



Security Council

Seventy-fifth year

8745th meeting

Thursday, 12 March 2020, 10.15 a.m.

New York

Provisional

President: Mr. Zhang Jun (China)

Members:

Belgium	Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve
Dominican Republic	Mr. Singer Weisinger
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Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	Ms. King
South Africa	Mr. Mabhongo
Tunisia	Mr. Ben Lagha
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 10.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

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

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Martin Griffiths, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen; and Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham, Acting Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator.

Mr. Griffiths is joining the meeting via video-conference from Amman, Jordan.

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

I give the floor to Mr. Griffiths.

Mr. Griffiths: I thank you very much indeed, Sir, for giving me the opportunity to brief the Security Council. The last time I did so (see S/PV.8725), I warned that the military situation in Yemen was growing increasingly dire. Today, I see the country at a critical juncture. The parties to the conflict will either move Yemen towards de-escalation and the resumption of the political process, or, I fear, towards greater violence and suffering that will make the path to the negotiating table more arduous.

The most alarming military escalation has taken place in Al-Jawf, the governorate to the east of Sana'a. I am deeply concerned about the rationale driving these escalations and the impact of the violence on Al-Jawf's people. Thousands of families have been displaced by the recent fighting, as I think we will hear from Mr. Rajasingham, and are in critical need of shelter and assistance.

This escalation could trigger conflicts in other governorates and drag Yemen downwards into a new and irresponsible cycle of violence. This would have devastating humanitarian and political consequences. It would gravely endanger civilians and delay the long-awaited and much-needed political process aimed at

bringing this war to a comprehensive close. The parties must therefore exercise maximum restraint to prevent such a terrible outcome. It is imperative that they uphold their obligations under international humanitarian law. Indiscriminate attacks affecting civilians or civilian objects are unlawful and reprehensible.

Over the last week, I travelled to Yemen to stress the need to stop the fighting. In Ma'rib, I met with local Government officials, political parties, tribal chiefs, civil society leaders, including women and youth, and persons displaced by the conflict. Let me, through the Council, thank the Governor of that governorate, Governor Al-Arada, for all his support and hospitality shown to me on that day. I listened to the concerns of all those I met about the military escalation and the humanitarian challenges, and I assured them of the commitment of my Office to supporting peace in Yemen. I heard from the people in Ma'rib a strong demand for peace, but not a peace that would be dictated from a position of military dominance.

In Sana'a, from which I have just come, I also discussed the need to stop the fighting in Ma'rib governorate. I met with Ma'rib tribal representatives and communal figures living in Sana'a to listen to their views and concerns about the conflict in Ma'rib. To be very clear — I wish to be very clear — there is no justification for military escalation in Ma'rib. Ma'rib must not become the next epicentre of Yemen's tragic conflict.

The governorate of Al-Hudaydah continues to experience clashes, particularly in the city and in the southern part of the governorate, and civilian casualties are, regrettably, increasing. Developments since yesterday's distressing and indeed tragic incident at the joint observation post in the city of Al-Hudaydah threaten to undermine the de-escalation mechanism put in place and the achievements of the Redeployment Coordination Committee. Under the leadership of my colleague General Guha, the United Nations Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement (UNMHA), approved, of course, by the Security Council, is working to mediate and restore trust between the parties after yesterday's events. I call on both parties to work through the established mechanisms to recover that calm. I should add that UNMHA continues to face movement restrictions. For example, its patrols have not been granted access to the city of Al-Hudaydah since 20 October 2019, which, naturally enough, hampers the implementation of its mandate.

I am also observing with much concern the violence elsewhere in the country. Clashes have continued in the Nihm district of Sana'a governorate — and we have discussed that in the Security Council before (see S/PV.8725) — and in the governorates of Al-Dhale'e, Shabwah, Taiz and Saada. In short, as we have discussed before, there is a real risk of a protracted military escalation across much of Yemen. We must do all we can to support the parties in containing and reversing the current trajectory.

As Council members know, since the start of the escalation in January, I have been calling publicly for the parties to agree to an immediate and unconditional military de-escalation and to work with my Office to achieve that goal. It is imperative that the parties agree to participate in a public, accountable, nationwide de-escalation mechanism that quiets the tempo of war and steers Yemen off this precarious path I have been describing. I repeated this call when I was in Ma'rib on 7 March, and I have received initial, positive responses from the parties. These reactions must now translate into tangible commitments on the ground.

Any de-escalation discussion should also be reinforced by efforts to resume the political process, which is also a subject we have discussed in this Chamber. The de-escalation and the political tracks should be supported and enhanced by an expeditious move to seriously address certain issues that have tangible effects on people's lives and, as confidence-building measures, build confidence between the parties.

I would like to add that I join the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in its statement condemning the death sentences handed down by a court in Sana'a to 35 Yemeni parliamentarians earlier this month. To say the least, the fragmentation and politicization of the judiciary and other institutions is a serious cause for concern.

Despite the alarm I am expressing today, I also want to share with the Security Council the messages I have heard from Yemenis that reassure me that, despite all the foregoing, the expeditious resumption of a peaceful political process remains within reach. On 26 and 27 February, my Office convened a group of Yemeni public and political figures here in Amman — and I am grateful for the Government of Jordan for allowing that meeting to go ahead — and these figures expressed a shared view that a durable peace can only emerge from a negotiated political settlement. Many participants

called for the prompt resumption of a comprehensive political process with no preconditions. Several expressed a frustration, which I share, that the political process has been stalled since the last round of official peace talks, which took place in Kuwait in 2016, three and a half years ago.

Over a third of the participants at that meeting were Yemeni women leaders. During my meetings with them, they emphasized the importance of including in political negotiations a diverse array of Yemenis, including women, youth, and tribal and social leaders. I completely agree with that call and that need and that requirement, and I will continue to work to get the parties to ensure the full representation of women in political consultations. Indeed, I raised the matter earlier today in Sana'a.

Despite this bleak season, the parties have indeed exhibited some willingness to continue engaging in confidence-building measures with a humanitarian purpose. As Council members know, the parties are taking important steps towards finally implementing the agreement that they reached in mid-February, again in Amman, on a large-scale exchange of prisoners. My Office has continued to work with them, as has the International Committee of the Red Cross, to fulfil that promise. Meanwhile, the World Health Organization continues its efforts aimed at ensuring that the medical air-bridge flights, which have Cairo as their next destination, operate, thereby allowing Yemeni patients to travel abroad for medical assistance that they cannot receive in Sana'a.

But much more must be done. All parties bear a responsibility to ease the impact of war on civilians. They must work assiduously on prisoner exchanges and on opening and securing access roads in Taiz, Al-Hudaydah, Ma'rib and elsewhere; we discussed that very issue in Ma'rib with the Governor to whom I have referred earlier in my briefing. The parties must also work on ensuring the payment of public-sector salaries across the country. Sana'a's airport must be opened for commercial flights to alleviate the suffering of the Yemeni people. These are crucial humanitarian measures — and none of them are particularly new — and they must not become the subject of politicization.

However, there is a limit to how much we can achieve in the absence of that political process to which I referred. We must maintain the focus — and I pledge that we will — on reviving a process that ushers into

Yemen an inclusive transition away from conflict. As Council members know, we have consulted widely among Yemenis — and will continue to do so — on the key elements of such a transition. Several common themes have emerged, and I have communicated them publicly to the Security Council before, but they bear repeating, if you would allow me, Mr. President, so as to ensure that the people of Yemen know what is on offer and in prospect.

During a transition, power will need to be shared among different political and social components, including women, of course, and civil society, in the spirit of partnership and consensus. Transitional security arrangements will need to be agreed in order to provide for the security of Yemen's people and to lead towards the State's monopoly over the use of force.

Lastly, the Yemeni people will need guarantees of humanitarian relief, reconstruction and economic recovery across the country to ensure that the suffering caused by the war is relegated to the past. We all hope that that will soon become the reality for Yemen.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Rajasingham.

Mr. Rajasingham: As the Council has just heard from the Special Envoy, escalating hostilities in Yemen have pushed peace further away than it had seemed just six weeks ago. That is dangerous territory and we join Mr. Griffiths in his call for all parties to freeze military activities and work towards de-escalation.

The renewed fighting underlines the urgency of the five priority issues on which we have briefed the Council for more than a year now: 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.

The first issue is the protection of civilians, which is a requirement of international humanitarian law. Civilian casualties last year decreased by one-third from the 2018 figures. That is good news, but it is only part of the story. There are also several alarming trends. Children now account for one in four civilian casualties — up from one in five in 2018. More than half of all civilian casualties now occur in family homes — up from 40 per cent in 2018. In other words,

violence — although killing and injuring fewer people — is now more likely to strike families in the places they should feel safest. It is no surprise that 90 per cent of those incidents result in psychosocial trauma that can last long after physical injuries heal.

When we look at data from this year, we see that civilian casualties are again rising. In February, 187 civilians were killed or wounded across Yemen; that is more than six people every day and an increase of 20 per cent since January. Much of that increase is due to the fighting Mr. Griffiths has just described, occurring in Al-Jawf and Ma'rib, which has displaced tens of thousands of people in the past several weeks. Nearly all civilians have fled Al-Jawf's capital, Al-Hazm, leaving behind only the most vulnerable. Some families have moved into remote desert areas that are difficult to reach. The rest mostly head towards Ma'rib — an area already hosting more than 750,000 people forced from their homes by earlier rounds of hostilities. We again join the Special Envoy's call for the fighting to stop now. We need a nationwide ceasefire. I also call on the parties, at all times, to protect civilians, in line with their obligations under international law. That includes taking constant care to spare civilians and meeting the essential needs of those who are displaced because of the fighting.

My second point is equally a matter of international humanitarian law — safe, rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access. For months, we have been transparent about the severe obstacles facing principled humanitarian action in Yemen. In the north, those restrictions have become untenable. Everyone agrees that a new approach is needed and we appreciate the close cooperation with our donors and partners in setting out that approach over the past few weeks. Our common objective, as the Secretary-General confirmed last month, is to maintain principled aid delivery to the millions of people who depend on it to survive. To that end, we are also intensifying dialogue with the de facto authorities to ensure that the right conditions are in place to facilitate that work. We are also preparing to adjust programmes in case there are conditions that are not in place or improve only temporarily.

As the Council heard last month, the de facto authorities agreed to drop their proposed 2 per cent levy on projects conducted by non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Since then, they have agreed to an acceptable format for NGO country agreements. Necessary food security assessments, which are

essential for knowing how many people need assistance, have also started in many areas in the north, albeit with some access challenges that we are trying to resolve with the authorities.

The World Food Programme has reached agreement with the authorities to start the retargeting and biometric registration exercise immediately. Although senior leadership engagement is there to ensure that the agreement is followed, new conditions have emerged. It is frustrating to see last-minute issues raised at the technical level. That again puts us in discussions with the authorities after more than eight months of sustained negotiations. We have communicated to the de facto authorities from all directions the need for actions over words. We appreciate the recent steps forward.

We also remain clear-eyed about what remains to be done and the need to avoid backsliding on what has recently been achieved. Specifically, we are asking de facto authorities to process the 71 aid projects still pending approval. We need more monitoring missions to be approved, and we need urgent humanitarian assessments to proceed on the basis of global standards. Those points are essential if we are to maintain principled aid programmes at the scale that people need.

On a related note, I would also recall the danger posed by the *FSO SAFER* oil tanker, where we have seen no progress. Independent technical experts recently modelled what a spill from the *FSO SAFER* might look like. In every scenario, nearly all the oil would wash up on the shores of Al-Hudaydah and Hajjah. That would devastate coastal communities in the north, as well as the fisheries and marine environment on which they depend. Neighbouring countries would also be affected. The first step to preventing such a catastrophe is the United Nations-led technical assessment, which we remain eager to undertake.

Humanitarian agencies also face challenges in Government-controlled areas, although not as severe as in the north. The Government of Yemen, for example, has left 44 humanitarian projects pending approval. On average, those projects have been waiting more than five months to start. A key multisector needs assessment has also stalled again in the south due to shifting Government demands on how it should proceed. Fortunately, food security surveys have been able to move ahead and results are being analysed now.

Insecurity also remains a challenge in parts of the south, including several recent incidents that have

affected humanitarian action. We remain grateful to the Government and local authorities for the support they are providing on those issues.

My third point concerns funding for the United Nations aid operation. Large-scale humanitarian assistance has mostly managed to keep the situation stable in Yemen and everyone agrees that the underlying needs remain severe. The aid operation is saving millions of lives. More than 13 million people receive food aid and other kinds of assistance every month. Preliminary data collected over the past several weeks seems to confirm that this is having a pronounced effect on countering severe food insecurity. But with delays in key assessments in the north and the south, it is not yet possible to quantify any changes over the past year or to confirm whether or not there are pockets of large, unmet needs.

As assessments proceed, we intend to roll over the 2019 response plan to maintain the programmes that have helped prevent famine, roll back cholera and otherwise save millions of lives. That technical roll-over will require considerable funding, although likely somewhat less than last year's plan.

We started this year on a very strong financial footing. But income projections now show more than 30 major programmes will reduce or start to close down by the end of April without additional funding. That would disrupt core, life-saving services for millions of people, including emergency food aid, treatment for malnourished children, vaccines for children and shelter for families fleeing conflict, among others. I want to be clear that those cuts would be purely due to lack of funding. That means that even if we see sustained progress in removing obstacles to principled aid delivery, we could still find ourselves up against another crippling constraint — no money.

We want to acknowledge the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for co-hosting, with the United Nations, a high-level pledging event in Riyadh planned for 2 April. The event is an opportunity to show the world's commitment to the Yemeni people. It is also an opportunity to reaffirm humanitarian principles which, in Yemen, may include donors choosing to disburse pledges in instalments as conditions for aid agencies improve.

My fourth point concerns the Yemeni economy, which is a major driver of humanitarian needs. Commercial food and fuel imports continue to enter the country through all ports and in line with established

averages. That is essential in a country where nearly everything must be imported. However, fewer people are able to afford what they need to survive, as the Yemeni rial remains far below its pre-crisis value. In the south, the rial is trading around 650 to the United States dollar; in the north, the rate is closer to 600. A dispute between the parties over banknotes is driving a disparity in the two rates. Rapid depreciation of the rial was a key factor in pushing Yemen towards famine in 2018. The Famine Early Warning Systems Network noted last month that it anticipates a steady depreciation of the rial in the coming months and warned that the risk of famine is expected to increase due to pressure on market systems, including the exchange rate. One of the most effective solutions to the exchange rate problem has been foreign exchange injections to strengthen the currency. We need a regular programme for those injections.

My last point concerns progress towards peace. Now is the time to take bold steps — such as opening Sana'a airport — that will give the people of Yemen hope that political dialogue, not war, will prevail in their country. Humanitarians have been remarkably successful in mitigating some of the worst consequences of the crisis for civilians, but only a political solution can end the crisis altogether.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Mr. Rajasingham for his briefing.

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

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): At the outset, I wish to thank Special Envoy Martin Griffiths and Acting Assistant Secretary-General Ramesh Rajasingham, as well as both of their teams, for all the work that they are doing under very difficult circumstances. We come here every month and hear these briefings, which normally swing between optimism and pessimism, but we all know the underlying realities of the situation in Yemen and the risks that the Yemeni people face. In that connection, I have to say that I find it astonishing that the kind of fighting that both Mr. Griffiths and Mr. Rajasingham have described today continues to take place.

I want to begin by echoing both Mr. Griffiths' and Mr. Rajasingham's pleas to all parties for the fighting to stop and for de-escalation to begin. As Mr. Griffiths said, the process must be public, accountable and nationwide. We have to enter into more and broader

negotiations that actually make tangible progress. The United Kingdom calls upon all the parties to please act in good faith, engage in the process and seize the opportunity to ensure that 2020 is the year we bring this dreadful conflict to a close. Mr. Griffiths has laid out the road map to that destination and we urge the parties to follow it without delay.

I also want to echo what Mr. Griffiths said about his time in Ma'rib — the conflict cannot be solved on the battlefield. In that connection, I wish to mention the continuing obstructions placed on the Redeployment Coordination Committee by the Houthis. I note the announcement today that the Government of Yemen has suspended its participation in the Committee. Less engagement is not a route towards peace in Al-Hudaydah or Yemen as a whole.

Again, the United Kingdom urges and implores all the parties to constructively cooperate with Lieutenant General Abhijit Guha and the United Nations Mission to support the Hodeidah Agreement. There is one positive development in that there has been increased engagement between Saudi Arabia and Oman — at least, that is how it seems. Increased dialogue between regional actors is key for stability, not just in Yemen but in the region as a whole.

Regarding humanitarian access, I think Mr. Rajasingham is absolutely right to cite the issue in the context of international humanitarian law. The fact that the number of children's casualties has risen from one in five to one in four is shameful. It should horrify us all and urge us to redouble our efforts.

On the difficult issue of the operating environment for humanitarian actors, I know there have been some small signs of improvement in the north of Yemen, but much remains to be done. We call on the Houthis to deliver on the minimum operating requirements that the international community has clearly set out. The world's worst humanitarian crisis cannot be allowed to deteriorate any further. We look to the United Nations and the international community to remain united in response to access constraints, which we saw was possible at the helpful donor meeting in Brussels on 13 February. Any plans to scale back assistance should be fully coordinated in order to limit the impact on Yemenis in need.

I wanted to echo what Mr. Rajasingham said about the *FSO SAFER* oil tanker. Again, it is incredible that we come here every month and every month we hear

how precarious the situation with that tanker is, yet nothing gets done. So, while I know negotiations are under way to find a diplomatic way forward, I once again call on the Houthis to either allow the removal of the oil or allow a repair mission to proceed. Continued Houthi inaction on this issue is nothing short of reckless. They are playing dice with people's lives and the environment in a very important part of the world. Such huge environmental and humanitarian damage must be avoided and all steps must be taken to that end.

I followed with interest what was said about the economy. We are very concerned that the Central Bank of Yemen may run out of foreign currency reserves in the next few weeks, which will of course have dire humanitarian and political consequences. Significant external financial assistance to the Central Bank on the scale of \$1 billion to \$2 billion dollars, we believe, is urgently needed so that imports can come in. I heard what Mr. Rajasingham said about the banknotes, which is obviously a situation that needs to be resolved quickly. The currency needs to stabilize so that ordinary Yemenis can afford the food and medical supplies they need.

We look to the Government of Yemen to urgently come up with a credible and transparent plan that reassures potential donors of their investments to the Yemeni people. Again, I think that this is an issue on which we are drawing closer and closer to the precipice, so we really do need to take action.

Lastly, if I may, I would like to say something about COVID-19. The last thing Yemen needs is an outbreak of that virus. I note the increasing restrictions that many States are implementing in the region. It is good to know that United Nations agencies are taking steps to ensure that the effect on their work is as limited as possible.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): Today is Ambassador Karen Pierce's last day as representative of the United Kingdom. I wish to thank her for her final statement at the Security Council and, in my capacity as the representative of China, I would like to thank her for her outstanding contribution to the Council's work. I pay tribute to her. I also wish her every success in her new post. She will be missed.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

Mr. Ben Lagha (Tunisia): Since this is the last time that we will have the pleasure to sit next to our dear colleague Ambassador Pierce, allow me to also express our appreciation to Her Excellency for her important contributions to the work of the Security Council. We wish her every success in her future responsibilities in Washington, D.C..

(*spoke in Arabic*)

At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Martin Griffiths and Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham for their briefings.

Yemen has witnessed a relatively calm situation recently, signalling the start of a positive breakthrough. However, military operations have resumed in a number of areas in a trend of escalation that gives cause for concern, further complicating the crisis and threatening the political settlement while obstructing the implementation of current agreements.

The continued escalation has further exacerbated the humanitarian situation and increased the suffering of the brotherly Yemeni people. In the light of the latest developments, my country's delegation stresses the need to reach an immediate ceasefire. We also call for continued efforts to advance a political settlement, which is the only solution to the crisis in Yemen, and support the call of the Special Envoy for Yemen for an immediate and unconditional end to military operations and the start of a comprehensive and inclusive de-escalation process.

We also renew our support for the legitimate leadership of Yemen and for international and United Nations efforts to advance a political settlement in that brotherly country. My delegation also calls on the parties to continue building on the outcome of the consultative meeting held in Amman and efforts to build mutual trust in order to start a transitional process in line with the terms of reference established by the Gulf Cooperation Council initiative and its implementation mechanisms, the outcomes of the comprehensive national dialogue and relevant Security Council resolutions. That would end the current crisis and restore security and stability in Yemen, while maintaining its sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity.

The Yemeni people are still suffering from an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. The continued fighting has exacerbated and increased the extent of the crisis, including by displacing tens of thousands

of people, putting at risk their safety, livelihood and well-being. Tunisia renews its call for relief efforts to be intensified and obstructions to the work of the humanitarian organizations to be removed in order to ensure the delivery of humanitarian aid to those in need. We also commend donors and welcome the convening of a pledging conference to finance the Humanitarian Response Plan in Yemen, which will be held in Riyadh next month in cooperation between the United Nations and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

To conclude, my delegation stresses once again the utmost importance of securing the access of United Nations personnel and experts to the *FSO SAFER* oil tanker to undertake the necessary maintenance. That would mitigate the huge environmental risks that threaten the region.

Mrs. Craft (United States of America): I too would like to pay tribute to my friend Ambassador Pierce for her devoted service to the Security Council and thank her for her wisdom and partnership. While I will miss her being seated to my right, I can personally say that the Trump Administration is most excited to have her as our ally in Washington, D.C., and I am looking forward to seeing her frequently on my trips there. I thank her for her service.

I thank Mr. Martin Griffiths and the Acting Assistant Secretary-General for their briefings. Regrettably, little has changed in Yemen since we met last month (see S/PV.8725). Violence has escalated, including by the Houthis taking the city of Al-Hazm in Al-Jawf governorate. We are hopeful that the parties will recommit to de-escalation, followed by a resumption of talks towards a political solution. We urge full implementation of the Riyadh agreement. When the United Nations is ready to convene talks, the parties must be prepared to field strong delegations and represent all Yemenis, including women.

Once again, we are forced to call specific attention to Houthi obstruction of humanitarian operations, which has become the unacceptable refrain of these briefings. We reiterate our message from last month to the Houthis — time is running out. We ask that they please not make it impossible for us to continue providing aid in the areas where they are present. Aid obstructions are unacceptable and have already caused many aid programmes to shut down.

We therefore urge the Houthis to take immediate steps to meet all the minimum conditions for

principled humanitarian operations before the end of this month. Those include lifting access restrictions; allowing unimpeded assessments and oversight of projects; approving backlogged agreements with non-governmental organizations; implementing biometric registration; and maintaining the elimination of so-called taxes on aid projects.

While there have been faint glimmers of progress in negotiations with the Houthis, statements and agreements alone will not save lives. We expect the Houthis to demonstrate verifiable progress and a commitment to ensuring the minimum operating conditions for the principled delivery of assistance. In the absence of credible Houthi actions to address our concerns, the United States will suspend United States assistance to Houthi-controlled areas in Yemen at the end of March, except for certain critical life-saving programmes.

We are actively engaging with other donors on that effort to create a permissive environment for the delivery of humanitarian assistance — consistent with the principle of independence — in the world's largest humanitarian emergency. We continue to look to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to play a strong role in coordinating with United Nations agencies and donors, as discussed in Brussels. We recognize, however, that each agency must make its own decision regarding the suspension or reduction of assistance. The United States welcomes the adoption of resolution 2511 (2019) on 25 February, renewing the Yemen sanctions regime, and we reiterate the obligation of all Member States to implement the sanctions in full.

Finally, the United States once again urges the Houthis to allow United Nations inspection and maintenance of the *FSO SAFER* oil tanker. In adopting resolution 2511 (2020), the Security Council emphasized the environmental risks and the need, without delay, for access of United Nations officials to inspect and maintain the tanker. We are grateful to the Special Envoy for continuing to raise this issue in Sana'a and we believe that an arrangement can be worked out for the disposition of the oil. The Houthis must stop using the *FSO SAFER* as a bargaining chip.

Mr. Schulz (Germany): Let me also first express our appreciation for Ambassador Pierce's outstanding contributions to the work of the Security Council. We wish her every success in her new assignment.

On the subject of our meeting this morning, I would like to begin by thanking Mr. Martin Griffiths and Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham for their comprehensive briefings and we very much agree with their plea to stop the fighting and engage in de-escalation immediately. That is the most important message and the most important step that needs to be taken right now.

We are extremely worried that fighting in the north continues and that military gains could lead to a further advance of front lines and fuel a cycle of ever-growing violence and escalation. An attack on Ma'rib would be very alarming news. We urge all relevant actors, in particular on the Houthi side, to refrain from seeking territorial gains by force, which would jeopardize the lives of thousands of civilians and threaten the security of the 2 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), which have found refuge in Ma'rib. There is a significant risk of the fighting and violence in the north impacting the volatile military situation in other parts of Yemen. The recent air strike on Al-Salif, in the north of Al-Hudaydah governorate, is a stark reminder that the fragile stability in Al-Hudaydah and beyond needs to be preserved.

We also agree with Mr. Griffiths and Mr. Rajasingham that all parties must adhere strictly to international humanitarian and human rights law and protect civilians and civilian infrastructure. Women and children are among those suffering the most from the dire military and humanitarian situation. All actors should alleviate their suffering and put the needs of vulnerable populations first.

Mr. Griffiths has spoken about his efforts in past weeks, calling for de-escalation, and we could not agree more with that. We call on all actors to break the cycle of violence and engage constructively and without delay in efforts to de-escalate the situation. We very much welcome and support the efforts of the Special Envoy aimed at the establishment of a de-escalation mechanism. His visit to Ma'rib last weekend, which he mentioned today, sent a clear and important signal in that regard and has our strong support.

For sustainable and lasting de-escalation, a minimum degree of confidence is indispensable. We therefore urge all sides to further engage in confidence-building measures and to demonstrate good will. We need to see implementation of the agreed prisoner exchange, the continuation of mercy flights, access to the *FSO SAFER* oil tanker and unrestricted

and full cooperation with the United Nations Mission to support the Hodeidah Agreement. On all these fronts, much more needs to be done.

Confidence-building measures, as well as informal meetings and exchanges among representatives of all sides, as facilitated by the Envoy at the end of last month in Amman, are crucial for the resumption of formal political talks. We particularly welcome the high level of women's participation at that meeting, which should set the standard for all subsequent talks. Political leaders and their vision for a future Yemen must be judged on their ability to provide a safe, prosperous and healthy environment for all Yemeni people, taking into account the diverse interests and groups in the country. There is no alternative to an inclusive political process.

The slow progress of the direct talks between the Houthis and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as well as the lack of progress in the implementation of the Riyadh agreement, underline the urgency of a swift restart of the political process under United Nations auspices. The Security Council has a responsibility to call on the involved parties to engage.

Before I conclude, I wish to say a word on the humanitarian situation. Given the ongoing and escalating fighting in the north, we are witnessing further degradation of the already catastrophic humanitarian situation, as we heard in this morning's very sobering briefing. Against that backdrop, it is even more incomprehensible that the political leadership in Sana'a is treating humanitarian workers and aid organizations in a way that calls into question the whole humanitarian operation in the north. We have tolerated such increasing restrictions for far too long. As a result, 8 million people in need are not being reached.

That is absolutely unacceptable. We must not wait any longer to send clear and hard messages to the authorities in Sana'a. In that regard, we appreciate the lead taken by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Without respect for the humanitarian principles and the safety of humanitarian staff, life-saving assistance cannot and will not get in. Therefore, we once more reiterate that it is the responsibility of all parties, especially the Houthis, to cease any harassment of humanitarian staff; facilitate safe, rapid and unhindered access; lift bureaucratic restrictions; and enable project agreements without further delay.

Mr. Singer Weisinger (Dominican Republic): Ms. Pierce is leaving us, but not before having left a deep mark on the Council. As a woman ambassador, she has shown what is possible to the many women out there who sometimes do not believe that there is a space for them in politics and diplomacy. She has increased the visibility of women in international affairs and provided an example of bridging the gender gap and the empowerment of women. We appreciate that, during her tenure, she has strived to ensure that women's rights and gender equality were on the table and that our societies are more inclusive and just. For that, we are grateful. I congratulate her once again on her appointment as the Ambassador of the United Kingdom to the United States, the first woman to hold that position. Her voice has always been an inspiration. It has been courageous and has driven many of our decisions in the Security Council, and I know that it will continue to do so in her future endeavours. I wish her all the best.

(spoke in Spanish)

We thank Mr. Martin Griffiths and Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham for their contributions. We reiterate our appreciation of their efforts, in their respective fields, under the complex circumstances described in their presentations.

I would like to highlight a few points.

First, we remain concerned about the increase in hostilities that began at the beginning of the year and which seems to be continuing unabated. In particular, military engagements are on the rise, putting at risk the political progress that has been so painstakingly achieved. Tensions in southern Yemen are also a cause for concern. The devastating impact of the situation on the civilian population makes an immediate nationwide ceasefire more urgent and the need for justice and accountability more pressing. We are greatly concerned about the growing lack of institutions and condemn the arbitrary actions committed against civilians in Houthi-controlled areas. We reiterate that the parties to conflict have an obligation to respect international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law.

Secondly, the deterioration of the humanitarian situation, with the associated risks on the ground for an already highly vulnerable population, compels us to reiterate, once again, that all parties to the conflict have an obligation to allow safe, unrestricted humanitarian

access. The situation of the *FSO SAFER* oil tanker, for example, is truly untenable.

As we had warned, there has been an unprecedented outbreak of desert locust swarms in recent weeks, including in areas that are rarely affected by that phenomenon. The Yemeni Government has requested a rapid intervention to support efforts to combat what it considers to be a serious pest threatening food security in the country. We call for support from the international community in that matter. Yemen, as we know, was on the brink of famine in 2018. If we do not take immediate action now to counter that scourge, we could find ourselves in a similar situation. The parties must facilitate access to relevant organizations in order to avoid an even more catastrophic situation.

Thirdly, with regard to the economic situation, the Director of the Yemeni Banking Association has indicated that banks cannot provide the population with sufficient cash. He stressed that the problems faced by the banks relates to the duplication of banking and financial regulations between two central banks in Sana'a and Aden, between which there is no coordination. A solution needs to be found to alleviate the economic situation in the country and avoid an economic collapse.

The statistics that continue to come out of Yemen about people who depend on humanitarian assistance for their livelihoods, which Mr. Rajasingham has already mentioned, are terrifying. We are talking about real people. It is on their behalf, now more than ever, that we must reach a broad and inclusive political agreement based on mutual respect and full compliance with the commitments undertaken. We reiterate that only an inclusive, sustainable and credible peace process can definitively open the door to avenues for development and prosperity for the Yemeni people. We reiterate our readiness to support Yemen and its people in achieving that fundamental goal.

Ms. King (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines): We thank Mr. Griffiths and Mr. Rajasingham for their updates and for their committed work and unwavering cooperation with the Council and reaffirm our support for them.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines remains deeply concerned about the worsening humanitarian situation in Yemen. At the same time, slow movement on the political track shows a deep divide between the current

situation and a future of peace and prosperity for all Yemenis.

However, we must not be discouraged. The Council and its members are well positioned to influence the course of events on the ground. It is clear that we need a Yemeni-owned dialogue facilitated by the United Nations, not military adventurism. The commencement of such a dialogue should not depend on the implementation of agreements but rather be geared towards building trust and confidence and, ultimately, easing the suffering of people.

We acknowledge that the Stockholm Agreement was able, among other things, to avert a crisis at the arterial Al-Hudaydah port, and that the Riyadh agreement addressed the immediate threat of fighting in the South. However, to await further implementation of those agreements before beginning peace talks is tantamount to inaction. Without progress on the political front, the conflict will not be resolved.

In the light of the urgent need to resume dialogue, we underscore the role of the international community and urge all States to encourage the parties to engage constructively. We call on the parties to the conflict to work towards a nationwide ceasefire, which would help to create an environment that can facilitate positive talks. As we seek to promote dialogue between the parties, the Council must, at a minimum, strongly discourage any actions that would jeopardize the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Yemen.

Lasting peace can only be achieved through an inclusive process that allows for the recognition of the aspirations of all persons for whom peace is secured. In our endeavours towards durable peace, we emphasize the significance of ensuring an inclusive and participatory process. Such an approach would strengthen the social fabric and facilitate positive sociopolitical transformation. The involvement of all groups is critical for supporting and bolstering sustainable peace. The importance of inclusion in addressing and defusing underlying tensions that have ruptured the social fabric cannot be overstated. To that end, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines encourages the unconditional creation of opportunities for the meaningful involvement of all groups, particularly the marginalized.

Before concluding, I must once again express our concern about the continuing denial of access to United Nations staff to the *FSO SAFER* oil tanker. We

appeal for access to be granted in order to avoid an environmental disaster in the Red Sea.

We close with a call for de-escalation and dialogue, with an immediate emphasis on saving lives and the longer-term goals of rebuilding Yemen, addressing underdevelopment and re-establishing the rule of law.

Before I cede the floor, and since this will be the last time that we have the privilege of having our colleague, Ambassador Karen Pierce with us in the Chamber, I would also like to wish Ms. Pierce all the best in her next assignment. We will surely miss her. I had so welcomed the opportunity to learn from her vast experience, knowledge and wisdom. I will cherish the short time I did share with her and continue her work and her methods. She makes all women proud. She is our dame.

Mr. Safronkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I too would like to express our sincere wishes for the success and future professional achievements of Ambassador Pierce. She has done a great deal personally and as a diplomat to ensure the productive work of the Security Council. We will certainly miss her.

We also wish to thank Special Envoy Griffiths and Mr. Rajasingham, Acting Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, for their overview of the political and humanitarian situation in Yemen. We commend the work of our United Nations colleagues on the ground in Yemen in the face of this acute crisis.

In Yemen, we continue to see a deadlocked political settlement process, an escalation of hostilities and a degradation of the humanitarian situation. We must be aware that all those factors bring us closer to the point of no return, after which it will be impossible to put together a functioning unity of Yemeni State institutions. Unfortunately, the data provided today by Emergency Relief Coordinator Rajasingham cannot convey the full magnitude of the bleak situation in Yemen, where a humanitarian catastrophe is unfolding.

The conflict has already done irreparable damage to the country's economy. Recovery will require a great deal of time and money. The people of Yemen have borne the brunt of the devastating consequences of the crisis. Most are hungry, need some form of assistance and are unable to access the basic medical services and treatment. The situation in Yemen therefore requires the close attention and assistance of the entire international community.

However, the Yemeni parties themselves must also take steps to improve the humanitarian situation. There is a pressing need to open the international airport in Sana'a. We once again call for a negotiated solution to the Yemeni conflict. The parties must exercise restraint and eschew the use of force. The history of the Yemeni conflict shows that militaristic approaches do not work.

Without a formula for a lasting comprehensive settlement of the Yemeni conflict, the humanitarian investments that are now critical to the population of the country will evaporate over the long term. Despite Mr. Griffiths' mediation efforts, the full implementation of the Stockholm Agreement has not yet been achieved. The responsibility for that failure lies with the Yemeni side. The Riyadh agreement has also not been implemented.

It is imperative to unite around the Special Envoy and assist him in his diligent efforts to engage with all stakeholders and help them realize the futility of trying to use force to resolve Yemeni problems. With each passing day of war, the cost of post-conflict reconstruction in Yemen increases immensely, playing into the hands of terrorist groups that capitalize on chaos and entrenching their position in the centre of the country.

We reaffirm our full support for Mr. Griffiths in his work to prompt the parties to the Yemeni conflict to acknowledge that there is no alternative to a political settlement. It is necessary to implement confidence-building measures and establish a comprehensive ceasefire. The Russian Federation will assist the United Nations mediation efforts, including through establishing contact with all political forces in the country and other stakeholders.

We are convinced that it is still possible to reach an agreement, in particular on confidence-building measures, through the establishment of a comprehensive ceasefire and the relaunching of inter-Yemeni talks. What is needed is political will. We call on all parties to proactively join Mr. Griffiths' mediation efforts.

In conclusion, we stress that, like any conflict in the Middle East, the conflict in Yemen cannot be resolved by trying to point fingers. As history shows, that approach only complicates efforts to resolve conflict. In that connection, we once again recall the importance of Council resolution 598 (1987), which called on the Secretary-General to develop a security architecture for the region, in cooperation with the States of the

region. We draw attention to the Russian blueprint of collective security in the Persian Gulf area, which is aimed precisely at unblocking conflict situations and developing confidence-building measures. The French Government has also put forward useful ideas. The Iranian Government proposed initiatives for peace as well. Such proposals create a constructive environment for improving the situation in the Persian Gulf region.

We are nearing the day when, exactly five years ago, the bloody and, at the same time, unnecessary war in Yemen began — a war that is costing hundreds of millions of dollars every day. That money could have been spent on addressing the challenges of countering terrorism, developing the economy and dealing with the threats of the pandemic. We call on all Yemeni parties to renounce mutual accusations and to take responsibility for the fate of their own State. We call on the Yemeni people to urgently start negotiations under the auspices of the United Nations to achieve a comprehensive settlement in Yemen in order to put the country back on the path of sustainable development. We want to see a peaceful and stable Yemen, coexisting in peace and security with all countries of the region without exception.

Mrs. Gueguen (France) (*spoke in French*): I, too, thank the Special Envoy and the Acting Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs for their briefings and I reiterate to them France's full support. The violence that they described, the risk of an increasing military escalation and the humanitarian repercussions are a source of great concern. We fully support their call for de-escalation and we reiterate that only a comprehensive and inclusive political solution can lead to a way out of the crisis in Yemen.

We deplore the ongoing escalation in northern Yemen. It seriously jeopardizes the de-escalation efforts made to date. For that reason, we call on the parties to put an end to it without delay and to choose the path of negotiation. The direct contacts and mediation undertaken by the Special Envoy should make it possible to achieve a ceasefire as soon as possible, in particular in Al-Jawf and Ma'rib.

In the south, the Riyadh agreement, which we welcomed, must be fully and rapidly implemented. Beyond that, efforts towards a comprehensive political agreement that is fully representative of all Yemenis must continue under the aegis of the Special Envoy,

whose role is key in coordinating all efforts. The talks must resume without preconditions.

Moreover, as we continue to reiterate at every meeting, respect for international humanitarian law is non-negotiable: it is binding on all. The protection of civilians, including humanitarian and medical personnel, as well as civilian infrastructure, must be the top priority. Children accounted for a quarter of civilian casualties in 2019, which is an increase over the previous year. That development is of great concern. All parties are obliged to respect international humanitarian law.

With regard to humanitarian access, much progress is still needed to ensure safe and unhindered humanitarian access, including to enable the United Nations to assess the needs. In addition, it is essential that the United Nations has access to the *FSO SAFER* oil tanker, which poses a grave potential threat to the environment. An oil leak would have a devastating impact on the entire region. We also share the concern about the structural collapse of the economy and its consequences.

France will continue to work tirelessly for a political solution in Yemen and, more broadly, for an easing of tensions in the region. Our authorities are fully mobilized and committed to that end.

Finally, as it is our last meeting in the presence of Ambassador Karen Pierce, I, too, would like to extend to her the warm congratulations, recognition and gratitude of the Permanent Representative of France. In my personal capacity, I would also like to convey to her my admiration. She is an exemplary individual, a model diplomat and a source of inspiration. I wish her the very best and every success in the new prestigious duties that await her.

Mr. Aougi (Niger) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Mr. Martin Griffiths and Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham for their briefings.

On 18 February, Martin Griffiths sounded the alarm about the consequences of a new escalation of violence on the peace process in Yemen and the progress made since last year (see S/PV.8725). Mark Lowcock, of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, was also not overly optimistic about a humanitarian situation that is deteriorating daily.

Today, the picture that has just been presented to us is far from encouraging. We therefore condemn any

military escalation and call on the parties to refrain from any action that could jeopardize the progress made towards the resumption of peace talks and the implementation of the various agreements towards a political settlement of the conflict.

My delegation supports the appeal made by the Special Envoy during his recent visit to Yemen for an immediate cessation of hostilities and the unconditional resumption of the peace talks. Those talks must be inclusive of all sectors of society, including women, whose achievements we celebrate in this month of March.

My country remains concerned about the ongoing human rights violations and non-respect for the fundamental principles of international humanitarian law in a country where one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world is taking place.

On 25 February, we renewed our solidarity with the people of Yemen and our commitment to maintaining international peace and security through the adoption of resolution 2511 (2020) (see S/PV.8732). My delegation expresses the hope that this new resolution will play a decisive role in accelerating the political process and overcoming obstacles to the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

In conclusion, my delegation urges the parties to respect their commitments and to build trust in order to resume dialogue once and for all and to give every opportunity to the political process, which alone can lead to lasting peace.

I will conclude my statement by paying tribute to Ambassador Pierce and wish her every success in her new duties.

Mr. Syihab (Indonesia): I would like to thank Special Envoy Martin Griffiths and Acting Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham for their important updates.

Despite the enormous efforts of the Special Envoy and humanitarian workers, the situation remains of great concern. That is of even greater worry today as the world struggles with the coronavirus pandemic, which is limiting the ability to travel and perform normal duties. I hope everyone is well and stays healthy. In response to the briefings, Indonesia would like to highlight three points.

First, regarding the political track, we are particularly troubled about the lack of progress towards the resumption of dialogue, as well as the escalation of violence in Ma'rib and Al-Jawf. It is significant that, until now, Ma'rib was untouched by the open conflict and was a safe haven. We applaud the Special Envoy for his quick response in visiting the area, thereby demonstrating the support of the United Nations to the people.

Sadly, the violence has resulted in thousands of people being displaced. My delegation echoes the call of the Special Envoy for a halt of all military activity and the start of a comprehensive, inclusive and accountable de-escalation as well as dialogue. We reiterate our position that the military approach or pursuit of territorial gain cannot settle the conflict in Yemen.

Secondly, on the humanitarian track, it is evident that the current fighting will impair the humanitarian efforts to secure the displaced thousands of people. Furthermore, we are deeply concerned that the hostilities may drive Yemen back to the high civilian casualty levels of 2018. We therefore urge the parties to abide by international humanitarian law in that regard.

With regard to humanitarian assistance, we also urge the removal of impediments to assistance. It is imperative that the Houthis also grant access for the United Nations team to the *FSO SAFER* oil tanker before it is too late. That call was made in resolution 2511 (2020), which we adopted in February, and we will keep monitoring the situation.

My third point is on the implementation of the Stockholm Agreement, including the Hodeidah Agreement. It was a grave disappointment to read the statement issued by General Abhijit Guha on 8 March on the air strike in Al-Salif. The air strike illustrates the fragility of the situation in Al-Hudaydah. As we have previously stated, Al-Hudaydah is the centre of gravity and the humanitarian lifeline in the country.

Parties must do their utmost to implement the Agreement, particularly the ceasefire. We would also like to reiterate the call by General Guha for the parties to continue working through the Redeployment Coordination Committee to ensure that the ceasefire holds and that de-escalation continues. With regard to the Stockholm Agreement, we similarly call for its implementation, including the prisoner-exchange agreement and the memorandum of understanding on Taiz.

My delegation would like once again to emphasize that all concerned must commit to dialogue before it is too late and Yemen slips back into large-scale conflict and even greater humanitarian tragedy. Measures must be taken to implement agreements and avoid making a bad situation worse. As we prepare to celebrate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the founding of the United Nations, it is inconceivable to have a humanitarian catastrophe reminiscent of the world war era.

Before concluding my statement, allow me to take this opportunity to join others in paying tribute to Her Excellency Ambassador Dame Karen Pierce for her dedication, constructive engagement and contribution to the work of the Security Council. For Indonesia, it has been such a privilege to serve in the Council together with Ambassador Pierce, not only during our current membership but also during our previous membership, in 2007 and 2008. We will certainly miss her, and we wish her all the very best and success in her next assignment.

Mr. Jürgenson (Estonia): First, I would like to join my colleagues in expressing my sorrow at seeing our dear Dame Karen leaving us. As many people have said, she has been such an inspiration. Her positive and constructive approach to everything we do in the Council has really been such an important lesson for us — especially for us young members, the rookies. I am sure I speak not only for myself in saying that we will feel like orphans when she is gone. But fortunately, it is a small world, especially when travel picks up and the world is again connected, so not only do I hope but I am sure that our paths will cross again.

I would like to thank Special Envoy Griffiths and Assistant Secretary-General Rajasingham for their briefings.

We are very concerned about the ongoing escalation in northern Yemen, with the latest clashes taking place in Al-Jawf governorate. Another 70,000 people have reportedly been displaced as a result of this latest fighting, adding to the suffering of the Yemeni people. Unfortunately, civilians continue to bear the brunt of the conflict. As reported by the United Nations, during the first two months of this year, the fighting has resulted in the killing of 74 people, including 43 children, and injury to another 107. We call on all parties to the conflict to maintain the protection of civilians as a priority and to adhere to international humanitarian and human rights law.

We are also alarmed by the latest ceasefire violations in Al-Hudaydah governorate. We urge all parties to refrain from undermining the Al-Hudaydah ceasefire and recall the importance of implementing the Stockholm Agreement. We call on all parties for an immediate cessation of hostilities and the start of an unconditional de-escalation process. As has been repeated so many times before, there is no military solution to the conflict. Only a political compromise that is inclusive, comprehensive and mediated by the United Nations can lead to a lasting solution. Despite the challenges, we encourage the parties to break the cycle of violence and return to implementing the existing agreements and confidence-building measures. We also urge all international stakeholders to support the Special Envoy in his efforts to bring about the resumption of political talks.

As pointed out in the earlier briefings, humanitarian conditions in Yemen are deteriorating. In addition to lack of food and medical necessities, there are also worrying reports about a possible cholera outbreak. In this context, we welcome the readiness of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to host a high-level pledging event for Yemen, on 2 April, in Riyadh.

Unfortunately, the delivery of humanitarian aid continues to be obstructed, particularly in northern Yemen, for which there can be no excuse. We reiterate the obligation of all parties to allow safe and unrestricted humanitarian access and to respect humanitarian principles.

We also repeat our call on the Houthis to grant United Nations officials access to the *FSO SAFER* oil tanker without delay, in order to prevent an environmental disaster. We also urge the Houthis to grant access to the representatives of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Finally, we express our appreciation to those members of Security Council who supported resolution 2511 (2020), extending the Yemen sanctions regime and addressing several relevant issues brought out in the latest final report of the Panel of Experts (S/2020/70).

Mr. Mabhongo (South Africa): We wish to thank Martin Griffiths, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, and Ramesh Rajasingham, Acting Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, for their briefings this morning.

South Africa remains steadfast in supporting the work of the Special Envoy in his tireless efforts aimed at finding a peaceful solution to the situation in Yemen. We would like to express our concern about the persistent and dire humanitarian situation and our dismay at the recent escalation in hostilities, which is hampering progress towards a political solution. We remain concerned at the latest clashes, which come after a months-long lull and relative calm, particularly because the parties had displayed such sturdy interest in de-escalation. It would be important for all parties to observe a nationwide cessation of hostilities and return to the negotiation process in an effort to work towards a comprehensive and sustainable political solution for Yemen.

We are particularly concerned about the impact this crisis has had on the civilian population, specifically as war casualties spike in such places as the Al-Hazm, Ma'rib and Al-Jawf governorates. The war in Yemen is having a disproportionate impact on Yemeni women and girls, who are exposed to increased risk of violence, exploitation and abuse. More than 3.25 million women in Yemen are facing increased health and protection risks. South Africa commends the efforts of the Special Envoy and UN-Women to promote women's inclusion in the peace process through initiatives such as the Yemeni Women's Pact for Peace and Security.

We reiterate our call for the full implementation of the Riyadh agreement and the December 2018 Stockholm Agreement. We call on all the parties to the conflict to allow free, regular and unimpeded passage of food and other humanitarian aid and not to take actions that would deprive civilians of their rights to food and basic health services. In this regard, we remind the parties to the conflict that all necessary measures should be taken to respect the Geneva Conventions. We also stress that the only sustainable solution to the conflict in Yemen is a negotiated, Yemeni-led political settlement that is inclusive and fair and puts the interests and well-being of all the citizens of Yemen first.

As I conclude, I should like to join other delegations in taking this opportunity, on behalf of the South African delegation, to congratulate Karen on her new appointment and to wish her well on her upcoming duties in Washington. We will miss her friendship and activism, not just in the Security Council but on a broad array of issues around the United Nations as a whole.

Mr. Dang (Viet Nam): I would like to thank Special Envoy Martin Griffiths and Acting Assistant Secretary-General Ramesh Rajasingham for their valuable briefings.

Viet Nam is closely following the situation in Yemen. We are deeply concerned over the recent military escalation in Al Jawf governorate, which has claimed the lives of dozens of civilians and displaced tens of thousands of people. We were alarmed by the report of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) on the humanitarian situation that has prevailed in the country since the beginning of this year, with 24 million people requiring assistance, including about 14.3 million in acute need. The new wave of hostilities in northern Yemen has worsened the humanitarian crisis. Furthermore, this escalation is undermining the hope of the Yemeni people for national reconciliation and peace. We share the Special Envoy's concerns, which arose during his recent visit to Ma'rib province, about the potential risk of Yemen slipping back into a large-scale conflict.

The pursuit of any military solution in Yemen will only prolong the suffering of the people and further weaken the whole country for many years to come. There is no military solution to this conflict.

In this vein, at today's meeting allow me to suggest the following points.

First, all parties involved in the conflict must immediately stop military action and return to the de-escalation process towards an unconditional and long-lasting ceasefire. We join other delegations in calling for additional efforts to be made by the concerned parties to implement all aspects of the Stockholm Agreement and the Riyadh agreement, and we reiterate that only a comprehensive and negotiated solution with United Nations mediation can bring sustainable peace to Yemen.

Secondly, the parties to the conflict, especially the Houthi, must take the immediate and necessary steps to protect civilians and further facilitate the humanitarian work of the United Nations and its relevant partners, so that international aid can reach the Yemeni people in need in a timely manner. We are grateful to the United Nations, the World Health Organization and countries of the region for their collaboration in the launch of the medical air-bridge, and we are looking forward to a more regular operation of those flights. We welcome OCHA's humanitarian commitment to

Yemen amid concerns on operation hindrances. In that connection, we urge all parties concerned to facilitate the inspection and maintenance of the *FSO SAFER* oil tanker, in accordance with resolution 2511 (2020), in order to avert possible severe consequences.

Thirdly, the United Nations and countries of the region should continue to encourage the Yemeni parties to engage in constructive dialogue. In this regard, we commend the organization of the consultative meeting of Special Envoy Martin Griffiths and Yemeni public and political stakeholders in Amman, Jordan, two weeks ago. We fully support the work of the United Nations Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement (UNMHA) and the Redeployment Coordination Committee, and we call on all parties in Yemen to further cooperate with UNMHA so that it can effectively carry out its mandate.

Finally, let me join other members of the Council in expressing our gratitude to Ambassador Karen Pierce for her excellent contribution to the work of the Council. Her dedication and constructive engagement truly set an example for new members like us. As the Permanent Representative of Viet Nam, I would like to express our thanks for her cooperation and very strong support for Viet Nam and myself so far, and I wish her all the best in her next assignment in Washington, D.C.

Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): I should like to thank Martin Griffiths and Ramesh Rajasingham for their briefings.

Belgium shares the serious concerns voiced by all delegations that took the floor before me concerning the recent escalation of violence in Yemen. More than ever before, the political process must resume. Any de-escalation of violence will remain fragile if it is not underpinned by a political process. The talks between Saudi Arabia and the Houthi are a good starting point, but at some point the Government of Yemen will need to be involved in the talks, and the process must be led by the United Nations.

The next steps in the political process must be taken as quickly as possible, under the auspices of the United Nations. The process must be inclusive and feature the meaningful participation of women and young people. It must also reflect the ethnic, geographical, social and political diversity of the people of Yemen.

As we have heard, the operational environment for humanitarian actors in Yemen, in particular in the

north of the country, remains very challenging. All restrictions, obstructions and meddling, which violate humanitarian principles, must be ended. We continue in particular to call upon the Houthis to provide access to the FSO Safer oil tanker in order to allow the situation to be assessed and to avert an environmental disaster.

Finally, all the parties must uphold their obligations under international humanitarian law and, where applicable, international human rights law.

(spoke in English)

Here I should like to add my voice to the farewell remarks addressed to our dear Karen. Yes indeed, we will miss her. It has been both a privilege and a pleasure to work with her around this table, and, like my colleagues, I would like to wish you every success in Washington, D.C.

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

China thanks Special Envoy Griffiths and Acting Assistant Secretary-General Ramesh Rajasingham for their briefings. China commends their active efforts to end the conflict in Yemen and to improve the humanitarian situation in the country.

There has recently been an escalation in military operations in many parts of Yemen, which has had negative impacts on United Nations mediation efforts and political dialogue among all parties and received extensive attention. In such circumstances, it is imperative that all parties in Yemen strengthen their political will and reach a ceasefire agreement as soon as possible so as to create conditions conducive to resuming comprehensive political negotiations.

The only way to end the conflict in Yemen is through an inclusive and comprehensive United Nations-led political process. Yemen's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity must be safeguarded through the joint efforts of all parties to the conflict in Yemen. The Stockholm Agreement and the Riyadh agreement are the political outcomes of arduous negotiations between the parties and should therefore be implemented effectively. The signatories should honour their political commitments, the countries of the region should step up their mediation efforts and the United Nations should also continue to play a constructive role. We hope that a large-scale prisoner exchange can take

place as soon as possible so as to enhance mutual trust among the parties.

China has always maintained communication with all parties in Yemen and will continue to make diplomatic efforts to facilitate the narrowing of differences and the broadening of consensus among the parties.

China is also concerned at the humanitarian situation in Yemen. The Yemeni people face multiple difficulties, including the threat of violence, severe shortages of food and commodities, seriously inadequate medical services and natural disasters. Some humanitarian problems are directly attributable to the armed conflict and therefore should be tackled through humanitarian aid and political efforts, while others are the result of economic instability, the degradation of infrastructure and insufficient development capacity. Greater attention should be paid to such problems, and long-term economic and social measures should be taken as soon as possible to address these problems.

All parties in Yemen should fully cooperate with the humanitarian relief operations and relevant agencies of the United Nations to provide humanitarian access. We also hope that the United Nations humanitarian agencies will closely follow the situation on the ground, including the spread of COVID-19, in Yemen, and provide full support and assistance to the Yemeni people.

China supports the efforts of the Government of Yemen to alleviate the humanitarian crisis and has been providing emergency food aid, medical equipment and other assistance to the Yemeni people, through bilateral and multilateral channels. An agreement on economic and technical cooperation has been signed with the Government of Yemen, and we will continue to deliver more concrete services to the Yemeni people and make constructive efforts so that Yemen can embark on the path to peace and development.

I resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

The representative of the United Kingdom has requested the floor to make a further statement.

(spoke in English)

My understanding is that she wishes to take this opportunity to respond to the kind words expressed by members of the Council.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I will not take up much of anyone's time. I apologize to Mr. Griffiths and Mr. Rajasingham, who have had their briefings hijacked by this attention.

I would like to thank everybody for their incredibly kind words and all their friendship and cooperation and that of all their missions during my time in the Council. I am incredibly lucky to have been able to serve at the United Nations. I am very proud to be part of the United Nations family. I cannot put it better than my own Foreign Secretary who says that the United Nations is a force for good. I think we can remember that every day as we go about our work. I thank everyone very much indeed.

The President: I believe that all members wish Ms. Pierce all the best in her new post. I am sure that we will have many opportunities to see each other, upon her invitation and that of Mrs. Craft. Once again, I thank Ambassador Pierce.

(spoke in Chinese)

I now give the floor to the representative of Yemen.

Mr. Al-Saadi (Yemen) *(spoke in Arabic)*: At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for this month. I wish you and your friendly delegation every success.

As Ambassador Pierce prepares to leave us, I would like to congratulate her on her new appointment. We thank her and appreciate all her work and cooperation and wish her every success in her new post.

The Houthi militias continue to block United Nations peace efforts, including by refusing to honour their obligations under the Stockholm Agreement, which was sponsored by the Organization. The Government of Yemen signed the Stockholm Agreement in good faith with a view to ending the suffering of the Yemeni people and as part of the confidence-building measures undertaken to find a comprehensive political solution to the crisis in Yemen. In addition, the recent military escalation on several fronts, in particular the military operations in Al-Jawf, which have led to the displacement of civilians, are a serious indication that the Houthi militias were never serious about achieving peace and have, in the five years since they started this futile war, been indifferent to the suffering of the Yemeni people.

The Houthi militias repeatedly bomb civilians in Ma'rib, Al-Jawf, Nihm, Taiz, areas on the west coast, Al-Dhale'e and Al-Bayda. For more than a year, they have targeted hospitals and refugee camps and escalated the situation while refusing to implement the Al-Hudaydah Agreement. They restrict the movement of the United Nations Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement, undermine the work of the Head and members of the Redeployment Coordination Committee and target joint observation posts. Yesterday, a Government officer, Colonel Muhammad Sharaf Al-Sulaihi, was targeted as he was performing his duties at one of the observation posts in Al-Hudaydah. He remains in very critical condition.

As a result, the Government of Yemen has suspended the participation of the Government team in the Redeployment Coordination Committee. We hold the Houthi militias responsible for what has happened. Their acts are proof that those militias will not heed the voice of reason and choose peace. The Government of Yemen calls upon the Security Council and the international community to shoulder their responsibility and compel the Houthi militias to implement the agreements concluded, cease the aggressive military operations that have led to increased humanitarian suffering in all its manifestations, and end the killing, destruction, blockades and gross violations undertaken in total disregard for the efforts of the United Nations, the Security Council and the international community.

No political negotiation can succeed when previously brokered peace agreements are not implemented. Nor can one succeed while military escalation and economic warfare are ongoing, while coercive measures are taken against humanitarian workers or when humanitarian aid is looted and diverted from those in dire need. The Yemeni people's desired goal is to achieve lasting peace in Yemen on the basis of agreed terms of reference, namely, the Gulf Cooperation Council Initiative and its Implementation Mechanism, the outcome of the comprehensive National Dialogue Conference and all relevant Security Council resolutions, in particular resolution 2216 (2015). Any attempt to circumvent these terms of reference or to overlook the root causes of the crisis will serve only to prolong the conflict and crush the hopes of Yemenis for the building of a new federal Yemen, based on the values of justice, equality and the rule of law, and the fair distribution of power and wealth, while correcting all the wrongs of the past.

The Government of Yemen underlines its rejection and condemnation of Iranian interference in Yemeni affairs. Iran continues to supply the Houthi militias with military support and weapons, encouraging them to block and undermine United Nations efforts aimed at ending the war, violence and terrorism. Iran's actions target the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, but they also constitute a serious threat to the countries of the region and to international and regional security. The international community and the Security Council should pressure Iran to end its interference in Yemen's affairs.

Following instructions from His Excellency Mr. Abdrabuh Mansour Hadi Mansour, the President of the Republic, the Government of Yemen is exerting tremendous effort to implement the Riyadh agreement, which benefits the State, the Yemeni people and all political actors. It is also an important step towards unifying under one banner all forces and efforts within the State to end the coup and abort the Iranian-Houthi project in Yemen and the region. We value the efforts of our brothers in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as sponsors of the Riyadh agreement aimed at guaranteeing the agreement's implementation.

The Government of Yemen is sparing no effort to try to end the suffering of the Yemeni people by implementing incremental plans at several levels, including revitalizing State institutions, improving tax and customs revenue collection, resuming oil exports — which had ceased for a period of more than four years — as well as reactivating our financial, economic, service and control sectors. These efforts have helped us make certain strides in recovery.

The decision to block the circulation of new bank notes in the national currency is a continuation of the economic war that has targeted citizens' livelihoods and undermined the national economy by creating a vast market for hard-currency speculation and exacerbating the humanitarian crisis. This irresponsible decision has deprived more than 120,000 employees and retirees in militia-controlled areas of their salaries, since payments could not be transferred to them. The Yemeni Government has adopted various financial and economic policies with a view to countering the impact of that decision, but we need the support of our brothers and sisters within the international community, without whose continuous assistance and

help to reform — especially in the absence of a vibrant national economy — the situation could deteriorate once again.

The Houthi militias have been standing in the way of humanitarian work, looting and imposing levies on relief aid. Their actions constitute a dangerous precedent that violates all principles of humanitarian work and aid and threatens to postpone the delivery of assistance needed by millions of Yemenis. The militias continue their acts of killing by targeting residential areas and places of worship. They also engage children in fighting their absurd war and arrest and sexually assault women. This phenomenon poses a serious threat to the Yemeni society and violates international law and accepted social norms.

The Yemeni Government condemns the death sentences issued by the Houthi militias against 35 members of the House of Representatives and the confiscation of their real estate and other assets in Yemen and abroad. Such rulings are null and void. It is not the first time that the militias have issued such rulings against political opponents and others, with a view to financing their war effort. We call on the Council and the international community to condemn such practices and put pressure on the militias to revoke the sentences.

Finally, we have come before the Council many times to speak about the issue of the *FSO SAFER* oil tanker, moored just outside the port of Ras Isa, which is under the control of the Houthi militias. We have called for pressuring the militias to allow a United Nations technical team to gain access to the tanker and provide maintenance so as to avoid the environmental disaster that would result if more than a million barrels of crude oil leak into the Red Sea. Yesterday, the Permanent Representatives of several Red Sea coastal States addressed a letter to the President of the Security Council and the Secretary-General of the United Nations indicating the potential risks of such an environmental disaster.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): 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 12.05 p.m.