



# Security Council

Seventy-fifth year

**8770**<sup>th</sup> meeting

Thursday, 15 October 2020, 10.25 a.m.

New York

*Provisional*

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*President:* Mr. Nebenzia/Ms. Evstigneeva . . . . . (Russian Federation)

*Members:*

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| Belgium . . . . .  | Mr. Kridelka         |
| China . . . . .  | Mr. Zhang Jun        |
| Dominican Republic . . . . .                                   | Mr. Singer Weisinger |
| Estonia . . . . .  | Mr. Auväärt          |
| France . . . . .   | Mr. De Rivière       |
| Germany . . . . .  | Mr. Heusgen          |
| Indonesia . . . . .  | Mr. Djani            |
| Niger . . . . .  | Mr. Aougi            |
| Saint Vincent and the Grenadines . . . . .                     | Ms. King             |
| South Africa . . . . .   | Mr. Mabhongo         |
| Tunisia . . . . .  | Mr. Ben Lagha        |
| United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . . . . . | Mr. Allen            |
| United States of America . . . . .                             | Mrs. Craft           |
| Viet Nam . . . . .   | Mrs. Nguyen          |

## Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.*

### **Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

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

**The President** (*spoke in Russian*): 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. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator.

Mr. Griffiths and Mr. Lowcock are joining today's meeting via video-teleconference.

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

I give the floor to Mr. Griffiths.

**Mr. Griffiths:** I thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity to brief the Security Council. I would like to start with an unusual comment in saying that we have some good news in Yemen today. As you probably know, since this morning, the skies of Yemen have seen what I like to refer to as an airlift of hope. The parties have started releasing prisoners and detainees following the agreement that they reached in Switzerland on 27 September. That process will lead to the release of more than 1,000 individuals, all returning to their families. That will bring immense relief and comfort to all those families who have waited so long to be reunited, as well as to other families, close relations, friends and members of their communities.

That is an extraordinary number to be released during the conduct of hostilities. Indeed, I understand that it is the largest such operation of its kind in the history of the conflict in Yemen. As the Council may imagine, I am personally very grateful to the International Committee of the Red Cross and its President, Peter Maurer, for working with us to reach that agreement and, in addition, for so diligently and expeditiously working on the implementation of the agreement — itself a densely complicated task. I want

to thank the Swiss Government for hosting the meeting to which I have referred in a supportive environment, especially at a time when face-to-face meetings are so difficult to organize. I would also like to take this opportunity, unusually, to congratulate my deputy, Mr. Muin Shreim, for his persistence and his mediation in reaching that agreement. I am very grateful to him, as are all of us in our mission.

More importantly perhaps, I commend the parties. We know that their respective leaderships stepped up to the plate and made the commitments necessary to send their delegations to Switzerland for the talks and, during the period of the negotiation, to negotiate constructively and successfully at length, day and night, to reach the agreement concerning those more than 1,000 individuals.

Of course, this prisoners' agreement does not include many thousands more Yemenis detained during the course of this conflict and it is therefore our obligation and the obligation of the parties to convene very soon to discuss further releases, in line with the commitment that they made in Stockholm in December 2018 to release all conflict-related prisoners and detainees. Indeed, the first time I met President Hadi, this was the first topic that he raised with me — the need for all prisoners to be released.

I would also like to reiterate my call on the parties to unconditionally and immediately release all arbitrarily detained civilians, including journalists and political prisoners. Here, I pay tribute to the Yemeni activists, actors and civil society organizations that have determinately, continuously and, many times, successfully, in situations of peril, advocated for the release of civilians and for uncovering the fates of the forcibly disappeared. We hope, of course, that the implementation of disagreement will build confidence and, indeed, momentum by demonstrating a simple truth — that peaceful dialogue and negotiation between the parties can deliver the road back to peace.

I should also like to take note today of the return yesterday of injured Yemenis to Sana'a, who had gone to Oman for medical treatment around the time of the Stockholm talks in 2018. This is very good news for those who are finally returning home.

My Office continues to negotiate the agreement between the parties on a joint declaration. Both parties remain engaged in those negotiations, but they have yet to agree a final text. I would like to say that I am neither

surprised nor, frankly, discouraged by this. We are, in fact, asking a lot from the parties. I have just returned from a visit to Riyadh myself, where I had very useful and extensive meetings with the Government of Yemen, of course, and President Hadi, as well as the leadership of the Arab coalition.

Now, I am not surprised. I am not discouraged. We are asking a lot. The joint declaration is an ambitious set of agreements, as President Hadi pointed out to me, which covers, as members know, a nationwide ceasefire, economic and humanitarian measures and the resumption of the political process — perhaps the most important of the three. So, I do understand the reasons why the parties take their time to cross that crucial line. Negotiations have been conducted, after all, in the midst of a global pandemic. We started in March, as Council members will remember, as a result of the Secretary-General's call for global ceasefire and subsequent call for ceasefire in Yemen.

In the midst of a global pandemic and lockdown, and while the war raged, perhaps even more ferociously, across the battlefields of Yemen, the negotiations have been conducted solely through shuttle diplomacy. The mediator, myself, has become the negotiator. The meetings have been mostly virtual due to coronavirus disease restrictions, and the parties have not yet met face to face to discuss the joint declaration. We know now that virtual means may take us a long way, but they still do not replace the necessity of parties negotiating with each other to understand the commitments they will make to each other. This is what made the prisoner meeting so important and, I hope, such a precedent.

The primary goal of the joint declaration is to end what I call the shooting war and to open the gateway to peace. Resuming this process, as I have just said, is an imperative and, frankly, an obligation for the people of Yemen. In Riyadh yesterday I met a group of Yemeni women, mostly from the south, who confirmed again — as we always hear, every time, in meetings with civil society and women's groups — that enough is enough. This war has gone on years longer than it needed to.

I cannot stress enough through you, Sir, and through the Council, the need for the parties to act with a sense of urgency to conclude the negotiation on this joint declaration. What we have learned from the Yemen conflict — and perhaps it is a general proposition — is that, as time goes on in such internal

conflicts, resolution becomes more difficult. Actors fragment and multiply. State institutions, of course, erode. The conflict becomes more entrenched and more the new normal. The war economy threatens the national economy, creating financial incentives for those who want to continue fighting. Interference from outside the country grows as opportunities present themselves. And in Yemen, as elsewhere, the longer the conflict goes on, not only does the suffering of the people continue, but it also makes it harder to reverse the circumstances in which they live.

On the military front, the intensity of the fighting in Ma'rib — we have often discussed the campaign in Ma'rib — has decreased in recent days. This is important, but the situation remains volatile, and I reiterate my call for the attacks on Ma'rib to cease completely and immediately.

Allow me also to express my concern about the situation in Al-Hudaydah. While my colleagues in the United Nations Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement, continue their efforts to reactivate the Redeployment Coordination Committee and the joint mechanisms contained in the resolution to implement the Hodeidah Agreement, the military situation in the city and the governorate has recently deteriorated significantly since my last briefing (see S/PV.8757). During the first week of October, clashes in the south of Al-Hudaydah, particularly in Durayhimi and Hays districts, developed into some of the most intense fighting since the signing of the Stockholm agreement in December 2018. We understand that this caused many, many civilian casualties, as well as those among combatants. The Mission and I, in their support, have engaged extensively with both sides and issued public calls to stop the fighting, following which the situation now seems tense but calm. I hope that the parties will sustain this calm and avoid putting the local population at further risk, as well as threatening the validity and continuation of the Hodeidah Agreement.

I want to comment today on the situation in Taiz, an historic place in Yemen, as members know, that has experienced far too much suffering. It has been a battlefield these many years, and the people living there have lived in that war zone all this time. A solution is desperately needed for Yemen, but a solution is also needed to unlock the impasse among the various forces — and there are a number of them — in Taiz. Such a solution should bring together all stakeholders — including, particularly but not only,

civil society and women's groups, famously active in Taiz — to contribute to reconciliation, to cross-line efforts, to protecting schools, to allowing workers to go to work and trade to resume at least a small part of the life of those communities and thus to alleviating the suffering. That is of great importance.

I want to turn to two other issues that require urgent action to prevent even more widespread suffering in Yemen.

I know, and as we will hear from Mark, that the fuel shortages in Ansar-Allah-controlled areas are having evidently detrimental impacts on the civilian population. Prices are rising, and vital services are being affected. The Government of Yemen has in the past day or so cleared a number of fuel ships to enter Al-Hudaydah this week, which is a positive step. But a mutually agreed solution is needed. We have been working with the parties for months, frankly, to agree a set of arrangements that will ensure the uninterrupted flow of fuel into and around Ansar-Allah-controlled areas to allow essentially for the flow of humanitarian assistance to reach the people who need it. I urge the parties to please engage with me on the current proposals in front of them to make this happen.

Secondly, with respect to the *SAFER* oil tanker, I acknowledge the positive public message from Sana'a on this matter in recent days, and I express my gratitude therefor. I will not repeat what Mark and I have said on numerous occasions to the Council about the vital importance of the United Nations, through the United Nations Office for Project Services, being granted permission to assess and undertake urgent initial repairs of the tanker. We all know what is at stake. The people in Yemen know what is at stake, and it is more urgent by the day.

Twenty years ago, the Council adopted resolution 1325 (2000), the landmark resolution on women and peace and security recognizing women's contributions to peace as well as the disproportionate effects of armed conflict on women and girls. In Yemen, as in all such situations, women have worked tirelessly, mostly behind the scenes and always below the radar, to stop the war, reduce violence, release detainees and build back peace. They do this against all odds, with a courage we can only imagine, and often under circumstances that threaten their lives, their livelihoods and their families.

On this anniversary, I would remind all parties to the conflict in Yemen to take special measures to

protect women and girls and human rights defenders from all kinds of violence and threats. I hope that they will, as we will, heed the consistent calls of Yemeni women, as I said, heard just yesterday once again in Riyadh for a just and equitable peace — not just a peace, but a just and equitable peace. I call on them to strengthen the meaningful participation of women, including by ensuring at least 30 per cent representation in their negotiating delegations. I remind us all of the extraordinary record in the national dialogue in Yemen of such participation, when Yemen was an icon of female participation in national dialogues.

Finally, I want to refer, perhaps a bit eccentrically, to the issue of education. I refer to it not, perhaps, purely as humanitarian but as an illustration of the costs of war. I was prompted to say this to you, Sir, and to the Council through reading about one particular school in Taiz where the children risk their lives to go to school and yet go there; where they go to school where there are few, if any, materials; where the teachers, I am sure, have rarely been paid and yet go there. This struggle to continue an education for the next generation is remarkable; we see it in every conflict, and we are seeing it in Yemen. It is a testament to the courage of Yemeni families and the plight of Yemeni children.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Lowcock.

**Mr. Lowcock**: While, as Martin has just said, there is a glimmer of hope on the political side, experts are increasingly worried that the window to prevent famine in Yemen is closing.

I will again brief the Council today on five priority issues that, when acted on two years ago, successfully prevented famine: protection of civilians, humanitarian access, funding of the relief operation, support for the economy and progress towards peace.

I turn first to the issue of the protection of civilians. Since we last briefed the Council (see S/PV.8757), we have seen a further escalation of conflict. There are now 47 active front lines across Yemen — the most ever recorded. In recent weeks, the heaviest clashes have occurred in Al-Hudaydah, Ma'rib and Al-Jawf. In September, civilian casualties reached the highest levels recorded this year. As Martin alluded to, in recent days, hostilities have subsided a little bit, but it is not enough.

Approximately 1 million displaced people are sheltering in and around Ma'rib city. A major confrontation there, as we said before, would be disastrous. The escalating violence in Al-Hudaydah is also very worrying. Al-Hudaydah, of course, remains the lifeline for northern Yemen, and anything jeopardizing its smooth and continuous functioning would put millions of lives at risk.

Violence also continues to force people from their homes. Nearly 150,000 people have fled this year, most of them in Ma'rib. The International Organization for Migration estimates that 80 per cent of people displaced in the last two months have had to move into already overcrowded shelters.

Critical civilian infrastructure is still coming under attack. Just yesterday, a civilian was killed and seven were injured when a local market in Ma'rib was hit by missiles. On 11 October, in Taiz, artillery shells struck a school, killing a child and injuring others. And despite Yemen's hunger crisis, farms are attacked with alarming regularity. The Norwegian Refugee Council estimates that air strikes and shelling have hit farms more than 900 times since 2018; that is about once every day.

So I repeat: Yemen needs a nationwide ceasefire, one that covers Ma'rib, Al-Hudaydah and everywhere else. That has been our message for many months.

All parties must take constant care to spare civilians and civilian objects throughout military operations. There should be accountability for violations. We welcome the recent mandate renewal of the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts, which was established by the Human Rights Council to document violations and promote greater accountability.

The second point is unimpeded humanitarian access. In the south, front-line humanitarian staff continue to face challenges due to insecurity, including harassment by armed groups. Discussions with the Government of Yemen to streamline bureaucratic processes to approve aid projects are still continuing, as they have done for the last six months. We hope that a resolution can be expedited.

In the north, agencies are grappling with more severe access challenges, mainly the result of restrictions imposed by the Ansar Allah authorities. Since my most recent briefing, they have taken concrete steps to reopen Sana'a airport to humanitarian flights,

which is welcome. That means that aid personnel and cargo should again be able to come in and out of northern Yemen. Reopening the airport has also enabled the return home on 4 October of 29 Yemeni patients and their carers who had travelled to Jordan for medical treatment, using the air bridge established and facilitated by the World Health Organization.

More broadly, donors and agencies continue to engage with the Ansar Allah authorities with the aim of improving the operating environment for humanitarian agencies. More progress is needed there. The European Union and the Government of Sweden will convene senior officials in November to take stock of developments on this issue and to look to the future.

On a separate note, as Martin touched on, we continue to speak to the Ansar Allah authorities about the *SAFER* tanker. The discussions have accelerated in recent weeks, and, as he indicated, we hope to receive formal written approval in the coming days for the United Nations mission to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the vessel and to undertake initial repairs.

The third point concerns funding for the humanitarian operation. Since my last briefing, funding for the Yemen humanitarian response plan has increased from 30 per cent to 42 per cent. That is obviously to be welcomed, but at this time last year, the response plan was 65 per cent funded. Funding shortages still mean that more key programmes are at risk of shutting down.

Just last week, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations was forced to close a livestock vaccination programme that was serving 3 million rural families. Aid agencies are now reaching only about 9 million people a month in Yemen, down from more than 13 million at the start of the year. What is to be the fate of the 4 million people we no longer have the money to help?

I said earlier that the window to prevent famine in Yemen is closing. Increasing support for the response plan, starting with fulfilling unpaid pledges, but also increasing support back to last year's levels, is the fastest way to help.

The fourth point concerns Yemen's economy, which remains a key determinant in the risk of famine. Commercial food imports have remained largely stable in recent months, with more than 380,000 metric tons entering Al-Hudaydah and Saleef in September, but the

cost of food and other basic goods means that they are out of reach for millions of families.

Fuel shortages also persist in the north. They are driving up the price of fuel, which in turn is exacerbating humanitarian needs. Only 20,000 metric tons of commercial fuel entered Al-Hudaydah in September. That is the third-lowest figure ever recorded and 76 per cent less than in August. Currently, 20 commercial fuel ships are waiting to enter the port and discharge the equivalent of three months of imports. The Government is blocking their entry due to an ongoing dispute with the Ansar Allah authorities over the management of import revenues. The Government has periodically cleared vessels to enter Al-Hudaydah on an exceptional basis, including a number this month, as Mr. Griffiths mentioned. But that modest and temporary exception to the fuel blockade does little to solve the problem. I therefore reiterate the Special Envoy's request for the parties to work urgently with his team to find a solution. Fuel is essential to providing life-saving assistance to millions in need.

I turn now to the exchange rate. In September, the Yemeni rial reached an all-time low, trading in the south at 850 to the dollar. This means fewer people can afford food and other essential goods, nearly all of which have to be imported. Yemen needs regular foreign exchange injections to help stabilize the rial, subsidize commercial imports and pay salaries. That worked in the past and it can work again. The economic support we saw in 2018 was critical to the famine-prevention effort. Given current conditions in Yemen, I am not convinced that humanitarian agencies, even if they had more funding, could prevent famine now if there is no accompanying support for the economy.

My final point is progress towards peace. The crisis urgently needs a political solution. That is what would help move the country back from the edge of famine. Indeed, food security data show clearly that the worst hunger is concentrated in areas affected by conflict.

The Council has just heard Mr. Griffiths summarize developments on the political track. The Council's support on that and on the other issues I have raised has never been more important.

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

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

**Mr. Allen** (United Kingdom): I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock and Special Envoy Griffiths for their briefings.

It is not often that we start Yemen discussions with reasons to hope, so let me begin by welcoming the news of the prisoner release. The first flights happened today following the agreement, on 27 September, by the parties to release 1,081 prisoners. I particularly applaud the efforts of the International Committee of the Red Cross in that regard.

Today's news is not just about that specific confidence-building measure; it also demonstrates that dialogue can lead to positive outcomes. That momentum now needs to be carried into the political tracks. The parties must urgently agree to the United Nations joint declaration. On the Riyadh agreement, I welcome the leadership of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia towards achieving a resolution, and urge the parties to rapidly form a Government.

As we mark the twentieth anniversary of resolution 1325 (2000) this month, I want to echo what Mr. Griffiths said about the importance of the inclusion of women in political processes, including in Yemen.

I also welcome his assessment that the violence in Ma'rib has decreased recently, and echo his call for it to stop completely. That violence has entered its sixth month and has had an untold cost on the lives of many Yemenis — young and old, men and women. The fighting that has now opened up in Al-Hudaydah is not only in clear breach of the Hodeidah Agreement, but is needless and will only lead to further instability in a country that is staring down the barrel of disease and famine.

Today, I call for renewed and urgent engagement with the United Nations Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement and the Special Envoy in order to reach a ceasefire. I stress that the Yemeni parties — which means the Government of Yemen just as much as it means the Houthis — should cooperate with the Special Envoy to agree to his joint declaration proposals as soon as possible. I want to reiterate the United Kingdom's full confidence in the United Nations-led process and in Special Envoy Griffiths.

On 22 September, Brigadier General Shekarchi, a spokesman for the Iranian armed forces, admitted that Iran had provided technical assistance and training to the Houthis. That represents an evident breach of the

arms embargo. It is deeply concerning and reaffirms our concerns about Iran's destabilizing activities in Yemen and the wider region. We call on Iran to cease such activities, which risk escalating the conflict, and to support a political solution to the conflict in Yemen.

We must prevent Yemen from tipping into famine. We welcome the recent positive steps taken by some donors to provide humanitarian funding, including new commitments from the United States, Kuwait and some European Union member States, as well as Saudi Arabia signing agreements with United Nations agencies. The United Kingdom itself recently announced over \$65 million in additional funding, taking us to over \$250 million this year and building on \$300 million last year. Funding levels remain alarmingly low at 42 per cent, however, with less than half the level of funding compared to this time last year.

Meanwhile, severe access constraints — some in the south, but mainly in Houthi areas — continue to prevent the delivery of life-saving assistance. That is recklessly driving up the risk of famine. As of 27 September, 94 non-governmental organization (NGO) projects, with a cumulative budget of \$218 million, remained unimplemented, largely due to Houthi restrictions. All barriers to humanitarian access in the country, no matter where, must immediately be removed and the Houthis must give the United Nations and NGOs the permissions they need to operate and save lives across the north.

Mr. Lowcock welcomed the reopening of Sana'a airport for humanitarian cases. I agree with him and say that it is essential that Sana'a airport and Al-Hudaydah port be kept open and that both parties come to an immediate agreement on fuel imports, as Mr. Griffiths laid out.

If we are to avoid famine, it is also essential that the Central Bank of Yemen be swiftly provided with external financial assistance so that it has sufficient hard currency to sustain food imports and stabilize prices. Food affordability, rather than availability, seems to be the main driver of hunger at present. The exchange rate in the south has reached its lowest level since the conflict began and food security is rapidly deteriorating. The proportion of people unable to find sufficient amounts of food increased from 28 per cent in May to 43 per cent in August. The Government of Yemen has a critical role to play here, too. It urgently needs to develop a credible and transparent economic

plan that reassures donors of its ability to implement economic reform.

Finally, I want to welcome the tentative news that the United Nations Office for Project Services and the Houthis appear to have agreed, in principle, to a mission to conduct an assessment and subsequent light repairs. I understand that it could take well over a month for the experts' work to be completed, so any unnecessary delay must be avoided. I look forward to next month's briefing and hope that we will have news then that the mission is under way. I also want to thank Germany, the Netherlands and France for joining the United Kingdom and Saudi Arabia in providing funding for the initial mission.

**Mr. Djani** (Indonesia): First of all, I would like to thank 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, for their important updates.

I would also like to congratulate the World Food Programme on winning the 2020 Nobel Peace Prize. This speaks volumes about its crucial work, including in Yemen. It has delivered food assistance to 13 million people, despite many challenges.

We would also like to applaud the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Special Envoy's and his deputies' efforts to finalize arrangements for the release of 1,081 detainees, as part of the important confidence-building measures and of the implementation of the Stockholm Agreement. We hope that this commitment will soon translate into more implementation.

What Mr. Griffiths mentioned was good news: an airlift of hope, hope for the families of the detainees. It is an important first step, and we hope for more to come soon. Nevertheless, the overall situation remains bleak, as Under-Secretary-General Lowcock alluded, with funding being the biggest challenge for humanitarian assistance in the face of the coronavirus disease pandemic. It is indeed not an easy time, and we are very disappointed that the joint declaration has not been agreed upon. In this regard, let me highlight three points.

First, the escalation of violence needs to stop. It is very unfortunate that the Houthis have intensified their attacks, thereby increasing the level of violence

across Yemen, despite the calls for de-escalation by the Secretary-General and resolution 2532 (2020). This intensified fighting is particularly worrying for Ma'rib and Al-Hudaydah. The Special Envoy has warned us that fighting in Ma'rib will undermine hopes for the political process and push hundreds of internally displaced persons to move. Furthermore, the military escalation in Al-Hudaydah undermines the Stockholm Agreement.

We have consistently expressed our deepest concerns for these attacks by the Houthis, including to Saudi Arabia. They pose a serious threat to regional security, and we reiterate our call for immediate de-escalation across Yemen. Parties must also comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law and fully protect both civilians and humanitarian personnel. I would like to underline the point that Mr. Lowcock mentioned on the unimpeded access for humanitarian workers. In our view, further restrictions by anyone sends a signal of not caring about the plight of the people of Yemen.

My second point is the imperative of an inclusive political process. While it seems that the military approach is the preferable choice, it only brings greater suffering to the Yemenis. Since April, the Special Envoy has offered a choice for peace through his three-point proposal in the joint declaration. Without a doubt, only through an inclusive political solution can the crisis and the conflict in Yemen be solved. The joint declaration provides the building blocks for that. In that regard, Indonesia once again urges all parties, the Houthis and the Government, to agree on the joint declaration and resume dialogue towards a comprehensive political settlement. It is not an easy task, we know, but the people of Yemen deserve a ceasefire — a holiday from violence — and long-lasting peace. It is the right thing to do, and to quote Mr. Griffiths, “enough is enough”.

My third point is our concern over the humanitarian situation and the risk of famine. The continued battle complicates the movement of humanitarian workers as well and will increase the number of people who need assistance. In the shrinking economy where financing has been a major challenge for humanitarian assistance, we are worried that programmes may be cut back. We do hope that we will find a more sustainable approach to easing the humanitarian situation in Yemen, including addressing the cost of the economic crisis. We would also like to reiterate our support for the five urgent priorities updated by Mr. Lowcock, while

emphasizing the importance of safe and unhindered humanitarian access.

Again and again, we continue to talk about the *FSO SAFER* oil tanker. We understand that there are some details involving the need for the assessment team to repair the vessel. We hope that there are no further hindrances to the United Nations team starting its work to avoid a potential catastrophe.

In conclusion, the 13 million Yemenis who will go hungry if they do not receive food assistance deserve a chance for peace and, for once, not to worry about food. We hope that there will be an immediate cessation of hostilities, and that the parties will start finding a sustainable solution to solve the crisis their country. We in the Security Council are united in finding a solution and in seeking peace in Yemen. It is now up to the people of Yemen and its leaders to also seek peace for future generations of Yemeni children. It takes courage and it takes compassion.

**Mr. Zhang Jun (China)** (*spoke in Chinese*): I wish to thank Special Envoy Griffiths and Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for their briefings.

In the past two years, the situation in Yemen has seen twists and turns. The international community and the parties in Yemen have made great efforts to find a political solution to the Yemeni issue. With the adoption of the Stockholm Agreement and the Riyadh agreement, some progress has been achieved. Meanwhile, we have also noted that the relevant agreements have not been effectively implemented. Recently, conflicts in many regions of the country have escalated. A severe lack of mutual trust among the parties and a political process in deadlock are combined with a worsening humanitarian crisis. China finds these facts deeply worrying. We hope that the parties in Yemen will have a greater sense of urgency and show political will to jointly promote a breakthrough in the peace process in the country.

First, a ceasefire must be achieved as soon as possible. In the general debate of the seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly, Secretary-General Guterres reiterated his appeal for a global ceasefire, calling for such a ceasefire by the end of the year. China supports the Secretary-General's appeal and hopes that the Security Council and the international community will play an active role to increase mediation efforts in conflict situations such as the one in Yemen and provide strong support to the work of the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy.



Both the Yemeni Government and the coalition have expressed support for the Secretary-General's ceasefire appeal, which deserves our recognition. We hope that all parties in Yemen will put the interests of the people and future of the country first, respond to the people's desire for peace and stability and immediately stop using force and return to the track of dialogue and negotiation.

China is concerned over the missile and drone attacks against Saudi Arabia and the escalation encompassed in such areas as Al-Hudaydah. The United Nations Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement should implement its mandate to monitor the ceasefire in accordance with the request set forth in resolution 2534 (2020).

Secondly, political commitments must be honoured. The Stockholm Agreement and the Riyadh agreement have shown the tremendous efforts made by all the parties and therefore cannot be left as empty words. The parties to the conflict cannot always go back and forth between the battlefield and the negotiating table in a vicious cycle of fighting and talking. The key is to implement the agreements reached. This is conducive to building mutual trust among the parties. It also serves as the basis for new progress.

Properly solving the problem in the south has a bearing on the overall situation in Yemen. China highly commends Saudi Arabia's contribution to advancing the implementation of the Riyadh agreement and supports Saudi Arabia in continuing its important work.

Through the mediation of the Special Envoy and the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Yemeni Government and the Houthis recently reached an agreement on the prisoner exchange. Today we see major progress in the exchange of prisoners. China greatly welcomes that, and we hope that additional confidence-building measures will be taken.

Thirdly, with regard to strengthening the regional security dialogue, a political solution to the Yemeni issue requires a conducive regional security environment. China advocates that regional issues be resolved through dialogue and consultation among the countries in the Gulf region by building a platform for dialogue among the countries of the region in order to forge a new consensus around maintaining regional peace and stability. Other countries have also put forward similar ideas. We see agreement on the general direction. We should therefore work together to realize such ideas and

promote the regional peace process. China encourages the relevant countries in the region to make use of their own advantages so as to positively influence the parties in Yemen and contribute to the political settlement of the Yemeni issue. At the same time, Yemen's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity should be fully respected and safeguarded.

Fourthly, with regard to striving to alleviate the humanitarian crisis, currently more than 20 million people in Yemen face the threat of food insecurity. At least 1 million women and 2 million children are severely malnourished. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the World Food Programme have repeatedly issued famine warnings. More than 2,000 cases of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) have been confirmed in Yemen, while the actual number of those infected is much higher. China urges all parties concerned to abide by international humanitarian law, put people and their lives first, protect civilians, in particular the vulnerable groups, and provide safe and unhindered humanitarian access, including allowing the United Nations to conduct a safety assessment of, and repairs to, the *FSO SAFER* oil tanker as soon as possible. The international community, particularly donor countries, should provide sufficient funding to the Yemen humanitarian response plan by honouring their pledges as soon as possible. Every effort should be made to prevent a famine in Yemen, protect farmland and agricultural production facilities, keep commercial ports operating and effectively deal with the plague of locusts and floods. We must support the World Health Organization in playing a leading role in fighting the pandemic and saving lives.

China has always stood by the Yemeni people. We have provided several batches of food aid to Yemen, covering most of its provinces. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, we have donated several batches of supplies for the pandemic response to the Government and the people of Yemen and have proactively shared our experience in fighting the pandemic. In future, we will continue to provide rice, medical equipment and other humanitarian assistance to the Government and the people of Yemen and work with the Gulf countries and the international community to contribute to easing the humanitarian crisis on the ground.

**Ms. King** (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines): We wish to express our gratitude to Martin Griffiths and Mark Lowcock for their updates and continued cooperation with the Security Council. We also

commend their unwavering dedication to the people of Yemen and their efforts to find a lasting solution to the conflict.

I begin by reiterating that Saint Vincent and the Grenadines stands in solidarity with the people of Yemen, who have suffered, and continue to suffer, immeasurably. We underscore yet again that the only viable solution to the crisis is an inclusive Yemeni-led and Yemeni-owned political process. That cannot be overstated. We continue to see that attempts at a military solution are counterproductive and come at the expense of the Yemeni people.

As Mr. Lowcock said in his briefing, much is being asked of the parties, but we need to ask a great deal of them because enough is enough. Let us put this protracted conflict into perspective. We need to truly grapple with the magnitude of its impact. The people of Yemen have been enduring this conflict for far too long and, while no one within Yemen has been left unscathed by it, we know that the children of Yemen have been, and will continue to be, the most affected.

The children of Yemen will suffer psychologically and to an unfathomable extent, even after the conflict finally comes to an end. Too many children in Yemen go to sleep hungry as the country suffers an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. Too many children in Yemen, some of whom can sooner describe the sound of a gun and pangs of hunger and of grief than they can spell, read or write their own name, have been deprived of their education. Too many Yemeni children have never known peace. Too many Yemeni children have only ever known war. Let us allow that to sink in. Those are the children for whom we are meant to guarantee peace and security.

Yet, under our watch, schools continue to be attacked, children continue to be maimed and killed, and there continue to be reports of sexual assault and humanitarian access denied. Far too many children, if they survive, will be forever scarred. We are failing them, and that can never be justified. It is time to heed the call of Yemeni women.

We recognize that the world is overwhelmed by the coronavirus disease and its consequences, but the people of Yemen are fighting on too many fronts all at once. They are our brothers, they are our sisters and their children are our children, all of whom continue to cry out for our help. On their behalf, today I make a plea to the international community to do better and to

do more before it is too late. I implore the actors within Yemen to work with the Special Envoy, in good faith, to resume negotiations.

We welcome the additional funding that has been pledged and encourage all donors to disburse funds as soon as possible. We regard the recent prisoner-exchange agreement, and the advancements made towards it, as a huge breakthrough in the political process and a much-needed confidence-building measure.

We appreciate the unstinting efforts of the Special Envoy, Martin Griffiths, and his team, as well as the work of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations Mission to Support the Hudaydah Agreement and all other organizations operating to bring relief to the people of Yemen.

However, before closing, we must also reiterate our continued concern for the lack of concrete progress on the *FSO SAFER* oil tanker. That is an issue that must be resolved as soon as possible if we are to avoid a humanitarian and environmental catastrophe in Yemen and the wider region.

**Mr. De Rivière** (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Special Envoy Martin Griffiths and Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for their briefings. The war in Yemen must be stopped. We reiterate that the only solution is political. We therefore call on the parties to the conflict to resume talks in coordination with the Special Envoy, to whom France reiterates its full support. The parties must agree on the draft declaration proposed by the Special Envoy. They must also seek a comprehensive political solution without delay, allowing the effective participation of women in that process. The agreement on the exchange of prisoners reached in Montreux at the end of September is a positive step. It now needs to be fully implemented, and we welcome the first flights seen today. Further confidence-building measures should follow soon.

In the north, we condemn in the strongest terms the offensive against Ma'rib and the Houthi attacks against Saudi territory. We are also very concerned by the resumption of hostilities in the Al-Hudaydah governorate, in violation of the Stockholm Agreement. Pursuing a military solution will lead nowhere, serving instead only to exacerbate the suffering of the Yemeni people. The Security Council therefore reiterates its clear call for a ceasefire, in line with resolution 2532 (2019).

In the south, the Riyadh agreement must be fully and effectively implemented. That must lead to the swift formation of a new Government that includes representatives from the south of Yemen. The Yemeni parties must show a spirit of compromise at this crucial juncture.

The humanitarian situation continues deteriorating. Amid worsening food insecurity, the coronavirus disease pandemic and measles and polio epidemics, we must collectively do all we can to tackle the growing humanitarian needs. To that end, it is crucial that all parties guarantee humanitarian access to all persons in need. The protection of civilians, including the protection of humanitarian and medical personnel, as well as the protection of civilian infrastructure, should also remain an absolute priority. Respect for international humanitarian law is an obligation applicable to all.

Turning, in conclusion, to the *FSO SAFER* oil tanker, there is an urgent need to act. We call once again on the Houthis to, without delay, permit access to the tanker for the United Nations-mandated inspection mission, to which France has contributed financially. France will remain fully mobilized and committed to achieving peace in Yemen and de-escalation at the regional level.

**Mr. Singer Weisinger** (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would also like to thank Mr. Griffiths and Mr. Lowcock for their briefings. Just a few weeks ago, we enthusiastically welcomed the news of a prisoner exchange agreement between the Government of Yemen and the Houthis. We are pleased that today we begin to see that agreement bear fruit.

We also draw hope from the fact that the situation in southern Yemen may have begun to stabilize thanks to the Riyadh agreement. However, clashes over recent days in the governorates of Al-Durayhimi and Ma'rib have increased, and the situation in the port of Al-Hudaydah is seriously undermining the Stockholm Agreement as well as the efforts of the Special Envoy to ensure that the parties fully implement it. It is important to stress that 70 per cent of Yemen's imports pass through that port, and that fighting in the surrounding area further hinders humanitarian assistance operations.

We condemn this increase in hostilities, while at the same time we stress that only a political solution to the conflict could lead to lasting peace. According to the information gathered by civilian population

monitoring project, the number of civilian casualties in Yemen in September was the highest since the last November, with 67 dead and 123 wounded.

I would like to turn now to the most recent report of the Panel of Expert on Yemen. Besides troubling reports of illegal attacks against civilians, the report includes evidence of the recruitment and use of child soldiers. This is alarming and deeply worrisome. All parties to the conflict must comply with the rules of international humanitarian law, as well as having a moral duty to halt hostilities immediately.

We are extremely concerned about the imminent collapse of the economy. The falling value of Yemeni rial and the fuel crisis mean that the few people with access to capital cannot purchase food and that the transport of people, supplies and goods is evermore precarious. And injection of foreign currency, as performed in 2018, would be critical to avert catastrophe. In addition, food insecurity worsens by the day. We are deeply concerned that several areas in Yemen are fast approaching conditions that amount to famine and that additional factors, such as the locust plague, increase the complexity and gravity of the situation. The saddest aspect of this situation is that we know how to resolve it. It is a completely avoidable tragedy. International organizations have sounded the alarm. Aid groups know what they have to do. We are encouraged by reports that donor countries, especially regional partners, are rising to the occasion, making greater funds available to Yemen.

In that regard, and in conclusion, we would like to urge donor countries to continue increasing their support to mitigate this immense humanitarian crisis and to step up their official development assistance for those countries most affected by the pandemic and its devastating consequences. We know that the uncontrolled spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) continues in Yemen. And we call once again for the vaccine and other health technologies needed to tackle COVID-19 be made accessible in an equitable manner and for assurances that they will be distributed to all human beings around the world. Thus the role of the World Health Organization, together with donor countries and the private sector, is essential to achieving this goal the spirit of cooperation, solidarity and justice.

**Mrs. Craft** (United States of America): I thank our briefers for their insights. We appreciate Martin

Griffiths' update on the prisoner release agreement. That is an important achievement made possible by his tireless efforts, together with those of the International Committee of the Red Cross. We very much hope to hear more positive updates on the parties' implementation of those commitments in the coming days and weeks.

Despite the promises the agreement holds, I am deeply concerned that progress on the political front is stalled because of the Houthis' failure uphold their commitments. Their continued offensive on Ma'rib demonstrates they are not interested in a political process and only want more years of war for the people of Yemen. Ma'rib is home to many of Yemen's internally displaced people and has become a refuge for Yemenis fleeing fighting throughout the war. The Houthi assault on that refuge is deeply concerning, and we call on them to cease that action immediately.

We are also extremely concerned about the recent intensified fighting in Al-Hudaydah and offer our condolences for the lives lost. Only a political solution will bring stability, peace and prosperity back to Yemen. Yet, sadly, the Houthis have been content throughout this conflict to lose tens of thousands of fighters on the battlefield. Of course the Houthis are not doing it alone; Iran's continued exports of weapons to the Houthis, in contravention of the arms embargo, have been extensively documented, including by the Secretary-General's most recent report (S/2020/531) on resolution 2231 (2015). Iran's role in this conflict, which defies Security Council sanctions, is serving no other purpose than to worsen this humanitarian tragedy and prolong the suffering of millions.

This horrible destabilizing situation has persisted for years. If Council members truly seek a mediated settlement to this conflict, then they must join the United States and others in calling on Iran to cease all support for the Houthis immediately. As the world tries its best to end this war, Iran's provision of lethal aid and training to the Houthis is doing nothing but ensuring endless war. It must stop now.

I would also like to speak further about the *SAFER* tanker, which, despite the concerted efforts of Martin and his team, continues to threaten the Red Sea and the people of Yemen with catastrophic consequences, including severely reducing the import of commercial food and humanitarian aid; lasting environmental damage; and economic degradation.

Last month, during the General Assembly's high-level week, the Council's five permanent members plus Germany, Sweden and Kuwait called on the Houthis to urgently facilitate unconditional and safe access for United Nations experts to conduct an assessment and repair mission. The Council, too, has been calling on, urging, pressing and admonishing the Houthis to do this for months.

And still the Houthis stall. They set out new demands, conditions and obstacles for the United Nations experts – those who possess the expertise and resources necessary to avert a serious disaster. That the Houthis are willing to risk catastrophe for millions of Yemenis — who rely so heavily on food, fuel and other goods imported through Red Sea ports — to gain political leverage demonstrates the cynicism and heartlessness of the Houthis' leadership.

Why would anyone expect any differently, given how the Houthis continue to obstruct international humanitarian assistance to Yemenis desperately in need? The Houthis' recent shutdown of Sana'a international airport obstructed movement of the life-saving humanitarian supplies and essential personnel that are required in the most densely populated areas of Yemen. Those Houthi actions halted the import of 2.4 million doses of oral polio vaccine for their own areas, as well as more than 200 metric tons of medical supplies related to the coronavirus disease.

A temporary reopening of the airport is not a sustainable reprieve. We urge the Houthis to end their brinkmanship and reopen the airport to United Nations flights on a permanent basis. This Houthi obstruction is unconscionable, particularly as Yemenis face the additional threats of rising prices and food insecurity. We cannot and should not be silent in the face of such unprecedented intransigence.

With famine a realistic prospect in Yemen in the event of prolonged food-import disruption, we encourage all donors to provide resources for ongoing and emerging needs now. All parties to the conflict, especially the Houthis, must enable actors to implement critical life-saving programmes.

I would also like to take a moment today to express our gratitude to our partners in Oman, Saudi Arabia and the Government of the Republic of Yemen, particularly the Sultan of Oman and the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, for helping the United States facilitate the release of two United States citizens in Yemen

and the return of the remains of another United States citizen. The Trump Administration has made bringing home Americans held hostage or wrongfully detained overseas a top priority, and we will never waver in our commitment to them and their families.

I thank the countries that have joined the United States in supporting the World Food Programme, as it plays a critical role in Yemen, providing 13 million people in the country with emergency food assistance and 1.1 million children and women with nutritional support. The World Food Programme urgently needs assistance to continue its life-saving efforts. The United States provides 43 per cent of the World Food Programme's budget, and we are grateful for others stepping up.

Finally, in my previous remarks before the Council, I called on the Houthis to immediately release wrongfully detained Yemeni citizen Levi Salem Musa Marhabi (see S/PV.8757). Levi's health continues to decline in detention, where he remains wrongfully held despite a Houthi "court" ordering his release in September 2019.

We call on all Houthis to respect religious freedom, stop oppressing Yemen's Jewish population and immediately release Mr. Marhabi.

**Mrs. Nguyen** (Viet Nam): I would like to thank 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, for their briefings. I also welcome the representative of Yemen to this meeting.

We are encouraged by the good news that Mr. Griffiths reported at the beginning of the meeting about the release of more than 1,000 individuals. That is a very important step in facilitating the implementation of the Stockholm Agreement.

However, we continue to have grave concerns about the escalation of hostilities in recent days in Yemen, where a number of people have been killed, including women and children. We condemn the attacks and join other members in expressing our deepest condolences to the families of the fallen. We support the statement made by Mr. Griffiths on 8 October in that regard.

Furthermore, the significant increase of \$450 million in financial contributions from donors is a positive sign. However, we are concerned by reports

that the current budget is inadequate for United Nations humanitarian operations in the closing months of 2020.

The economic crisis, the prolonged conflict, food insecurity and other issues have had dire impacts on the humanitarian situation in Yemen. Moreover, the oil from the *SAFER* tanker, reported to be leaking into the Red Sea, constitutes an alarming threat to Yemen and the Gulf region. It is therefore important to immediately grant the United Nations technical team access to the tanker for assessment and repair.

Against that backdrop, allow me to highlight the following points.

First, we urge all concerned parties in Yemen to heed the calls for a ceasefire. It is imperative that all parties immediately put an end to military activities in the country, with a view to halting the disproportionate civilian suffering, facilitating humanitarian assistance and resuming peace talks.

We cannot emphasize enough that there is no military solution to the situation in Yemen. Council members and the relevant parties should therefore support the efforts of the Special Envoy in working with the Government of Yemen and the Southern Transitional Council to agree on a joint declaration on a nationwide ceasefire across Yemen.

Secondly, safe and unhindered access for humanitarian efforts in Yemen should be ensured. We also urge the relevant parties to fulfil their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law.

At the same time, we call for further efforts from the international community, the United Nations and donors to find a way out for funding for Yemen. Against the backdrop of the 2020 pledged contributions, it is necessary for the United Nations to work in advance with the parties involved to begin planning for the donor conference for Yemen, to be held in 2021.

Thirdly, we urge all parties to fully uphold and implement the Stockholm Agreement and the Riyadh agreement with United Nations mediation. In that process, we reaffirm our support for Yemen's sovereignty, unity, independence and territorial integrity. The meaningful participation of women in the political process should be also ensured and further promoted.

In conclusion, we commend Special Envoy Martin Griffiths and the United Nations team for their tireless efforts and support their proposals on peace in Yemen.

**Mr. Heusgen** (Germany): It is very good to see Martin Griffiths and Mark Lowcock on the screen. I just want to say that we still have one coronavirus-free seat here and that it would be great if perhaps next time one of them could be here in our midst.

I wish to echo what Martin said at the beginning when he described how we are currently witnessing this airlift of hope. I would also echo what he said with regard to the relief and comfort that this brings to not only those in the planes but also to their families and friends. I thank him, his Deputy, his team and in particular the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and President Maurer. It is incredible what the ICRC is doing not only there but also in other places around the globe.

We share Martin's wish that on the basis of this airlift of hope, we can now build momentum and confidence that we can actually embark on a road to peace and start with a final agreement on a joint declaration on the shooting war, or as Mark Lowcock said, that we have a nationwide ceasefire. We and the parties owe that to the people. In that regard, I would like to commend Mr. Griffiths, as I did last time, for his ongoing meetings with members of civil society and women. We have to involve them and listen to them. As Ms. King repeated earlier, civil society says that enough is enough.

That is in contrast with what is developing with the airlift and what is happening in Ma'rib. We see a deterioration of the situation in Al-Hudaydah, which is alarming, and Taiz. With regard to Taiz, I support the Special Envoy's efforts to work with civil society and highlight what civil society does with regard to schools and education, for example. Women's participation in all peace talks, at both the local and national levels, are very important. Mr. Griffiths mentioned how much more enduring peace agreements are when women participate.

On the humanitarian front, we are repeating ourselves. Nevertheless, we must repeat it — Yemen is the worst humanitarian situation of all the conflicts we deal with here in the Council. The people are suffering and, as Mr. Lowcock has highlighted, famine is looming. His overview was dire. As in many conflicts, women, children and marginalized people are the ones suffering

the most from this conflict. Some might remember that under the German presidency in July we had Ms. Raja Abdullah Ahmed Almasabi, Chairwoman of the Arab Human Rights Foundation, as a briefer (see S/PV.8753). She highlighted the fate of people with disabilities. Before she left, she pointed to us and said that we can do more and we can do better. I still have that ringing in my ears. I would therefore like to plea with colleagues who are standing in the way of highlighting the dire situation of persons with disabilities in the statement that we are preparing. I hope we will be able to agree to highlight the fate of people with disabilities.

On humanitarian aid, we heard Mr. Lowcock's figures. I am happy that some are now paying. The last time we spoke about this issue I pointed particularly at the members of the coalition. I am very happy to hear that Saudi Arabia is now contributing financially. We hope that the United Arab Emirates will do likewise.

Germany has disbursed all \$150 million it committed towards the Yemen humanitarian response plan. In addition, we are contributing \$100 million to the World Food Programme and the United Nations Office for Project Services. I mention to Mrs. Craft, incidentally, that Germany is the second-largest donor to the World Food Programme, which we believe does a wonderful job. We all recall when David Beasley briefed the Council on the situation in Yemen (see S/2020/930).

With regard to the distribution of support, I would like to echo what others, like Mrs. Craft, said today, that it is unacceptable that the Houthis are blocking humanitarian aid. I recall that Mr. Beasley emphasized how the Houthis were diverting humanitarian aid.

However, I would also like to point the finger a bit to the other side. Mr. Lowcock mentioned that some humanitarian aid is not reaching Al-Hudaydah because the Government of Yemen is blocking it due to certain questionable import duties. I would like to plead here for the Government of the Yemeni people to not withhold humanitarian aid to its people. Perhaps the Yemeni Ambassador would like to say something in that connection.

**Mr. Aougi** (Niger) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Mr. Martin Griffiths and Mr. Mark Lowcock for their detailed briefings, which keep us informed about the situation in Yemen on a monthly basis.

The Niger has been following with great interest the recent developments in the conflict in Yemen,

in particular the agreement reached in Switzerland between the Government of Yemen and the Houthis on 27 September, including the exchange of more than 1,000 prisoners. In an entrenched war like the one in Yemen, and in view of the escalation observed in recent months, that agreement, which the Niger welcomes, is the glimmer of hope that we have been waiting for in this conflict of disastrous humanitarian consequences. We commend the parties for having reached an agreement.

Through that agreement, the Yemeni parties have shown goodwill and, above all, commitment, which is an encouraging sign. Despite the tensions on the ground, it is a promising step forward that could pave the way for the resumption of the political process and an agreement on a joint ceasefire declaration.

Faced with this turning point in the conflict, we must do our utmost to maintain that positive momentum and use every opportunity to silence the weapons, stop the bloodshed and bring the parties to make peace in the country. Only a commitment to a truce will enable the parties to maintain the trust they have built, which remains essential for the resumption of peace talks.

In that regard, we call upon regional actors and the members of the Security Council with influence on the parties to the conflict to spare no effort to bring them to honour their commitments made in the Stockholm, Riyadh and, recently, Geneva agreements, and to agree to support the Special Envoy's efforts towards a joint declaration of a national ceasefire so that the Yemeni people can enjoy peace, reconciliation and a return to progress.

With regard to the humanitarian situation, my delegation remains concerned about the lack of funding for United Nations agencies in the context of aid programmes that ensure the survival of several million people in Yemen. That lack of international assistance is forcing the United Nations to reduce services in health centres, and even to partially or totally close those facilities. We deplore the continuing obstacles to the delivery of humanitarian aid and the continued fighting in several localities, including Al-Hudaydah, where most of the humanitarian aid and imported goods pass through. In order to avert the looming disaster, we call on the international community to show greater solidarity with the suffering population of Yemen.

In conclusion, my delegation would like to express its deep concern about the situation of the *FSO SAFER* oil tanker, whose advanced state of disrepair, in

conjunction with the delay in inspections and repairs, place Yemen and the countries bordering the Red Sea at imminent risk of an environmental disaster with incalculable consequences, exposing Yemen and the countries bordering the Red Sea. Given the situation, urgent action is needed to avert the worst from coming to pass. We call on the Houthis to honour their commitments and issue the necessary authorizations to the United Nations team in charge of the inspection of the tanker.

**Mr. Ben Lagha** (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I wish to begin with words of gratitude to Mr. Martin Griffiths, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, and Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for their important briefings on recent developments in Yemen. We wish to reiterate our support for all efforts aimed at arriving at a comprehensive political settlement to end the crisis currently plaguing Yemen and the suffering of the fraternal Yemeni people through a solution that safeguards the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of the country.

The years of conflict have unleashed an acute humanitarian tragedy and resulted in the collapse of infrastructure, the deterioration of the socioeconomic situation and a worsening of the living conditions of the Yemeni people — all of which has had negative consequences for peace, security and stability in the region.

Tunisia welcomes the prisoner exchange agreement, which is an important step forward towards implementing the Stockholm Agreement. However, we emphatically condemn the military escalation at the port of Al-Hudaydah, which has led to the loss of many civilian lives, including women children. It has also compounded the humanitarian crisis and led to a worsening of human rights violations and breaches of international humanitarian law. In that regard, Tunisia reaffirms the fact that a military solution is no solution at all and that the solution to this crisis, which has been ongoing for many years in Yemen, can be achieved only through a political process based on dialogue and peace negotiations. Any political settlement must embrace of the overriding interests of the Yemeni people and place their interests above any other considerations, in fulfilment of the agreed benchmarks, namely, the Gulf Cooperation Council Initiative and its Implementation Mechanism, the outcome of the National Dialogue Conference and the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, including resolution 2216 (2015).

Tunisia wishes to reiterate its support for the efforts undertaken by the Special Envoy to advance the political settlement process. We are in agreement with the Special Envoy: the longer the crisis lasts, the more complicated it is and the more difficult it will be to reach a settlement, and the worse off the Yemeni people will be. We therefore wish to reiterate our call for the stakeholders in Yemen to respond favourably to the proposals under the joint declaration, so as to begin a new stage in the negotiations that paves a path towards a comprehensive transition agreement to guarantee political stability and improve conditions in the country.

We wish to reiterate the importance of compliance with the ceasefire and of bringing an end to all hostile acts. We also reaffirm the importance of political negotiations to incorporate all stakeholder groups within Yemeni society, especially to ensure the meaningful participation of both women and civil society representatives.

We are very concerned by the unprecedented humanitarian crisis in the country, especially in the light of the suspension of the delivery of humanitarian goods and of the obstacles that continue to stymie the provision of humanitarian assistance. This bodes ill with regard to the further deterioration of the situation and greater risk to the lives of Yemenis, especially given the ongoing coronavirus disease pandemic. We call for a redoubling of international efforts to alleviate the suffering of the people as a result of the humanitarian crisis. This is an urgent priority, hence the need to continue to mobilize the necessary funds to finance the humanitarian response aimed at ending the suffering of the fraternal Yemeni people. In that vein, we commend those countries that have honoured their commitments, in particular such countries as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The *FSO SAFER* oil tanker situation requires an immediate intervention to carry out the necessary and urgent repairs to the vessel and avert a very dangerous and serious humanitarian, environmental and economic disaster. We call upon the Houthis to grant the United Nations experts access to inspect the tanker and take the necessary measures.

In conclusion, the Tunisian delegation is of the view that the Yemeni crisis has lasted for far too long and that the Yemeni people have therefore suffered for far too long. This is intolerable. Enough is enough, as

Mr. Lowcock said. We also believe that the Security Council today is duty-bound to redouble its efforts in support of the Special Envoy so as to ensure that all parties genuinely and meaningfully respect the choice for peace and negotiations.

**Mr. Auväärt** (Estonia): I would like to thank Special Envoy Griffiths and Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for their briefings.

The continuing violence in the conflict in Yemen is deeply worrisome. It results in a growing number of civilian casualties and the exacerbation of the humanitarian crisis. The military escalation in Ma'rib is threatening hundreds of thousands of displaced people and puts the United Nations peace process at risk.

The recent escalation in Al-Hudaydah, which has caused a substantial number of civilian casualties, is another worrisome setback and risks jeopardizing the peace efforts. We call upon the parties to immediately stop fighting, return to the implementation of the Hodeidah Agreement and engage with the United Nations Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement's joint implementation mechanisms.

It is clear that violence will only undermine the prospects for a long-term solution to the conflict. We call upon all parties to come to an immediate nationwide ceasefire and agree to the United Nations proposal of a joint declaration without further delay. We fully support the efforts of Special Envoy Griffiths in mediating the negotiations.

On a positive note, we welcome the agreement reached by the parties on the exchange of over 1,000 prisoners and the first swap, which took place today. This is an important humanitarian and confidence-building measure and a key step in implementing the Stockholm Agreement.

We also remind all parties of their responsibility to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law and to ensure accountability for all violations and abuses. All parties must take the necessary measures to protect civilians, especially vulnerable groups, such as women and children. In that context, we welcome the renewal of the mandate of the Group of Eminent Experts on Yemen.

Turning to the humanitarian situation, we fully share the concerns stressed by Under-Secretary-General Lowcock regarding the grim situation that



Yemenis are facing, including the possible famine. The funding gaps in the humanitarian programmes must be filled, and Yemen's economy must be strengthened. In that regard, we welcome the organizing of the virtual high-level side event on the humanitarian situation in Yemen, which took place on 23 September. We also call for intensified efforts to find a long-term solution to ensure the import of fuel and commercial items through the ports.

Lastly, we call on the Houthi authorities to finalize the agreement for allowing the United Nations mission to gain access the *FSO SAFER* oil tanker safely and without further delay, in order to prevent a large-scale catastrophe.

**Mr. Kridelka** (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Special Envoy Griffiths and Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for their relevant briefings, including on the importance of the role of women and the courage of Yemeni children and their teachers.

I will focus on three issues today: the rising violence in Al-Hudaydah, the recent prisoner exchange agreement and the findings of the Group of Eminent Experts on Yemen, particularly with regard to violence against children.

Belgium is very concerned about the recent escalation of violence in Al-Hudaydah and the ongoing fighting in Ma'rib. This violence increases the pressure on an already exhausted civilian population. It undermines the efforts of Special Envoy Griffiths. For months, we have been waiting for a joint statement that would put the parties back on the path to peace. The lack of progress on the joint statement leads us to question the true political commitment of the parties.

Only dialogue can put an end to the war and resolve the profound differences in the country. We urge all actors to remain engaged in the peace talks under the auspices of the United Nations and to implement the Stockholm Agreement and the Riyadh agreement.

Once again, I would like to place particular emphasis on the issue of the oil tanker *FSO SAFER*. No one can ignore the ecological disaster that would occur in the event of a spill. We urge the Houthis to provide access to the United Nations team as soon as possible. The agreement between the parties to exchange more than 1,000 prisoners is good news. It has the potential to contribute to increased confidence, which is fundamental to progress towards lasting peace.

We commend all those involved in achieving that agreement, in particular the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Let me draw attention to a closely related and particularly worrisome aspect of the war in Yemen — the fate of civilians arbitrarily detained and forcibly disappeared, people who have disappeared because of their political views, profession, activism or religious affiliation. Since 2016, the independent Yemeni organization Mwatana for Human Rights has documented a total of 1,605 cases of arbitrary detention and no less than 770 cases of enforced disappearance.

As the American investigative journalist Patrick Radden Keefe writes in his book *Say Nothing*:

“Perhaps the cruelest feature of forced disappearance as an instrument of war is that it denies the bereaved any closure, relegating them to a permanent limbo of uncertainty.”

Belgium urges all parties to the conflict in Yemen to respond to the appeals of the families of the victims, to reveal the fate and whereabouts of those forcibly disappeared and to urgently release all those arbitrarily detained, including journalists.

I would like to welcome the renewal of the mandate of the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen, as endorsed by the Human Rights Council in Geneva last week. The report of the Group of Eminent Experts on the situation of human rights in Yemen (A/HRC/45/6) is fundamental to the work of the Security Council. Human rights and accountability for serious human rights violations are inextricably linked to the maintenance of international peace and security.

Belgium is particularly concerned about the conclusions of the Group of Eminent Experts regarding children. Over the past year, there has been a high rate of casualties among children in several cases of illegal attacks against civilians, including during air strikes that the Group has been able to investigate. Children account for almost one third of civilians killed or maimed in armed violence in the first half of 2020.

Those figures are horrific. The violence must stop. Accountability must be ensured. The Yemeni people have suffered for too long. They deserve peace and stability.

**Mr. Mabhongo** (South Africa): We thank Special Envoy Martin Griffiths and Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for their briefings this morning.

South Africa would like to reiterate that the dire humanitarian situation in Yemen, intensified by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, is indistinguishably linked to the political impasse. As such, our intervention today focuses on the humanitarian as well as the political situation.

On the humanitarian situation, South Africa continues to express its concern regarding the devastating effect of the conflict on the people of Yemen, in particular women, children, the elderly, internally displaced persons and those living with disabilities.

We express our concern that the surging violence risks worsening the widespread human-made hunger crisis in Yemen, where two thirds of the population require food aid. Although there has been ongoing humanitarian assistance, more than 20 million Yemenis still face the harsh reality of food insecurity. Millions of Yemenis do not know where their next meal will come from, or are in acute need of assistance to obtain drinking water, and millions of children require treatment for malnutrition.

South Africa calls on all parties to the conflict to agree to a unified set of measures to counter the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, improve the delivery of humanitarian aid and provide impetus to the overall political negotiations to end the war and alleviate the suffering of the people.

We have consistently highlighted the importance of all parties abiding by their obligations and responsibilities under international humanitarian law and international human rights law and taking all the measures necessary to end and prevent violations against civilians.

On the political impasse, South Africa is concerned that the fighting in Yemen has intensified in recent days, threatening to unravel an already stalled peace process and deepen the world's worst humanitarian catastrophe.

This past week, Al-Hudaydah saw the worst escalation in violence since the truce two years ago. The number of civilian casualties nationwide in September was the highest since last November, with 67 killed and 123 injured.

We therefore urge all parties to the conflict to immediately cease hostilities in line with the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire and resolution 2532 (2020), and to also agree on confidence-building measures, such as the payment of civil servants. The reopening of Sana'a airport and the lifting of the siege are required to restart the peace process.

We reiterate our position that the military response is not a viable solution, and we call on all parties to approach the resumption of political negotiations in a spirit of compromise, placing the interests of all Yemenis at the centre of a negotiated political settlement. We appeal to parties to avoid the stance of going for absolute positions in the negotiations.

South Africa calls on all parties to engage in good faith and without preconditions with Special Envoy Martin Griffiths in order to reach a comprehensive, negotiated settlement to end the conflict, and that this be done in parallel to continued efforts to implement the Stockholm and Riyadh agreements.

We applaud the progress made under the Stockholm Agreement, which led to the exchange of more than 1,000 prisoners. We urge the parties to rapidly implement that agreement and for further measures to be taken towards implementing the Agreement. We also are encouraged that such progress can resolve the lack of access and inspection of the *FSO SAFER* oil tanker so that this looming threat will be dealt with on a purely technical basis, without politicization.

In conclusion, South Africa reiterates that the only solution to the conflict in Yemen is an inclusive Yemeni-led and Yemeni-owned political settlement that delivers on the hopes of the people for a strong economic and political future. In that context, we also call for the full and meaningful participation of women in all aspects of an inclusive political process.

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

We thank Special Envoy of the Secretary-General Martin Griffiths and Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for their overview of the political and humanitarian situation in Yemen. We are concerned that fighting continues in various parts of Yemen, affecting civilians in particular. The situation in the country, widely acknowledged as the worst humanitarian crisis in the world today, continues to deteriorate.

Humanitarian problems and challenges have come to the fore, requiring an immediate response from the international community.

At the same time, humanitarian assistance is being delivered intermittently. We are concerned that the United Nations programmes to provide basic assistance, including food security, access to water and health services, are being curtailed due to a lack of funding. We are deeply concerned about the current health situation. The vital infrastructure has been almost completely destroyed, and there is an acute shortage of medicines and equipment. That is compounded by the coronavirus disease pandemic.

Our country is providing assistance to Yemen through United Nations agencies. We call on donors, including from the region, to increase the necessary support. At the same time, we recall that humanitarian assistance must be impartial and that assistance must be distributed on a non-discriminatory basis to the entire population in all parts of the country, regardless of who controls a particular area.

We consistently advocate that the parties to the Yemeni conflict should as soon as possible renounce violence and move towards a political settlement of their differences. We see no alternative to resolving issues through an intra-Yemeni dialogue. We note with regret that the parties have not yet signed the joint declaration.

We support Special Envoy Griffiths' tireless efforts in these circumstances. He has steadfastly sought to establish discussions among the belligerents in order to end hostilities, establish confidence-building measures and tackle urgent humanitarian, socioeconomic and political matters.

We welcome the agreement on the exchange of prisoners and the beginning of its implementation. We very much value the role of the International Committee of the Red Cross in that process — a development that shows that the parties are indeed able to negotiate. We trust that will enable them to build trust and establish a comprehensive dialogue.

Among the issues where progress can be achieved is the situation concerning the *FSO SAFER* oil tanker. We urge the stakeholders, including the United Nations Office for Project Services, to look after one another's interests and cooperate constructively with a sharp focus on achieving solutions acceptable to all. On our part, we will pursue contacts with all interested

Yemeni and external parties. We will urge them to seek compromise and support the efforts of both the United Nations and Mr. Griffiths personally. We will also support the efforts of the United Nations Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement. We trust that our Security Council colleagues and the entire international community will do the same.

In conclusion, we would like to note that the situation in Yemen has a direct bearing on the Middle East, the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea regions. In order to achieve de-escalation in the region, we urge the international community to engage in constructive cooperation in pursuit of peace and stability throughout the Middle East, including on the basis of resolution 598 (1987). The Russian blueprint for collective security in the Persian Gulf region remains relevant in that regard. It provides for an inclusive and collective approach for resolving problems. We object to attempts to pin blame for all developments in the region on one side alone. We reiterate our call for all stakeholders to begin comprehensive dialogue to create favourable conditions for cooperation.

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, allow me to extend my congratulations to the Ambassador of the Russian Federation on his assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. We wish him and his friendly delegation every success. We also wish everyone good health and safety.

The Government of Yemen, under the leadership of His Excellency President Abdrabuh Mansour Hadi Mansour, continues to work towards ending the war imposed on the Yemeni people by Houthi militias since 2014. The main task for the Government and the people of Yemen is to achieve fair, lasting and sustainable peace based on the terms of reference for a political solution, namely, the Gulf Cooperation Council Initiative and its Implementation Mechanism, the outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference and the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, in particular resolution 2216 (2015).

Peace is an irreversible option, but it will materialize only through ending the coup and restoring the institutions of the State, which looks after the

interests of all its citizens. In order to achieve that sublime goal, the Government has spared no effort to provide support for the efforts of Special Envoy Martin Griffiths and has engaged positively with all options for peace. Recently, the Government of Yemen displayed additional flexibility and made further compromises to respond positively to all calls and suggestions aimed at achieving progress in the comprehensive peace process, including the draft joint declaration. Unfortunately, however, as always, the Houthis have continued to come up with new conditions and preconditions.

The Government of Yemen welcomes the Secretary-General's call for a ceasefire and has unilaterally observed one, so as to provide an opportunity for Mr. Griffiths' efforts to arrive at a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire and resume the political process. We have extended our hand and shown all possible flexibility in dealing with peace options. We have made many compromises, for we want to save our war- and disaster-ravaged country — our humane and historic civilization. Our hand is still extended for peace.

However, unfortunately, it is met only with impertinence and intransigence by the Houthi militias towards all agreements and understandings, as always. This is in addition to the obstacles they create and their insistence on subversion and taking advantage of the suffering of the Yemeni people and blackmailing the international community. All of that has amplified the suffering of the Yemeni people. The intransigence of the Houthi militias is evident in the absurdity whereby the economic issue is manipulated and the national currency is undermined. Added to that is the stealing of civil servant's salaries, the weaponization of humanitarian assistance, the blackmailing of the international community through the *FSO SAFER* tanker issue and military escalation in densely populated cities, in addition to disrupting agreements and seizing resources.

The Houthi militias do not believe in peace or dialogue. Why do I say that? Because we have experiences with these militias. There was a political process in Yemen. There was a transition period in Yemen in 2011. There was the Gulf Cooperation Council Initiative and its Implementation Mechanism. The Houthis participated in the Comprehensive National Dialogue. Unfortunately, however, they took advantage of the peaceful atmosphere to mobilize and take control

of several areas, including Sana'a, thereby actually rebelling against the outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference and the aspirations of the Yemeni people.

President Hadi and all the political segments of Yemeni political society tried as much as possible to salvage the political process and the transition period, spare Yemeni blood and avoid plunging Yemen into war, as is the case now. As all members are aware, the partnership and peace agreement was signed, and the Houthis participated in the Government. However, they controlled all Government institutions because they are armed — they never gave their weapons — and they rebelled against the Government, putting the President under house arrest. They continued war and escalation. They are the cause of all of the suffering of the Yemeni people today.

The Houthi militias did not stop with those violations. They continue to tear apart social cohesion along abhorrent sectarian and ethnic lines. They disrupt State institutions and target the education sector.

The Yemeni Government upholds the Stockholm Agreement and has responded positively to all calls and initiatives throughout the past five years, so as to achieve peace and alleviate the suffering of the Yemeni people. However, the results on the ground since the Stockholm Agreement clearly point to the indifference of the Houthis to the implementation of the agreement. They are even indifferent to the timelines and deadlines of the agreement, so much so that it became meaningless. They continue to pursue military escalation in the Al-Durayhimi district of Al-Hudaydah, and prior to that in Ma'rib, Al-Jawf and Taiz. They work to pre-empt this agreement, and in particular Al-Hudaydah agreement. They continue to violate the ceasefire. They use Al-Hudaydah as a platform to launch rockets and booby-trapped drones against civilian neighborhoods. They launch barbaric attacks against public and private economic institutions, lay mines, target shipping routes, smuggle weapons and steel humanitarian aid.

All of this is taking place in flagrant violation of the Stockholm Agreement. The recent shelling by the Houthis of an economic or industrial complex in Al-Hudaydah, and the resulting aggravation of the humanitarian crisis, are yet further evidence of the disregard of the Houthi militias for the lives and livelihoods of the Yemeni people. They also obstruct the work of the United Nations Mission in Support

of the Hodeida Agreement. For that reason, we again call for relocating the Mission to an area not under the control of the Houthis.

Under the guidance of His Excellency President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, and with the support of our Saudi brethren, the Yemeni Government has made strides in the implementation of the Riyadh agreement, which aims at achieving stability and restoring State institutions, as well as unifying national efforts to put an end to the militias' coup and the Iranian project in Yemen and the region. From the very outset, the Yemeni Government has been quite willing to provide all the necessary support for the implementation of the agreement, for we believe in the importance of concerted efforts towards reconstruction and development under the authority of the State. The consultations carried out by the interim Head of Government, Mr. Maeen Abdulmalek, with the various political stakeholders have resulted in progress towards forming a new Government that will uphold — not undermine — national values, foremost among which are the unity, stability and territorial integrity of Yemen, along with a focus on providing basic services, safeguarding the national currency and implementing the necessary reforms for the functioning of State institutions.

We have incurred great economic losses due to the coup by the Houthi militias. It has hampered the development process and reversed decades of gains, destroyed the private sector, causing the worst humanitarian crisis, and pushed millions of Yemenis to the brink of famine and poverty. It has also created the largest wave of internal and external displacement, the likes of which Yemen has not seen in its modern history. The outbreak of the coronavirus disease pandemic has aggravated the humanitarian crisis and put further pressure on the health sector, which was already vulnerable and lacking the resources to address the pandemic.

Notwithstanding the efforts by the Government to alleviate the suffering of the Yemeni people, the challenges remain enormous. We call on the international community to support the Government's efforts to address the economic and development challenges and bolster the national currency in order to stabilize livelihoods. The Government of Yemen stresses its commitment to the implementation of the agreement recently concluded in Switzerland and to release the first group of prisoners and detainees. We believe in

the importance of releasing all prisoners, detainees, forcibly disappeared persons and those under house arrest, including the four covered by Security Council resolutions. The Government emphasizes the principle of all for all under the Stockholm Agreement, given the humanitarian importance of the matter. We call upon the Special Envoy, the International Committee of the Red Cross and all international mediators to uphold the Stockholm Agreement and hasten its implementation.

The subversive acts and piracy of the Houthi militias and their use of the *FSO SAFER* oil tanker as a ticking time bomb threaten both Yemen and the region. The Houthis have repeatedly denied the United Nations team access to the tanker to assess its condition and carry out initial repairs and offload its contents in order to avert an environmental, economic and humanitarian catastrophe in the Red Sea and the region. That is further egregious defiance of the international community and the Security Council's determination to avoid an impending catastrophe, one that draws closer with each passing day. We reiterate our call on the Council to shoulder its responsibility and adopt a strict position in order to spare Yemen and the region a catastrophe whose effects could last for decades. The Council should exercise pressure on the Houthis, who continue to procrastinate and to manipulate the situation to use this issue for political blackmail.

In response to what my friend the representative of Germany said, I would reiterate that the Government of Yemen is a Government of all Yemenis. The Government spares no effort, within the available resources, to alleviate the suffering of the Yemeni people throughout all governorates — without discrimination — including those controlled by Houthi militias. The Government provides all the facilities necessary for the delivery of humanitarian assistance to those in need throughout Yemen. Unfortunately, it is the Houthis who are obstructing and withholding aid in the areas they control. They also misuse oil products to sell on the black market. They are pillaging port revenues to finance their futile war and for personal gain. They are trying to create shortages of fuel products in the areas they control. They are also depriving civil servants of their salaries and causing food prices to soar. We reiterate that we in the Government stand ready to take all the measures necessary to provide unimpeded access to humanitarian assistance and alleviate the suffering of the Yemeni people.

In conclusion, our great people look forward to an end to this unjust war, the alleviation of the people's suffering and the achievement of fair, equitable, comprehensive and sustainable peace, which they well deserve, and which is enshrined in all regional and international terms of reference.

**The President** (*spoke in Russian*): 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 12.25 p.m.*