabilize prices and providing support for education, employment and other economic and social needs. The

unity of the Security Council is an essential prerequisite for a political resolution of the Yemeni issue. All parties should enhance communication, overcome their differences, work towards consensus and create favourable conditions for a political settlement.

On the question of sanctions, China always takes the position that they are not an end in themselves. The Committee established pursuant to resolution 2140 (2014) should play a constructive role in promoting the political settlement of the Yemeni issue. China is not in favour of introducing complicated issues into the question of sanctions, since that would only undermine the unity of the Council.

Mr. Djani (Indonesia): Like others, I would like to thank Special Envoy Martin Griffiths, Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock and Ambassador King for their important briefings. All of them have provided us with an update on the seriousness of the situation on the ground. While there has been notable progress in some areas, many issues remain unresolved and are even getting worse. Nevertheless, we extend our deepest gratitude to the Special Envoy and the humanitarian workers for their tireless efforts to make progress and deliver massive amounts of assistance despite many challenges. In response to the briefings, Indonesia would like to highlight three points.

First, I would like to touch upon humanitarian assistance. We are deeply concerned about the prolonged humanitarian impediments imposed by the Houthis. Obstruction of humanitarian assistance and operations, by any side and for any cause, is completely unacceptable. That is particularly true in Yemen, where over 12 million Yemenis are desperately in need of such assistance. It is inconceivable that the Yemeni people, who are already victims of that violence, have now also become victims of bureaucracy, paperwork and other impediments.

That is an unforgivable tragedy in view of the fact that humanitarian aid is a lifeline for 80 per cent of the population. In that connection, we urge Houthi officials to immediately cooperate with the United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator for Yemen in order to resolve the blockade and create a conducive environment in which humanitarian workers can perform their tasks effectively.

The second topic I would like to address is the political process and security situation. We would like to reiterate our support for the Special Envoy and

commend his efforts. In our view, no progress is too little. We are encouraged to learn that there has been agreement on a detailed plan to complete the first official large-scale exchange of prisoners. We hope that the swap occurs soon so that they can finally be reunited with their families. We are also pleased to hear that the mercy flight was operationalized and able to carry more than 30 patients to receive medical care outside of Sana'a. That is one good step towards helping to build confidence.

In addition, we would like to see progress in Taiz and a reduction of violence in Yemen. I share Mr. Griffiths' serious concern about the recent escalation of violence, which might hamper the political process. I would also like to echo his sentiment that peace should be nurtured. The recent escalation of violence, which has led to increasing civilian casualties, is therefore intolerable. If it continues, it will erode the confidence of both parties to implement all previous agreements.

Thirdly, with regard to the *FSO SAFER* oil tanker, Indonesia has serious concerns that after months and months of discussion of that issue, there has been no major progress. The assessment team continues to be unable to access the decaying tanker, whose explosion would trigger an environmental catastrophe. It is the hope of my delegation that the assessment team will be permitted to at least enter the tanker, but it is also critical that all the necessary actions be taken to prevent a catastrophe. The discussion of relevant procedures and oil revenue can continue after urgent pre-emptive action has been taken.

In conclusion, my delegation pleads that, at the very least, parties should work harder to avoid civilian casualties and reduce the suffering of our brothers and sisters in the country. Saving people's lives should be at the centre of our work. Furthermore, and for the sake of humankind, dialogue should continue. I would also like to underline Under-Secretary-General Lowcock's message that enough is enough.

The calendar continues to change and time ticks away, yet the suffering of the people of Yemen goes on and on. When will we put a stop to all that carnage?

Mr. De Rivièrè (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Special Envoy and the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs for their briefings and reiterate our full support for them. I also thank Ambassador King for her briefing. We have said it time and again: we must put an end to the suffering of the Yemeni people,

and a comprehensive and inclusive political solution is the only way to achieve it.

We are very concerned about the ongoing violent clashes in northern Yemen, which have resulted in many casualties. De-escalation must be pursued without delay, facilitated by direct exchanges between the parties, and we must move towards a cessation of hostilities. Confidence-building measures are needed in order to do so. Some initial progress has been made — the first medical evacuation flights from Sana'a to Amman in early February and the agreement announced on 16 February 2020 for a large-scale prisoner exchange. Additional progress is needed. The Riyadh agreement must now be fully implemented. A deteriorating situation in southern Yemen will benefit only the terrorists.

Those processes must lead to the resumption of political dialogue with a view to reaching an inclusive solution for the whole of Yemen and its components. The role of the Special Envoy is central to the coordination of those efforts. Every effort must also be made to ensure humanitarian access. The parties are obliged to respect international humanitarian law. Increasing restrictions on humanitarian access and the diversion of humanitarian assistance must cease immediately. The announcement by the Houthis that they would abandon the 2 per cent levy on humanitarian projects is a first step, but much more progress is still needed. It is imperative that the entire humanitarian community remain steadfast in its commitment to the relevant principles and support the United Nations humanitarian response plan. That was the purpose of the donor coordination meeting held in Brussels from 12 to 13 February.

Lastly, we urgently call for the United Nations to be given rapid access to the *FSO SAFER* oil tanker, which poses a serious threat to the environment. France will remain fully committed and ready to act to reach a political solution to the Yemeni crisis and, more broadly, to avoid any escalation in the region. French authorities are working with all stakeholders to that end.

Mr. Abarry (Niger) (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Martin Griffiths for his briefing on the recent developments relative to the security situation in Yemen. The Niger welcomes and reaffirms its full support for his unrelenting efforts to return peace in Yemen. My thanks also go to Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-

General for Humanitarian Affairs, and Ambassador Inga Rhonda King.

The escalation seen over the past days, characterized by missile strikes and aerial bombing, constitutes a serious obstacle to the resumption of dialogue. My delegation urges the parties to demonstrate further restraint to give a chance to the political process and the implementation of the various agreements previously reached by the parties, including those of the National Dialogue Conference, the November 2019 Riyadh agreement and the various provisions of the December 2018 Stockholm Agreement. It was not so long ago that de-escalation was proving to be a success, which demonstrates that, if the parties want, they can create the conditions necessary for seeking a political solution.

We condemn violations of international humanitarian law and blocking the delivery of humanitarian assistance in a region in which approximately two-thirds of the population are in need of such assistance. We also condemn violence directed against human rights workers and other civil society actors. The evacuation of sick children to hospitals, in particular in Jordan — it should be repeated — is to be lauded, as it can significantly contribute to de-escalation, which is so desperately desired.

Similarly, we note and welcome that, despite upsurges in violence, the provision of humanitarian assistance and medical care is being pursued thanks to the courage and determination of the humanitarian workers. Such humanitarian assistance, which is vital to the Yemeni population in need of it, must continue and be stepped up. In that regard, I call on all the relevant entities of the United Nations system to strengthen their support for the Yemeni economy and enable the Government to ensure the regular functioning of essential State services.

With regard to the political situation, my delegation encourages the parties to keep the channels of dialogue open and to resume without delay the political process, which, — we cannot repeat enough — is the only way of finding a lasting peace.

The President (*spoke in French*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Belgium.

Belgium is extremely concerned about the escalation of violence in Yemen over the past month, which led to one of the deadliest incidents to occur since

the beginning of the war. A resumption of the political process is needed more than ever. The talks between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis are a good starting point, but, at some point, the Government of Yemen will have to be involved in them, and the process will have to be led by the United Nations. The next steps in the political process must begin as soon as possible under the auspices of the United Nations.

Belgium welcomes the plan recently agreed between the parties in Amman for the implementation of the prisoner-exchange agreement, which could signal a first step towards the resumption of the political process. We encourage its swift implementation.

The operational environment for humanitarian actors in Yemen, particularly in the north, has rapidly deteriorated, and humanitarian space has been shrinking significantly. Obstacles are constantly being imposed, thereby hampering humanitarian access and the delivery of aid. International and national humanitarian personnel are under threat, and we deplore the direct attacks in many areas of the country. At the conclusion of their meeting in Brussels on 13 February, donors reaffirmed their full support for the United Nations, international non-governmental organizations and other humanitarian actors who are working in extremely difficult conditions. The conference participants unanimously stated that the situation is untenable. Every form of restriction, obstruction and interference that violates humanitarian principles must be lifted once and for all.

Belgium takes note of the announcement by the Houthis to lift the 2 per cent levy on humanitarian projects and urges them to put it into practice. We also call on the Houthis to refrain from setting up other obstacles that make the distribution of humanitarian aid to children and other civilians in need more difficult. Belgium welcomes the medical flights. The civilian population must be the focus of our attention. Those innocent victims continue to suffer the most serious effects of the conflict.

We also encourage the Houthis once again to finally allow access to the *FSO SAFER* oil tanker in order to facilitate a review of the situation and avoid a possible environmental disaster.

All parties must respect their obligations and commitments under international humanitarian law and, where applicable, international human rights law.

As Chair of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, we welcome the exchange of letters between Special Representative of the Secretary-General Gamba and the coalition. As a result, it was possible to adopt and formalize a time-bound programme of activities implementing last year's memorandum of understanding. We call for its implementation by the coalition as soon as possible.

Lastly, the Secretary-General presented here in the Security Council last week (see S/PV.8721) the United Nations practical guidance for mediators to better protect children in situations of armed conflict. We invite the parties to the conflict and Special Envoy Martin Griffiths to make use of the guide in the political talks that, we hope will, soon begin.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Yemen.

Mr. Al-Saadi (Yemen) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I congratulate you, Mr. President, on Belgium's presidency of the Security Council for this month. I wish you and your friendly delegation every success. I also thank Mr. Martin Griffiths, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, for his briefing and I thank Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator. Our thanks also go to Ambassador Inga Rhonda King, Permanent Representative of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, in her capacity as Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 2140 (2014), for her efforts. I thank the Committee members, as well.

The Yemeni Government has been eager to achieve lasting peace in accordance with the agreed parameters, namely, the Gulf Cooperation Council Initiative and its Implementation Mechanism, the outcome of the comprehensive National Dialogue Conference and the relevant Security Council resolutions, in particular resolution 2216 (2015).

The Yemeni Government has always expressed its support for the efforts of Mr. Griffiths. In order to achieve such a noble goal, we have participated in many consultations in good faith, and we have made significant compromises, the latest of which was made in Sweden. We had hoped that the Stockholm Agreement would serve as a positive starting point to build confidence, reach the desired peace that the Yemeni people aspire

to and end the conflict and humanitarian suffering of our patient Yemeni people, brought on by the reckless war waged by the Iran-backed armed Houthi militias.

Regrettably, after more than a year since the conclusion of that Agreement, it has led nowhere. We have entered a new phase of escalation, exacerbation of the conflict and increased suffering among the Yemeni people as a result of the Houthis' recklessness, their evasion of implementing their commitments and their attempts to tighten their grip over the city and port of Al-Hudaydah. Such acts are in disregard of the provisions of the Agreement and United Nations efforts. The militias have committed more crimes and violations against the Yemeni people, amid the obvious silence by the international community. They have opened new war fronts in an attempt to bring our people to their knees and make them submit to their ideological and sectarian rule, while implementing the Iranian agenda and scheme in Yemen and the region.

The grave escalation by the Houthi militias in Al-Jawf, Ma'rib and Nihm and their targeting of cities and displaced persons camps, as well as hospitals and mosques, thereby claiming the lives of many civilians, including women and children, underscores their intention to abort peace efforts and prolong the war. Their actions are in flagrant defiance of all efforts undertaken by the United Nations, including the Security Council.

The Yemeni Government once again reiterates the that holding of any future consultations primarily hinges upon achieving genuine and realistic progress in the implementation of the Stockholm Agreement, as well as on ensuring the success of such consultations. The Yemeni Government commends the efforts of Special Envoy Griffiths and the International Committee of the Red Cross in connection with reaching a phased agreement for the release of prisoners under the Stockholm Agreement. The Yemeni Government pursued that effort, as instructed by His Excellency Mr. Abdrabuh Mansour Hadi Mansour, President of the Republic of Yemen, since the beginning, in accordance with the principle of all-for-all. We reiterate that this step is purely humanitarian and should be implemented without procrastination, in line with the agreements reached in the meeting held recently in Jordan.

The Yemeni Government commends the important role of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the alliance leader, in supervising and ensuring the implementation

of the Riyadh agreement. The Government is deploying significant efforts, as directed by President Hadi, to implement the provisions of the agreement, in line with the chronological order agreed on, without any selectivity. The Government has implemented all those steps in accordance with the signed timetable, and it looks forward to taking measures leading to the implementation of the agreement and to join efforts in order to defeat the Iranian-Houthi agenda.

The practices perpetrated by the Houthi militias against humanitarian organizations and workers, which include stealing and pillaging humanitarian aid, controlling its distribution, detaining and intimidating relief workers, undermining humanitarian action, denying some areas their aid and imposing measures and levies on humanitarian assistance, require the international community to take a firm and decisive stance to put an end to such practices, hold to account the perpetrators and condemn such behaviour by the militias, which must stop that approach.

The Yemeni Government holds the Houthi militias fully responsible for the announcement made by some donor countries and United Nations agencies to reduce or stop aid or relief activities in Houthi-controlled areas. That will have serious ramifications on the economic, health and humanitarian situations of millions of people in dire need of such aid. That announcement is a natural consequence of the practices and behaviour of the militias. It corroborates what we have repeatedly said and emphasized here in the Council, namely, that the militias do not care about the humanitarian situation in the areas under their control. They have adopted a policy of humiliation, impoverishment and starvation against Yemenis. They also use humanitarian suffering to turn a profit and make political and media bids before local and international public opinion.

The Yemeni Government is committed to providing all facilities conducive to relief efforts and attenuating the humanitarian disaster. We once again call on our friends in donor countries and humanitarian organizations and agencies to coordinate with the Yemeni Government in order to consider a mechanism to provide assistance for beneficiaries in the Houthi-controlled areas and to stop yielding to the dictates, pressure and extortion by those militias at the expense of the groups in need.

The effects of the war waged by the Houthi militias, as well as the risks to the safety, integrity and future of

Yemen and Yemenis, are not limited to the humanitarian suffering and disaster endured by my country to date. They go beyond that to include long-term threats represented by supporting terrorist organizations. The Houthi militias support the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, which exists in Yemen, by providing it with technical support, releasing its members and allowing it to control some military positions or posts under their control, according to United Nations reports.

The Iranian weapons seized by the United States Navy on Sunday, 9 February, which included 150 anti-tank missiles, surface-to-air missiles, binoculars, thermal imaging equipment, drone components and other ammunition, which were bound for the Houthi militias, constitute a flagrant violation of Council resolutions and provide irrefutable evidence of the close relationship between the mullah regime in Tehran and the Houthi militias. They have common objectives to perpetuate the war, undermine United Nations efforts

towards reaching peace, exacerbate the suffering of the Yemeni people and threaten the security, safety and stability of the region and the world.

In conclusion, the Houthi militias continue to deny United Nations teams access to the *FSO SAFER* oil tanker in Ras Isa. The international community and the Security Council must assume their responsibility and bring pressure to bear on the Houthi militias. They must also determine which Houthi leaders are responsible for undermining the efforts to address the situation of the tanker, while taking measures to deter them and avoid a dangerous environmental disaster in the Red Sea.

The President (*spoke in French*): 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 noon.