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Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Dame Barbara Woodward	(United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)
<i>Members:</i>	Albania	Mr. Hoxha
	Brazil	Mr. De Almeida Filho
	China	Mr. Geng Shuang
	Ecuador	Mr. Pérez Loose
	France	Mr. Olmedo
	Gabon	Mrs. Ngyema Ndong
	Ghana	Mr. Agyeman
	Japan	Mrs. Shino
	Malta	Mr. Camilleri
	Mozambique	Mr. Afonso
	Russian Federation	Ms. Evstigneeva
	Switzerland	Mr. Hauri
	United Arab Emirates	Mr. Abushahab
	United States of America	Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

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

On behalf of the Council, I welcome His Excellency Mr. Jaap Sloopmaker, Vice-Minister of Infrastructure and Water Management of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Hans Grundberg, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen; Ms. Joyce Msuya, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator; and Mr. David Gressly, United Nations Resident Coordinator for Yemen.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Grundberg.

Mr. Grundberg: I thank you, Madam President, for giving me this opportunity to brief the Council on the latest developments in Yemen and on my efforts to mediate an agreement on a way forward between the Government of Yemen and Ansar Allah.

Despite the expiry of the truce, Yemen and its people continue to feel the benefits of the longest period of relative calm since the beginning of the conflict. According to the latest report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2023/363), the truce contributed to a 40 per cent drop in grave violations against children such as killing, maiming and recruitment to armed formations. While that is a meaningful achievement, more progress is needed. Just last week, a mortar attack injured five children in the district of Hays, south of Al-Hudaydah. I join the United Nations Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement in condemning the incident and calling on all parties to uphold their obligations under international law and prevent and end violations against children. Other benefits continue to this day. The commercial flights between Sana'a and Amman have continued, and this

month I welcomed the first commercial flights in seven years between Sana'a and Saudi Arabia, carrying Yemeni Hajj pilgrims. Fuel also continues to flow steadily through Al-Hudaydah's ports.

Most importantly, this period of relative calm has opened the door for serious discussions with Yemeni actors on a way forward for ending the conflict. The discussions are ongoing, but if we are to sustainably end the war those talks have to reach a serious breakthrough. I am grateful for the continued efforts of actors in the region, especially the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Sultanate of Oman, in support of those discussions. We have also seen the parties engage constructively in other confidence-building measures. My Office recently convened the parties in Amman to discuss further detainee releases, building on the successful large-scale release of detainees in March in partnership with the International Committee of the Red Cross. I am grateful to the Government of Jordan for hosting those and other meetings in Amman, and for continuing to support the work of my Office. For more than a year, therefore, we have seen some important and positive steps that have de-escalated the violence and helped to improve the lives of Yemenis. However, the situation on the ground remains fragile and challenging.

With regard to the military situation, although fighting has decreased markedly since the start of the truce, the front lines are not silent. Armed clashes have taken place in Al-Dhale'e, Taiz, Al-Hudaydah, Marib and Shabwah. I am also concerned by reports of troop movements, including near Marib, and a recent parade of fighters in Ibb. Those continued sparks of violence, alongside public threats to return to large-scale fighting, increase fears and tensions. I call on the parties to cease provocative military actions and rhetoric that raise the spectre of further escalation.

Moreover, the parties continue to battle on a different front — the economy. The struggle to control revenue-generating ports, trade routes, the banking sector, currency and natural-resource wealth has become inseparable from the political and military conflict. The value of the Yemeni riyal against the United States dollar in Aden has fallen by more than 25 per cent in the past 12 months. As always, it is Yemeni citizens who pay the highest price for the economic divisions and deterioration in the country.

Freedom of movement also remains a huge challenge. Conflict-related road closures force thousands of Yemenis to take unsafe routes every

day and have raised the cost of transporting goods by upwards of 100 per cent. Landmines, unexploded ordnance and climate-change-related extreme weather events compound the impact of freedom-of-movement restrictions on civilians. In addition, despite recent positive efforts, there is a pressing need to further expand the availability of flights to and from Sana'a airport. For women and girls, the restrictions on the freedom of movement have become even more pronounced over the course of the conflict. The requirement that women and girls travelling have to be accompanied by a male relative has expanded significantly in the past year, especially in Ansar Allah-controlled areas, and armed groups at checkpoints in various parts of the country have also often imposed the same requirement. Such restrictions prevent women from accessing their basic needs, engaging in economic opportunities and participating in politics and peacemaking efforts.

We cannot afford to seek a seasonal peace. The parties have to take further bold steps towards a sustainable and just peace. That means ending the conflict in a way that promises accountable national and local governance, economic and environmental justice and guarantees of equal citizenship for all Yemenis, regardless of gender, faith, background or race. Even if the way forward to that future is challenging, it is well-lit. There are three key elements here.

First, the parties should immediately end their military provocations and prepare for and agree to a sustainable nationwide ceasefire. My Office recently held constructive discussions with delegates of the Government of Yemen to the Military Coordination Committee on the protection of civilians, including women's security, and plans to implement a ceasefire. That followed an earlier meeting in May with the Joint Forces Command of the Coalition about technical preparations for a ceasefire.

Secondly, the parties should immediately de-escalate economically and address near- and longer-term economic priorities. They should ensure regular public-sector salary payments nationwide and reverse antagonistic economic policies, which deepen the divide between them and further fragment the country. They should also enhance economic and other links among Yemenis in different parts of the country, including by opening roads and building on previous efforts to further expand the availability of flights — including domestic flights — to and from Sana'a airport. My Office is in constant communication with Yemeni

political actors, businesses, civil society and others to explore sustainable solutions.

Thirdly, the parties need to make progress on agreeing on a clear path towards restarting an intra-Yemeni political process under the auspices of the United Nations. That process needs to start urgently if the gains made since the truce are to be consolidated and further fragmentation prevented. To find sustainable solutions to the near-term challenges, Yemenis need to address broader issues at the heart of the conflict. For example, we are now seeing how current discussions on salary payments are becoming linked to issues of revenue management and ultimately to longer-term questions of the shape of the State. Only Yemenis can debate and decide on such weighty and fundamental questions of sovereignty, national and local governance, revenue management and security arrangements. The United Nations-mediated process will be led and owned by Yemenis and will involve and reflect the priorities of a plurality of Yemenis, including women and men from across Yemen's governorates.

I want to note here that Yemenis have deep capacities to draw on in any political negotiation. There is a rich history of dialogue, innovation and compromise in Yemen, including at the national level. And at the local level, Yemenis are proving their solidarity and ability to resolve problems every day. They are opening roads, releasing detainees and negotiating access amid significant barriers to movement. In some governorates the local authorities have actually stepped up service delivery, despite the challenges of the conflict. In others, private-sector actors have stepped in to provide crucial social services such as health and education. We need to build on those efforts to support post-conflict governance and peacebuilding.

Everyone in the Council wields influence. I ask members to use that influence to encourage the parties to stop escalatory actions and work along the path that I have outlined here today.

The President: I thank Mr. Grundberg for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Msuya.

Ms. Msuya: I welcome the update provided by Hans Grundberg and echo his call for the parties to maintain the momentum gained so far. We cannot allow this opportunity to pass unseized. I am very pleased that David Gressly joined us today to provide an update on the *FSO SAFER* salvage operation. I

would like to commend him for his exceptional efforts. Under his leadership, and in close coordination with our colleagues at the United Nations Development Programme, remarkable progress has been made to avert an environmental and humanitarian disaster.

As I have stressed in my previous briefings, humanitarian needs in Yemen will remain high for the foreseeable future. This year, the humanitarian community is seeking to reach 17.3 million people out of a staggering 21.6 million people in need of assistance. Migrants, asylum seekers and refugees are among the most vulnerable of these, and their numbers are growing. The International Organization for Migration reports that, in the first half of 2023, the number of migrants arriving in Yemen — more than 77,000 people — increased sharply and approached levels from before the coronavirus disease pandemic. At that rate, the number of arrivals is expected to double compared to last year. While not the largest vulnerable group in Yemen in terms of their numbers, they face severe protection risks. Migrants usually arrive in Yemen en route to better opportunities elsewhere. But once in Yemen, they often face exploitation and violence, including extortion, abduction and physical abuse. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reports that asylum-seekers and refugees use the same routes, arrive in mixed flows with migrants and face similar threats. Women and girls are particularly at risk. The International Organization for Migration reports increased demand for responses to gender-based violence, as physical and sexual violence against migrant women and girls is routine.

Overall, the humanitarian community estimates that 300,000 migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees need humanitarian assistance this year. But those groups face limited, if any, access to health or social services, owing to a lack of documentation and already-strained public resources. I call on the relevant parties to fulfil their obligations in order to meet the essential needs, such as health, food, water and shelter, of all civilians under their control.

As my previous briefings have made clear, internally displaced people also face a precarious reality in Yemen. Recently, in the part of Tuhayta' district controlled by the Government of Yemen, approximately 6,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Al Hayma village, together with approximately 4,000 host community residents, have faced heightened insecurity in recent months, owing to their proximity to the front

lines. In May, an 8-year-old boy was killed, and his sister injured by a mortar. Since my last briefing (see S/PV.9282), and following productive engagement with the relevant authorities and the affected residents, the humanitarian community has now begun preparations to support the IDPs and other residents who wish to relocate from that area in hopes of a more stable and safer future for their families.

One of the main factors driving the immense level of humanitarian needs in Yemen is the deteriorating economic situation. Only by stabilizing the economy can we reduce the staggering number of people in need. In that regard, the long-overdue resumption of oil exports from government-held areas is critical, including for paying public sector salaries. The continued obstruction to the transport of commercial goods from government- to Houthi-controlled areas must also be addressed. Commercial goods should be able to flow throughout the country without hindrance. Beyond that, more must be done to generate incomes and improve people's purchasing power, as well as to ensure the provision of basic services. In the summer heat, enabling the continued provision of electricity is particularly important. The United Nations is working with our donors and partners to address the underlying drivers of need and improve the economic situation, in line with the United Nations economic framework. We are doing that by working through the humanitarian-development-peace nexus to improve the targeting of development and humanitarian initiatives. As part of that work, the United Nations is, for example, enhancing its presence in the divided city of Taiz to work with local authorities and communities to increase access to safe drinking water on both sides of the city and bolster socioeconomic development. In addition, through the Yemen Partners Group, the United Nations and donors are identifying opportunities for more coordinated sustainable initiatives across the country that will complement humanitarian action.

As we continue our work, our operations face ongoing and significant access constraints. In areas under the control of the Houthi de facto authorities, restrictions on the movement of female national staff continue to impede our ability to carry out vital projects for women and girls. We also encounter delays in receiving authorization to carry out assessments and attempts to interfere in tendering processes. In areas controlled by the Government of Yemen, authorities have begun processing work permits for international aid staff after some delays. I encourage the authorities

to continue with that positive trend. We continue our advocacy with the relevant authorities to expand our operational space so that people in Yemen are better able to receive the assistance that they urgently need. I once again call on the parties to fulfil their obligation to facilitate the rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief.

Turning to funding, halfway through the year, our 2023 humanitarian response plan is funded at just 29 per cent. The grim consequence of that is that some activities are forced to scale back. The World Food Programme's malnutrition treatment activities are operating at 40 per cent of the needs, and, in the absence of new contributions, by September it may be forced to cut as many as 5 million people from food assistance. The lack of funding for safe shelter and other protection services limits our ability to support the migrant women and girls who I mentioned earlier. And gaps in funding for cash assistance risk leaving 1.3 million refugees and IDPs receiving assistance from UNHCR unable to cover their basic needs. Sadly, there are many examples.

On top of those challenges, staff security continues to be a significant concern. Five United Nations staff members abducted in Abyan in February 2022 remain missing. In Sana'a, two United Nations staff members have been detained since November 2021. We call for their immediate release, and for the protection of all humanitarian staff.

Yemen is poised for change. As the political process progresses, we must remain vigilant and active on the humanitarian front. With better funding and more access, we can expand our reach and improve the protection of civilians, but we also need to see support for measures to improve Yemen's economy. We count on the Security Council for its continued support.

The President: I thank Ms. Msuya for her briefing.

I give the floor to Mr. Gressly.

Mr. Gressly: I would like to start today with a progress report on the United Nations operation to prevent a catastrophic oil spill from the decaying *FSO SAFER*.

Since the salvage ship *Ndeavor* arrived at the *FSO SAFER* site on 30 May, SMIT Salvage, the Boskalis subsidiary contracted by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), has done everything possible to stabilize the decaying *FSO SAFER* and

prepare it for the removal of more than 1 million barrels of oil.

Just some of the work that I have witnessed over the past five weeks includes the inspection of each part of the vessel and thorough structural assessments of the hull, confirming that, despite decay, the hull thickness levels are more than sufficient to withstand forces generated during the oil transfer. That means that the vessel can be moored alongside the *Nautica* for a cleaner, faster transfer of the oil. It also includes the pumping of inert gas into the oil cargo tanks to significantly reduce the risk of fire or explosion and continual testing to ensure the atmosphere remains at a safe level; the preparation of portable transfer pumps and the rigging of hoses and valves and the repairs of the *FSO SAFER*'s manifold through which the oil will flow during the operation; and the pre-positioning of equipment required for the transfer of the oil but also oil spill response equipment if necessary.

SMIT Salvage has certified to UNDP that the oil transfer can proceed, with the level of risk within an acceptable range. Thus, the *FSO SAFER* is fully stabilized for the ship-to-ship transfer of the oil. The upcoming oil transfer still presents a residual risk, but the United Nations and its partners have put in place a crisis management team, based in Al-Hudaydah, and assembled the expertise and equipment required to respond if there is an incident.

Shortly after the *Ndeavor*'s arrival, the authorities here in Sana'a wrote to me to affirm their full support of the operation, including a waiver of all fees associated with it.

The Safer Exploration and Production Operations Company's skeleton crew currently aboard the *FSO SAFER* is working closely with the salvage team. In line with the 5 March 2022 memorandum of understanding, the Safer Technical Committee, based in Al-Hudaydah, continues to effectively facilitate the operation. The Committee provides access, security and technical support and has maintained a high level of coordination and cooperation with the United Nations team in Al-Hudaydah and the salvage team. Even when there were miscommunications or misunderstandings, which are inevitable in a sensitive security environment such as this, the Committee acted quickly to de-escalate and resolve them.

I am pleased to report to the Council that the authorities in Sana'a provided authorization today for

the oil transfer from the *FSO SAFER* to the replacement vessel. I want to acknowledge the overall cooperation received so far from the Committee and the authorities in Sana'a in the implementation of the project.

The replacement vessel, the *Nautica*, is preparing to sail from Djibouti. It will moor alongside the *FSO SAFER* and should begin taking on the oil by early next week. Once the transfer starts, it will take approximately two weeks to complete.

The completion of the ship-to-ship transfer of the oil will be a moment when the whole world can heave a sigh of relief. The worst-case humanitarian, environmental and economic catastrophe from a massive oil spill will have been prevented. But it will not be the end of the operation. The next critical step after the oil transfer will include the delivery and instalment of a catenary anchor leg mooring (CALM), otherwise known as a CALM buoy, to which the replacement vessel will safely be installed. The CALM buoy needs to be in place by September of this year, as currents and winds become more dangerous as we enter the month of October.

I also want to recognize and thank the Government of Yemen for its full support to this operation. In February 2022, the internationally recognized Government confirmed to me in Aden its support for the plan. It pledged \$5 million towards the operation, making it the sixth largest donor to this operation. The political and financial support have been critical to the success of the project, and I really want to thank the Government of Yemen for its support for the political, financial and technical support we have receive through the planning and implementation of this project.

The Security Council has remained seized of the situation of the *FSO SAFER* tanker over several years. The attention and unity of the Council on that issue has helped propel us to where we are today. With a current estimated budget of \$143 million, of which the United Nations has raised \$118 million from generous Member States, including eight members around this table; the private sector; and the general public, which has contributed \$300,000 through a crowdfunding campaign.

The broad coalition working to prevent the catastrophe includes environmental groups such as Greenpeace and, here in Yemen, Holm Akhdar, showing once again the breadth of the coalition. The Secretary-General has placed great importance on resolving the issue of the *FSO SAFER* tanker and has directed the

United Nations system to fully support the project. UNDP has worked tirelessly to secure and manage the wide range of maritime expertise needed to conduct the complex and high-risk operation, not to mention the 320-meter replacement vessel. The International Maritime Organization, the United Nations Environment Programme, UNESCO and the World Food Programme have provided invaluable expertise. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs provided \$20 million in bridging finance from the Central Emergency Response Fund, which gave UNDP sufficient liquidity to start the operation that is now under way. On the ground, the project has received operational support from the United Nations Mission to support the Hudaydah Agreement, the United Nations Department of Safety and Security and other members of the United Nations country team, including the United Nations Population Fund.

I would like to recognize the top five donors for their role in advocating for the *FSO SAFER* operation and also in assisting us with mobilizing resources from both Member States and the private sector. They include Saudi Arabia, the Netherlands, Germany, the United States and the United Kingdom. We are thankful to all 23 Member States, plus the European Union, for their generous funding, but we still need another \$25 million, in large part to repay the \$20 million that we have borrowed from the Central Emergency Relief Fund. With the Council's continued support, I am confident that the project to put an end to that environmental, humanitarian and economic threat will be a success.

The President: I thank Mr. Gressly for his briefing.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the United Kingdom.

I would like to start by thanking the Special Envoy, Assistant Secretary-General and the United Nations Resident Coordinator for their briefings.

As we heard from the Assistant Secretary-General, we are closer than ever to resolving the threat posed by the *FSO SAFER* oil tanker, thanks to the efforts of the United Nations, public and private donors, and the constructive engagement of all parties. It is critical now that we support the United Nations to swiftly overcome obstacles and start the oil transfer. Until this is complete, the threat to the environment, global trade and the delivery of life-saving aid to Yemen remains.

As we heard, the United Nations still needs \$25 million to safely secure the oil and complete the

job. Let us not forget that the funding gap includes a United Nations loan, which was crucial to getting us this far. Until the loan is repaid, the United Nations is compromised in its ability to respond to current and future crises. We have come so far. But we now need to ensure that the operation begins and that we find these remaining funds.

Our concerns about the humanitarian situation and access persist. I also want to stress my concerns with regard to the Houthis' anti-vaccination policy. This is a serious threat to public health, placing children at risk of illness and death. The United Kingdom urges the relevant authorities to unblock the situation and allow for urgent vaccination campaigns.

Finally, I would like to draw attention to the ongoing detention by the Houthis of 13 members of the Baha'i community. Although we are encouraged by the release of four individuals, the United Kingdom calls on the Houthis to uphold the freedom of religion or belief and release the remaining detainees, especially those in need of urgent medical care. It is essential that all Yemeni parties exercise these principles of inclusivity and fairness, as they look to move towards a more sustainable peace in Yemen.

I resume my functions as President of the Council.

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

Mr. Agyeman (Ghana): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the three African members of the Security Council (A3), namely, Gabon, Mozambique and my country, Ghana.

We thank Special Envoy Hans Grundberg, Assistant Secretary-General Joyce Msuya and Mr. David Gressly for their briefings and welcome the participation of the representatives of the Republic of Yemen and the Kingdom of the Netherlands at this meeting.

The A3 remains cautiously optimistic about the prospects for peace in Yemen. We are pleased by the parties' appreciation of the benefits of the elements of the expired truce that they still generally observe. Paramount among the peace dividends has been the significant reduction in civilian casualties accompanying the general decrease in military hostilities in the country. Such a rare period of relative calm has created an enabling environment for other benefits of the truce to take root.

As part of the benefits, commercial flights between Sana'a and Amman have increased. For the first time in nearly seven years, there was a direct flight from Sana'a to Jeddah carrying Yemeni Muslim pilgrims to participate in this year's Hajj in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. While such movements between cities in different countries are daily occurrences in most parts of the world, in Yemen it represents a significant milestone worth celebrating. Such developments offer the people of Yemen a glimpse of the limitless opportunities that await them should they choose the path of peace over conflict.

On this note, the A3 commends Special Envoy Hans Grundberg and his team for their continuing push to find a lasting solution to the conflict in Yemen and assures them of its support for their efforts.

The holding of the eighth meeting of the Supervisory Committee on the implementation of the Detainees' Exchange Agreement in Amman, Jordan, last month, is another positive development. As was the case in March, when nearly 900 conflict-related detainees were released, we remain hopeful of the eventual release of all remaining detainees.

The need to preserve the current relative calm while negotiations continue in an effort to find a more durable solution to the conflict is ever more important. As the United Nations working in concert with regional Powers strives for a breakthrough in the ongoing negotiations, we urge the parties to refrain from engaging in escalatory actions that may disturb the relative peace being enjoyed by the people of Yemen.

It is for this reason that the A3 condemns in the strongest terms recent military hostilities along the front lines. Such provocations risk reversing the marginal progress so far made and must not be countenanced. The parties are once again reminded to prioritize the interests of the people of Yemen and demonstrate their full commitment to the peace process by taking concrete steps to improve the fragile security situation in the country.

Regional efforts remain key in the search for a lasting solution to the Yemeni conflict. Such efforts complement the role of the Security Council in the maintenance of international peace and security. In this regard, we acknowledge the pivotal role played by Oman and Saudi Arabia in attempting to resolve the Yemeni crisis, and we assure them of our support.

The humanitarian situation in Yemen remains dire, with a majority of the population still requiring assistance. At the same time, due to funding shortfalls, aid agencies are contemplating cutting back on relief supplies. If urgent steps are not taken to provide needed resources, the suffering of those who depend on the assistance will be exacerbated. The A3 calls for increased international support to fund the Yemen humanitarian response plan, which sadly is currently 70 per cent underfunded.

Unfortunately, the humanitarian crisis is compounded by a declining economic condition. The worsening economy continues to reduce the purchasing power of many Yemenis, as prices of basic necessities are pushed beyond their reach. The situation is further severely affected by adverse actions taken by the Houthis, including their stranglehold on the ability of the Government of Yemen to export oil. The restriction curtails the Government's capacity to fully honour its financial obligations. The Security Council must explore ways to bring the economic blockade to an end to ease the suffering of the Yemeni people.

In addition, it is regrettable that access constraints continue to persist, notwithstanding constant appeals for them to be lifted to ensure smooth delivery of relief items and services. Actions that impede humanitarian access, including restrictions on the movements of female staff, not only violate international humanitarian law and international human rights law, but they also deny or limit delivery of critical humanitarian assistance to segments of Yemeni society. In this regard, we renew our appeal to the parties, especially the Houthis, to grant unimpeded access for the delivery of humanitarian aid to all those in need.

The risk posed by landmines and explosive remnants of war in Yemen must be tackled head on to bring down the number of casualties associated with the menace and increase economic productivity, as a semblance of normalcy returns to the country. Besides ensuring civilian safety, increased mine-clearance efforts will help free up affected agricultural lands for food production and contribute to the economic recovery of the country. The A3 renews its call for effective international and local collaboration to deal with the issue comprehensively.

Regarding the *FSO SAFER* tanker, we are pleased that the transfer of oil from the decaying vessel has begun and is progressing smoothly. At this stage the cooperation of all stakeholders is essential to ensuring

a safe, quick and uninterrupted salvage operation. We would like to take this opportunity to express our appreciation for the various roles played by all stakeholders, which have brought us this far, and to renew our appeal to the international community to help bridge the outstanding funding gap of about \$25 million to ensure an uninterrupted operation, as we heard earlier.

Finally, the A3 holds the view that the best solution to the conflict remains a Yemeni-led and -owned political process under the auspices of the United Nations. In that regard, the renewal of the truce, followed by a nationwide ceasefire, is a *sine qua non* for the process to commence. The parties must work diligently to achieve that.

Mr. Olmedo (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Hans Grundberg, Joyce Msuya and David Gressly for their briefings.

As the Special Envoy said, the situation on the ground is still fragile and we must remain vigilant. We need to see the negotiations, which have been ongoing for months, make progress and result in an agreement. We call on the parties, particularly the Houthis, to make the effort necessary to achieve a lasting nationwide ceasefire. That is an essential step in putting an end to the state of "neither war nor peace" and launching a political process under the auspices of the United Nations. In that regard, France welcomes the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement, which plays a useful role on the ground.

France calls on the Houthis to refrain from any action that could harm Yemen's already highly fragmented economy, especially by blocking imports of gas from Marib or putting pressure on the United Nations Verification and Inspection Mechanism for Yemen, which is essential in enabling imports of basic goods to continue. It is vital for Yemen to be able to build a strong economy capable of providing public services to all Yemenis and to allow the private sector to operate without interference or intimidation. Yemenis must be able to access their salaries in the north and the south. France and the European Union are aware of the importance of the Mechanism for the stability of the country and the region and will continue to support it.

On the diplomatic front, France reiterates its full support for the work of the Special Envoy and commends his efforts to reach a peace plan. We also

welcome the diplomatic efforts of various regional stakeholders, in particular Oman and Saudi Arabia. Only a comprehensive and inclusive political solution that takes into account the concerns and interests of all Yemenis can bring the conflict to an end. And Yemeni women politicians must be involved in the current discussions, starting now.

We heard in today's briefings that the humanitarian situation remains worrisome. The Yemeni population is suffering from growing food insecurity at a time when the funding for the humanitarian response is lacking. The working and safety conditions of humanitarian actors continue to deteriorate. We again call on the Houthis to end the restrictions imposed on such workers, especially those targeting female humanitarian workers. The protection of Yemeni children is also a priority. As the Special Envoy mentioned, we welcomed the reduction in children's recruitment in 2022, but serious violations have continued nevertheless. We call on the Houthis to implement the commitments they have made to the United Nations. They must stop recruiting children to send them into combat and indoctrinating them in their so-called summer camps. France also calls for the immediate release of the 13 Bahais detained by the Houthis. We reiterate that we are as committed to freedom of religion or belief as to all other fundamental freedoms.

Lastly, with regard to the *FSO SAFER* tanker, we welcome the encouraging news we heard today from the Resident Coordinator with regard to the progress of the rescue operation and the arrival of the *Nautica* rescue tanker. As several French companies have done, we call on Member States and the private sector to redouble their efforts to bridge the budget gap.

Mr. Hoxha (Albania): I thank Special Envoy Grundberg, Assistant Secretary-General Msuya and Resident Coordinator Gressly for their briefings.

We welcomed the unanimous renewal earlier of the mandate of the United Nations Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement and commend the United Kingdom, as penholder, for its diligent work. The show of unity by the Council sends an unmistakable message of support to the Yemeni people in their efforts to escape a devastating conflict and work to build a peaceful and dignified life. We are happy to see that in general the benefits of the truce are holding. The start of direct flights between Sana'a and Saudi Arabia for the Hajj pilgrims and the continuation of other flights in and out of Sana'a are encouraging and positive steps.

We welcome the engagement of the parties under the Supervisory Committee on the Implementation of the Prisoners and Detainees Exchange Agreement to gradually release conflict-related detainees, based on the all-for-all principle. That precious momentum should be fully maintained if we are to work towards a comprehensive nationwide ceasefire and an inclusive and peaceful political solution. We call on all the relevant actors not to waste this window of hope with timid steps or half-measures. Rather than hesitating, they should show determination and work in line with the recommendations of the Special Envoy. It is time to go beyond mere symbolic measures with a post-war mindset and a shared vision for a future in which there are no losers.

While we welcome all positive steps, we continue to be concerned about the volatile security situation in the country. The recent Houthi attack on Al-Dhale'e, which killed six soldiers, testifies to the fragility of the situation, which could derail the ongoing efforts. We continue to be concerned about reports of Houthis blocking the flow of oil and essential goods from south to north, which is worsening the humanitarian crisis. We deplore and condemn all restrictions on female relief workers and on freedom of movement in general. And we call for full accountability for the gross violations of the rights of children that have been extensively documented in the most recent report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2023/363).

We deplore the mistreatment of religious minorities in the country and urge the Houthis to immediately release the Bahai abductees. We reiterate our call for the unconditional and immediate release of the staff of the United Nations and non-governmental organizations and other civilians who have been abducted by armed groups or forcibly disappeared, as well as of Yemenis employed by the United States and the United Nations. We echo the concern expressed by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs about the dire humanitarian situation of migrants, asylum seekers, refugees and internal displaced persons in Yemen and acknowledge the vital role of the international humanitarian response in addressing it. Peace is on the horizon and peace is possible. But as we have rightly been reminded, the prospects for it are fragile. The devastating consequences of the war for Yemeni civilians and the ongoing deep humanitarian crisis and economic hardship are the most effective reminder we have of the need for the parties to accelerate their efforts towards sustained peace.

Let me conclude by applauding the work of Mr. Gressly and the United Nations for commencing the operation on the *FSO SAFER* oil tanker. We fully support all the international efforts to arrive at a successful solution to that key issue.

Mr. Pérez Loose (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Special Envoy Grundberg, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator Joyce Msuya and Resident Coordinator David Gressly for their briefings. I also welcome the Permanent Representative of Yemen and the representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to today's meeting.

My delegation once again congratulates the Special Envoy and his team on their efforts to reach political agreements that can enable an end to the conflict, the attainment of lasting peace and a start on the path to national reconciliation. It is crucial to uphold the commitments made under the truce, which has enabled the continuation of successful steps such as the release of prisoners, a milestone in confidence-building measures. We hope that in the short term, progress can be made in a second phase of the release of prisoners within the framework of the Detainees' Exchange Agreement and with the support of the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross. We therefore encourage the parties to seize the moment to reach an inclusive agreement that will enable a definitive ceasefire and a lasting peace. That is the only way forward to enable Yemen to focus all its efforts on its political, economic and social recovery. Given the fragile situation, there is no room for further delay.

My delegation is concerned that in the face of the needs of more than 20 million Yemenis who require protection and aid to survive, obstacles are still being imposed on the entry of humanitarian assistance and the work of female personnel is being hindered in the areas of the country that are most in need. Humanitarian personnel must be guaranteed free access in order to support the country's nearly 4.5 million displaced people and the growing number of food-insecure Yemenis. We condemn the detaining of humanitarian personnel and hope for their immediate release.

We call for continued progress in the clearance of anti-personnel mines and explosive remnants of war, which prevent the voluntary return of displaced persons and the opportunity to use the affected land for productive activities to restore the economy.

My delegation reaffirms the need to strengthen the implementation of the 2014 action plan and the 2018 road map to end and prevent the recruitment and use of minors, and the actions undertaken to raise awareness and train the parties on the protection of children in conflict.

We hope that the implementation of resolution 2691 (2023), adopted by the Security Council this morning (see S/PV.9369), will make it possible to carry out the vital work of the United Nations Mission to Support the Hudaydah Agreement. We commend the donors for their contributions and recognize the work of the parties involved in resolving the situation of the *FSO SAFER* oil tanker.

Finally, we hope that all stages of the negotiation and peacekeeping process will include the meaningful participation of women and the creation of safe spaces within which they can discuss their priorities and perspectives for building an inclusive future.

Mr. Camilleri (Malta): I too thank Special Envoy Grundberg, Assistant Secretary-General Msuya and Resident Coordinator Gressly for their briefings today.

Yemen is at a pivotal point in this protracted conflict. The truce from last year continues to deliver benefits for the Yemeni people, and we welcome the steps made by the parties to build an environment for constructive dialogue. We also welcome the acts of reconciliation between the parties in recent months, including the first direct flights between Yemen and Saudi Arabia in nearly seven years. We urge the parties to keep up the positive momentum and to engage constructively in peace talks to bring about a formalized and permanent ceasefire. The parties to the conflict have an obligation to build on the progress made to date and to take decisive steps towards a peaceful and comprehensive solution. An inclusive Yemeni-led and -owned political process, under United Nations auspices, is the only way to bring lasting peace to Yemen.

Malta remains gravely concerned about the dire humanitarian situation, with 21 million people in need of humanitarian assistance. Yemen remains one of the most food-insecure countries in the world, with nearly 17 million people — half the population — estimated to suffer food insecurity. Financial contributions are urgently needed for Yemen's 2023 humanitarian response plan, which remains chronically underfunded more than halfway through the year. That shortfall is increasingly threatening the delivery of life-saving aid

and livelihood assistance. The international community must scale up its response to help the millions of people who are displaced across Yemen, including migrants and refugees. Tens of thousands of migrants have crossed into Yemen in the first half of 2023 and suffer widespread violence and exploitation while perpetrators act with impunity.

Chronic access impediments for humanitarian workers remain a key driver for suffering across Yemen. Restrictions of movement for Yemeni women aid workers have severely disrupted the delivery of humanitarian assistance, particularly for women and girls, and we reiterate our call for the immediate lifting of the *mahram* requirements. We also support the recommendation made by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict to ensure that specialized gender-based violence services are made available.

Bureaucratic and administrative constraints also continue to hamper and delay humanitarian operations across Yemen. All the parties to the conflict must facilitate the rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief, in line with their obligations under international humanitarian law. We also call for the immediate release of detained United Nations and non-governmental organization staff and those recently abducted from the Baha'i community.

We remain concerned about the reports of the recruitment, killing and maiming of children in Yemen, as well as the military's use of schools and hospitals. We reiterate our call on all the parties to the conflict to swiftly implement the relevant United Nations action plans to ensure the safety of children in all parts of Yemen.

Let us take this opportunity to welcome the strong progress made in the plan on resolving the major threat posed by the *FSO SAFER* oil tanker. We commend Resident Coordinator Gressly and United Nations colleagues on their tireless work to prevent a catastrophic environmental, humanitarian and economic disaster. We echo our United Nations colleagues in calling for further donations in funding for the *FSO SAFER* oil tanker plan to eliminate that threat once and for all.

Finally, we were pleased today to see the unanimous adoption of the resolution renewing the mandate of the United Nations Mission to Support the Hudaydah Agreement (resolution 2691 (2023)). Malta commends our United Nations colleagues in Al-Hudaydah, who

perform critical work to bring peace and stability to the governorate and to maintain the civilian nature of Al-Hudaydah's ports, which is essential for the humanitarian response.

Mrs. Shino (Japan): I thank Special Envoy Grundberg, Assistant Secretary-General Msuya of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and Resident Coordinator in Yemen Gressly for their briefings.

First of all, Japan welcomes the extension of the United Nations Mission to Support the Hudaydah Agreement (UNMHA) mandate, adopted by consensus today. The Mission's continued presence in Al-Hudaydah and its role in supporting the parties in implementing the Hodeidah Agreement remain essential. The Security Council should continuously support UNMHA's activities.

The Council has been committed to supporting the progress of a sustainable, United Nations-led peace process in Yemen. The parties to the conflict should understand that there is no military solution. Japan reiterates its full support for the Special Envoy's efforts to facilitate the process to realize inclusive Yemeni-Yemeni political talks under the auspices of the United Nations.

As highlighted in the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2023/363), Yemen recorded one of the highest numbers of grave violations against children over the past year. We are distressed to learn that children in Yemen are still being recruited as soldiers and targeted for arbitrary detention. They also suffer from the danger of landmines and explosive remnants of war. No child should live in fear of attacks, nor should they be compelled to fight on the front lines of armed conflicts.

Japan has repeatedly emphasized the importance of economic stability in Yemen and has provided assistance for that purpose. In that regard, we are concerned that the Houthis are imposing measures intended to undermine the economic capacity of the Government of Yemen, which will eventually damage the livelihoods of the people. A stronger economy, essential public services and an active private sector free from interference and intimidation are key elements for the stability of a nation. Japan calls on the Houthis to stop any actions that would further damage the economy of Yemen, and to engage with the United Nations.

Regarding the *FSO SAFER* oil tanker, Japan welcomes the recent rapid progress of the FSO Safer Salvage Operation Project. We praise the tireless efforts of Mr. Gressly and the relevant United Nations organizations, as well as private sector partners carrying out this unprecedented maritime operation. Japan contributed \$1 million to the project to support emergency preparedness for, and response to, oil pollution. We express our appreciation to the United Nations Development Programme and oil-spill experts for utilizing the fund to support the mobilization of the local population for simulation exercises, provide equipment for shoreline response activity and conduct demining operations to provide safe access for shoreline clean-up. Japan continues to engage with United Nations agencies to collectively find solutions to fill the financial gap in order to prevent an environmental, humanitarian and global economic crisis. This is a shared responsibility of the international community.

Mr. De Almeida Filho (Brazil): I wish to extend my sincere gratitude to today's briefers for their detailed and instructive remarks on the situation in Yemen. Their dedication, expertise and first-hand knowledge are invaluable and will guide our work to contribute to alleviating Yemen's immense challenges.

I congratulate the United Kingdom, the Council's penholder on Yemen, for its guidance and leadership in renewing the mandate of United Nations Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement (UNMHA) for another year. I welcome the delegations of Yemen and the Netherlands to this meeting.

As a steadfast supporter of the Mission's activities, including by contributing with military observers on the ground, Brazil regards UNMHA as instrumental in preventing further escalation in the Al-Hudaydah governorate and beyond. The economic and humanitarian importance of Al-Hudaydah's ports for the entire country cannot be overstated, as they remain a lifeline for millions.

The continued impact of landmines on the civilian population in Al-Hudaydah is cause for concern. As highlighted in the Secretary-General's latest review of UNMHA (S/2023/432), the stabilization of the military situation has led to increased civilian access to former front-line areas, where remnants of war pose a high risk of serious injuries or even death. It is urgent to strengthen mine action capabilities and increase related projects. The cooperation of all parties

is indispensable to ensuring the safety and well-being of the local communities.

Turning our attention to the *FSO SAFER* oil tanker, Brazil acknowledges the recent developments in the operation to avoid a potentially catastrophic situation in the Red Sea. We recognize the complexities involved and remain hopeful that pending matters will soon be resolved, allowing for the timely commencement of the oil transfer. We express our gratitude to United Nations Development Programme, as well as to all partners and donors, for their relentless dedication in pushing this critical operation forward amid challenging circumstances.

Brazil reaffirms its support for the tireless efforts made by Special Envoy Hans Grundberg. We take note of his extensive travels and meetings with different stakeholders within the region in pursuit of a political solution to the conflict in Yemen. His work, supported by the international community, is central to the peace process.

We also welcome the recent increase in commercial flights between Sana'a and Amman, as well as the first flight from Sana'a to Saudi Arabia since 2016. Those developments are not only milestones for regional connectivity, but also positive indicators of improvement in the regional political environment.

Despite those positive strides, the dire humanitarian situation in Yemen remains a source of concern. We are troubled by ongoing access and funding challenges that impede the efficient delivery of aid. The funding shortfall in the United Nations Verification and Inspection Mechanism for Yemen (UNVIM) also raises significant concerns, as it poses risks to UNVIM's important work in facilitating the flow of much-needed commercial cargo to Yemeni ports.

On the economic front, we underline the necessity of measures that bolster the Yemeni economy. They include the resumption of oil exports, the removal of obstacles to the overland transit of commercial goods and the improved provision of electricity, all of which are pivotal to Yemen's path towards development.

In conclusion, Brazil remains committed to continuing its work within the Security Council and elsewhere on this file. Our enduring belief is that, through diplomacy and the promotion of dialogue and mutual understanding, we can help the people of Yemen build the future of peace, stability and development that they deserve.

Mr. Abushahab (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Hans Grundberg, Ms. Joyce Msuya and Mr. David Gressly for their valuable briefings. I welcome the participation of His Excellency Mr. Jaap Sloopmaker, Vice-Minister of Infrastructure and Water Management of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, and His Excellency Ambassador Abdullah Al-Saadi, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Yemen, in today's meeting.

I would also like to welcome today's unanimous adoption of resolution 2691 (2023), which extends the mandate of the United Nations Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement (UNMHA). I also express our appreciation to the United Kingdom, as penholder, for introducing and facilitating the resolution.

First, we call upon the Houthis to fully comply with the resolution and remove all obstacles and restrictions to the Mission's freedom of movement. That includes allowing unannounced and unobstructed visits to the ports. Secondly, we call upon the Houthis to provide the revenue from the port of Al-Hudaydah for the benefit of the Yemeni people, including the disbursement of salaries owed, in accordance with the Stockholm Agreement, and to stop using those funds to finance their military operations.

We fully recognize the recent positive developments on the Yemeni file and the progress made towards maintaining the truce first achieved more than a year ago. However, we must recall that the Yemeni people, worn down by war, deserve a better reality, one that assures them a dignified life without war. The time has come to establish comprehensive peace that is not merely a truce, one that achieves national reconciliation and the fair distribution of wealth among all Yemenis.

In that context, we reaffirm the full support of the United Arab Emirates for the efforts of the United Nations at both the humanitarian and political levels. We also appreciate the role of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in defusing tensions in Yemen, which has witnessed the longest period of relative calm since the beginning of the crisis. We acknowledge the role of the Sultanate of Oman in mediating and reconciling the viewpoints split by war.

Despite the restraint shown by Yemeni Government forces, there is an unjustified escalation by the Houthis on various fronts — in Taiz, Ma'rib, Shabwah, Al-Hudaydah and Al-Dhale. That has included artillery attacks and drone strikes and has resulted in many

civilian casualties, including among children. Just last week, there was an attack that injured five children in the district of Hays.

The situation requires us to assume our vital role, to firmly demand that the Houthis stop those attacks immediately and to refrain from any attempts to rekindle the flames of war. Any escalation or step in that direction is a source of great concern, especially given the Houthis' continued build-up of their military arsenal since the beginning of the truce, including through smuggling operations in flagrant violation of resolution 2216 (2015).

Given that situation, it is necessary to accelerate the conclusion of a permanent ceasefire agreement, accompanied by a series of confidence-building measures, such as opening roads, unifying the economy, paying salaries and exchanging prisoners. Such an agreement would form the necessary basis for starting a political dialogue among the Yemeni parties aimed at reaching a comprehensive and sustainable political solution.

Yemen is facing immense humanitarian challenges. The Houthi group is still imposing severe restrictions on the delivery of aid and the movement of humanitarian personnel, especially women. Furthermore, they continuously meddle in the selection process of aid recipients, employing illegitimate systems that they have established.

The Houthis also continue to wage an economic war against the Yemeni people and Government, which exacerbates human suffering, by targeting oil facilities and ports in the governorates of Shabwah and Hadramout, restricting trade movement within the country, threatening companies and banks and forcing them to import goods solely through Al-Hudaydah ports. In addition, the Houthis continue to arbitrarily confiscate land, buildings and private property. They even threatened to damage the infrastructure for the production and export of oil and gas in the governorate of Ma'rib.

The Houthis are also exploiting summer camps and school curriculums to sow the seeds of hatred and extremism among children. Such actions are not only a violation of children's rights. Extremism also poses a genuine risk that leads to the recurrence of conflict, as acknowledged by resolution 2686 (2023), which the Security Council adopted last month.

Finally, we welcome the beginning of the safe transfer of oil from the *FSO SAFER* tanker, as part of the efforts led by the United Nations. We also acknowledge the commendable efforts of the Netherlands in that regard. We reiterate our continued support for all regional and international efforts aimed at ending the conflict and achieving stability and progress in Yemen. We look forward with hope and optimism to the day when Yemen recovers and when peace and prosperity have prevailed.

Ms. Evstigneeva (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, Mr. Hans Grundberg, and Assistant Secretary-General Joyce Msuya for their briefings on the political and humanitarian situation in Yemen. We also listened carefully to the Resident Coordinator for Yemen, Mr. David Gressly.

The situation in the country gives us reason for cautious optimism. There have been no active hostilities for more than a year. After the end of the official truce in October 2022, the situation on the ground has been relatively calm. Clearly, the parties to the conflict do not intend to escalate the situation and instead intend to refrain from large-scale clashes. Positive momentum has been created by an increase in the number of flights between Sana'a and Amman, the establishment of a flight connecting Sana'a and Jeddah and the preliminary agreement to hold another exchange of prisoners and detainees. All that gives us hope that the protagonists in Yemen will soon reach a compromise. The general trend towards normalization in the region also helps to create a conducive environment to that end.

Under those conditions, we note that it is important for regional and international actors to pool their efforts aimed at achieving a rapprochement of the positions of the parties to the conflict. We will continue to coordinate closely with the leading Yemeni forces to urge them to find mutually acceptable solutions and build confidence, including with key regional partners.

We are convinced that only progress on the settlement track as a result of international and regional efforts will help us avoid the worst-case scenario for Yemen, namely, a relapse into a full-scale military confrontation, such as that which we have already witnessed more than once. The ultimate goal of international mediation should be a lasting and comprehensive solution to the many problems in Yemen, which have implications for its neighbouring States too.

As is customary, we reiterate our full support for the work of Special Envoy Grundberg and commend his active shuttle diplomacy. We sincerely hope that his efforts will result in a sustainable, long-term truce that will create an opportunity for a full-fledged inclusive national dialogue under United Nations auspices.

Security Council members must realize that, sooner or later, there will be a need to review and update the basis for the international legal framework for a settlement, which should realistically reflect the actual military and political situation.

We also oppose a broad interpretation of the Security Council sanctions resolutions on Yemen. Restrictions should be used to promote a peaceful settlement rather than to fuel political turbulence in the region. We note with concern that certain foreign naval presences are engaged in manipulations of Security Council decisions in bad faith by conducting inspections in nearby waters.

The Security Council unanimously extended the mandate of the United Nations Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement for another year. We welcome that decision. We have always advocated de-escalation in Al-Hudaydah and maintaining the civilian nature of its ports. We call on the parties to engage meaningfully with United Nations mediators and to refrain from unilateral steps. We welcome the resumption of the work of the Redeployment Coordination Committee, which is helping to improve the security situation in that part of Yemen.

Unfortunately, the socioeconomic situation in Yemen remains complicated. The humanitarian situation is also dire. The Yemeni people must have unhindered access to food, medicine and other basic goods throughout the country without discrimination. Any restrictions imposed on the delivery of humanitarian supplies or obstacles to the work of humanitarians are unacceptable. We note the mediation efforts of regional stakeholders who are helping Yemenis on the financial and humanitarian tracks.

We welcome the progress in implementing the United Nations plan of action for the disposal of the *FSO SAFER* tanker, which is moored off the coast of Al-Hudaydah. That is literally a ticking time bomb, which threatens to cause a humanitarian and environmental disaster in the Red Sea. According to Mr. Gressly, the operation is proceeding on schedule. We hope that the coordinated efforts of the Yemeni people, the United Nations Development Programme

and the specialized non-governmental organizations will enable us to finally put an end to that threat.

In conclusion, we would like to once again remind members of resolution 598 (1987) and other initiatives aimed at subregional stabilization, including the updated Russian concept of collective security.

Mr. Geng Shuang (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Envoy Grundberg, Assistant Secretary-General Msuya and Resident Coordinator Gressly for their briefings. I also welcome the presence of the representatives of Yemen and the Kingdom of the Netherlands at today's meeting.

Since the beginning of the year, the parties involved in the Yemen issue have maintained contact on the resumption of the truce and the achievement of peace. Saudi Arabia, Oman and other countries in the region have made positive efforts to preserve the ceasefire on the ground in general, for which China expresses its appreciation. We welcomed the holding of the second Yemen International Forum and the opening of commercial flights from Sana'a to Jeddah, and we look forward to more positive progress in that direction.

The window of opportunity for peace will not remain open forever. We hope that the parties concerned will feel a heightened sense of urgency, set reasonable expectations for negotiations that demonstrate the appropriate flexibility and move forward steadily and gradually in accordance with the principle of progressing from easier to more difficult tasks. The Council should remain united in support of the United Nations, in its role as the main channel for good offices, and of the work of Mr. Grundberg, with a view to helping to ensure tangible results in the political process in Yemen as soon as possible. China is concerned about the multiple military clashes that have recently erupted in Taiz, among other areas, resulting in casualties and tensions in the security situation. We call on all the parties to the conflict to exercise calm and restraint, reject military means and refrain from action that could undermine mutual trust, exacerbate tensions or further complicate the political process.

Yemen continues to be the country with the most critical humanitarian situation on the Council's agenda. Since the rainy season began several governorates in Yemen have been hit by torrential rains and floods, affecting hundreds of thousands of people and destroying large swathes of crops and infrastructure. The international community should

increase its humanitarian assistance to Yemen and actively support the United Nations humanitarian operations in the country. The relevant parties in the country should also ensure humanitarian access and lift unreasonable restrictions.

The transfer of crude oil from the *FSO SAFER* tanker is progressing steadily. China appreciates the efforts of the United Nations in that regard and hopes that the parties concerned will actively cooperate and formulate a proper plan for the subsequent disposal of the crude oil.

The situation in Yemen cannot be improved without supportive conditions in the region. We welcome the fact that the countries of the region have continued to take new steps on a path of dialogue, reconciliation, unity and cooperation, which has injected hope into the work of achieving a political settlement of hotspot issues in Yemen as well as other countries in the Middle East. As a good friend and partner of the countries in the region, China stands ready to work with all parties to uphold genuine multilateralism and implement global security initiatives. We will continue to make unremitting efforts to restore peace and stability in Yemen and achieve shared security and long-term stability in the Middle East.

Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield (United States of America): I thank Special Envoy Grundberg and Assistant Secretary-General Msuya for their briefings and continued efforts. We are also grateful to Resident Coordinator Gressly for his updates and his perseverance in addressing the *FSO SAFER* oil tanker situation together with the United Nations Development Programme. While much more needs to be done, that is truly good news. The *FSO SAFER* operation represents a model for international cooperation on Yemen. Together we are making true progress towards averting environmental, humanitarian and economic catastrophes that would exacerbate the already dire humanitarian conditions in Yemen and would have widespread consequences for the region and beyond. We must maintain that momentum and secure the additional \$25 million needed to complete both phases of the *FSO SAFER* operation, as Mr. Gressly requested. We encourage private-sector donors to support the United Nations plan for avoiding a catastrophe.

At the same time, we must balance efforts like the *FSO SAFER* operation with the need to continue providing life-saving humanitarian assistance. The humanitarian response of the United Nations in

Yemen remains dangerously underfunded, and cuts to assistance would have dire consequences for Yemenis at a time when famine conditions are poised to re-emerge. We urge bilateral donors, especially those in the region, to fund the humanitarian response.

The United States welcomes the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement (UNMHA) for an additional 12 months (resolution 2691 (2023)). I want to stress that the Mission must be afforded the freedom of movement it needs to carry out its vital work. We welcome UNMHA's investments in women and peace and security, which are essential to addressing all aspects of the conflict in Yemen.

It has been 16 months since the United Nations-brokered truce in Yemen began. While we are heartened by the various efforts to bring relief to Yemenis, including the expansion of flights from Sana'a airport, we know that those measures are insufficient and that many Yemenis are not yet feeling that relief. In fact, some are suffering from continued and even increased restrictions on the flow of goods, including Houthi impediments to the sale of cooking gas and the movement of other goods from southern Yemen to the north. The Houthis have also continued to block oil exports, further exacerbating Yemen's humanitarian and economic crisis. Yemenis are rightly anxious to see progress on peace efforts, but that progress will require the Yemeni parties to come together to negotiate complex issues such as the use of Yemen's sovereign resources to pay public salaries. We urge the parties to cooperate with the United Nations Special Envoy and to participate meaningfully in future intra-Yemeni talks.

The United States continues to call for the immediate and unconditional release of all of its locally employed Embassy staff who have been detained in Sana'a for over 18 months. The international community is united on that issue and the Houthis must allow those innocent Yemenis to reunite with their families. We also call on the Houthis to immediately and unconditionally release the 13 Yemeni Bahais held in Sana'a since last month. We are especially concerned about Ahmed Al-Malahi, who requires urgent medical treatment. Finally, we call on the Houthis to immediately and unconditionally release Levi Marhabi, one of the few remaining members of Yemen's Jewish community. All Yemenis should have the ability to practise their religion without fear, and we continue to speak out against religious persecution in Yemen.

We must continue to do everything in our power to end the war and the violence that has plagued Yemen for the past eight years, and we must do so with urgency.

Mr. Hauri (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank our three briefers, in particular the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Yemen, Mr. David Gressly. I also welcome the presence here today of the Vice-Minister of Infrastructure and Water Management of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the representative of Yemen. Switzerland welcomes the unanimous renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Mission in Support of the Hodeidah Agreement (resolution 2691 (2023)), which demonstrates the Council's full support for the Mission. Today I would like to place particular emphasis on climate and environmental issues, as Yemen is disproportionately affected by climate change.

First, we remain concerned about the amplifying effect of climate change and environmental degradation in Yemen, which exacerbates the risks and tensions surrounding access to water in particular, at a time when the country is already weakened by natural disasters and food insecurity. Given those challenges, it will be all the more urgent to step up our efforts to promote peace in Yemen.

Switzerland also welcomes the progress made in the rescue plan for the *FSO SAFER* oil tanker and commends the commitment of the Resident Coordinator and the United Nations system to avert an environmental catastrophe in the Red Sea.

Secondly, we reiterate the importance of an inclusive process to reach a peace agreement that serves the interests of all Yemenis. In that respect, we note the commitment of regional players and stress the need for a concerted approach in line with the needs and aspirations of the population. We also welcome the talks held last month in Amman on a potential exchange of prisoners. We encourage the parties to the conflict to continue those exchanges, which represent important confidence-building measures, and reiterate Switzerland's readiness to host future discussions on that subject.

Thirdly, we call on the parties to the conflict to allow and facilitate the safe, rapid and unimpeded delivery of humanitarian aid, in accordance with international humanitarian law. Freedom of movement for humanitarian workers and the granting of visas and work permits are essential to ensure that all vulnerable

people can benefit from humanitarian aid. In that context, we note with concern the situation of refugees and migrants arriving from the Horn of Africa, who are at increased risk of exploitation, arbitrary detention and refoulement. We are equally concerned about the increase in hate speech against those vulnerable groups by some political leaders.

With regard to children, and echoing our discussions during last week's open debate (see S/PV.9366), we call on all parties to fully and swiftly implement their respective action plans and other concrete commitments to end and prevent grave violations against them.

Finally, Switzerland deplores the impact of the conflict on civilians. That is exacerbated by the lack of respect for the rules governing the conduct of hostilities by the parties to the conflict, such as the arbitrary arrest and detention of members of the Baha'i community in Sana'a. In that respect, Switzerland reminds the parties to the conflict of their obligations under international law.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Yemen.

Mr. Al-Saadi (Yemen) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Hans Grundberg, Ms. Joyce Msuya and Mr. David Gressly for their briefings. We welcome Vice-Minister of Infrastructure and Water Management of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

The Yemeni Government reiterates its commitment to pursuing the path to peace. We welcome all efforts and initiatives to end the war that was launched by Houthi militias in order to alleviate the humanitarian suffering of our Yemeni people and to achieve their aspirations to comprehensive and sustainable peace on the basis of the agreed terms of reference for a political solution, namely, the Gulf Cooperation Council Initiative and its Implementation Mechanism, the outcomes of the comprehensive National Dialogue Conference and relevant Security Council resolutions on Yemen, notably resolution 2216 (2015). We look forward to redoubling and integrating regional and international efforts to shape the transition that all the Yemenis are aspiring to. It entails restoring State institutions and ending the coup by the Houthi militias.

The desired peace cannot be achieved unless we have a true partner that believes in peace, the civilian State, equal citizenship and a partner that renounces its divine right to rule.

It is high time to turn regional and international positions into collective action, to compel Houthi militias, supported by the Iranian regime, to seriously engage with United Nations efforts through its Special Envoy for Yemen and the efforts of our brethren and friends to end the conflict that left comprehensive and tremendous destruction and caused the worst humanitarian crisis in the world. The option for peace today is the ideal choice, but we are missing, unfortunately, a true partner in achieving peace. In that context, we commend the efforts by the sisterly Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, its honest stances and sincere commitment to supporting the Presidential Leadership Council and the Yemeni Government to alleviate the humanitarian suffering of our Yemeni people and to achieve their aspirations towards restoring State institutions; achieving development, stability and security; renewing the humanitarian truce and reviving the political process. The Yemeni Government has engaged positively with all options for peace and has increasingly shown flexibility. It made a number of unilateral concessions, supported the tireless efforts by our brethren in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Sultanate of Oman to renew the truce and to implement all of its provisions even after it ends in order to stop the suffering of our people and not to allow the Houthi militias to return to a full-scale escalation and to aggravate the humanitarian suffering.

On the other hand, instead of fulfilling their commitments and engaging in good faith with Government initiatives and international and regional efforts while making the necessary concessions, the Houthi militias continue to be intransigent by rejecting all initiatives and efforts to achieve peace. They continue to violate international humanitarian law and international human rights law. They further impose restrictions on rights and freedoms, including their continued blockade on the governorate of Taiz and their use of the humanitarian dossier for political blackmail. Those militias continue to target civilians and civilian neighbourhoods, including women and children. They are mobilizing their fighters and sending them to the front lines. They continue to recruit tens of thousands of children in so-called summer camps and drag them to the battlefields. The Houthi militias are also imposing the system of male guardian on women in areas under their control, denying Yemeni women their basic right to actively participate in the building of the society. They continue to engage in arbitrary procedures, systematically detaining religious minorities in flagrant

violation of the freedom of religion and the freedom to perform religious practices provided for by international laws and instruments. Most recently, they have detained 17 Baha'is in Sana'a, including five women. They have become among the forcibly disappeared. They have stormed numerous homes and terrorized numerous families. Houthi militias are not observing the truce. They refuse any efforts to extend it and persist with their economic war against the Yemeni people. That reveals their true intentions. They reject peace and undermine the peaceful settlement of the conflict and aggravate the humanitarian situation. The Yemeni Government calls again on the international community and the Council to shoulder their responsibilities and to bring pressure to bear on Houthi militias supported by Iran. They must stop their practices and not use the economy to promote their interests. They must choose peace and stop their crimes and flagrant violations of international law and international human rights law.

The Yemeni people cannot endure any more humanitarian suffering and economic burdens. The Houthi militias persist with their hostile approach. They are destroying the country's resources and its social fabric. They continue to wage a systematic economic war on the Yemeni people, targeting national economic facilities and oil terminals. They prevent vessels and commercial tankers from entering ports used for export. They are obstructing the efforts of the Yemeni Government to provide basic services and to pay the salaries of public employees. They prevent the Yemeni Government from including employees living in areas under the control of Houthi militias. That approach could jeopardize all prospects for peace and undermine efforts to end the war and could put the lives and livelihood of Yemenis at risk. It has led to a reduction in public revenues and adversely impacted the economy and the ability of the Government to provide basic services and pay salaries and has made the situation in Yemen more complex.

In addition, the Houthi militias continued their assault on the private sector. Most recently, they stormed the Chamber of Industry and Commerce in Sana'a. They forcibly replaced its board of directors with another that is loyal to them. Their actions are undermining the public sector and the business community. They are preventing the flow of food items and other basic commodities to areas under their control. To address those new and emerging challenges, the Yemeni Government has implemented comprehensive reforms to maintain the relative stability of the national

economy. The Government has countered corruption, streamlined spending, improved revenues and enhanced accountability and transparency. We call on the international community and the Council to act swiftly and support the efforts of the Presidential Leadership Council and the Yemeni Government to stop the Houthi economic war against the Yemeni people and stop their arbitrary actions against the private sector and banks. They must end the restrictions that they impose on the movement of goods and humanitarian aid. We further call on the international community and the Council to support the efforts made by State institutions to safeguard the economic and humanitarian situation against collapse. We value the support provided by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates with regard to service, development and humanitarian aspects. They have helped to alleviate the suffering of the Yemeni people. We look forward to enhancing that support in order to enable State institutions to fulfil their duties.

As the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2691 (2023), which extends the mandate of the United Nations Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement, we would like to recall that the Houthi militias continue to undermine the Stockholm Agreement, in particular the Hodeidah Agreement. The Houthi militias are rendering it meaningless by placing many restrictions and obstacles on the work of the Mission, with the aim of preventing it from fulfilling its mandate, restricting its movement and trapping it in the areas under the control of those Houthi militias. They do not allow the Mission's patrols to move freely within the city to monitor the ceasefire and verify any violations. In addition, Houthi militias continue to commit violations in the Al-Hudaydah governorate. Most recently, they targeted civilian neighborhoods in the district of Hays, which resulted in civilian casualties, including eight children. They also planted landmines indiscriminately, targeting civilians and their livelihoods and causing severe injuries, disabilities and significant human casualties.

The Yemeni Government commends the efforts of the Masam mine-clearance project. At the same time, we call on the international community and the United Nations to support the efforts of the Yemeni Government and the relevant authorities to overcome the tragedies resulting from the mines and explosives planted by Houthi militias.

In conclusion, the Government of Yemen commends the progress made in the FSO Safer Salvage Operation

Project. We commend the efforts of the Resident Coordinator, Mr. David Gressly, the United Nations country team and the United Nations Development Programme. We also wish to thank the donors, the friendly and brotherly countries and the private sector for their support in ensuring the full implementation and funding of the Salvage Operation Project, led by the United Nations. We also value the efforts of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in that regard. We reaffirm that the Yemeni Government is committed to providing all necessary facilitation to implement that project so as to avert an environment, economic and humanitarian disaster.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

Mr. Slootmaker (Kingdom of the Netherlands): Let me start by thanking Special Envoy Grundberg for his briefing. I also thank Assistant Secretary-General Joyce Msuya and Resident Coordinator David Gressly for their briefings. And allow me to personally express my gratitude to Mr. Gressly and his team, as well as to the United Nations Development Programme and the broader United Nations system for the tireless efforts to get the *FSO SAFER* operation going despite its complexity. And I thank you, Madam President, for the partnership and important contributions of the United Kingdom on this file and for giving me the floor here today.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands and Yemen have a long-standing history. We have the longest development cooperation programme with Yemen, uninterrupted for over 40 years. We are a large provider of humanitarian aid, and we continue to stand with the people of Yemen in these challenging times.

Allow me to focus my intervention on a particular humanitarian concern, namely the decaying *FSO SAFER* oil tanker, because inaction will lead, without a doubt, to devastating consequences — first and foremost, on the already dire humanitarian situation in Yemen — but it will also devastate the biodiversity and environment of the entire Red Sea region, the Saudi coastline and possibly the African continent. It would disrupt vital shipping lanes and energy and food supply chains, and it would cost an estimated \$20 billion to clean up the oil spill.

We can prevent all of that. A salvaging operation is technically feasible, and we have the knowledge and expertise to prevent a disaster. My country, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, a country partly below sea level, has learned the hard way that the cost of prevention always outweighs the cost and suffering of disaster. That is why, together with the United Kingdom, the Kingdom of the Netherlands has been leading the fundraising campaign to enable the United Nations to prevent this catastrophe.

We are grateful for the funding raised collectively by over 20 countries and various private donors thus far. Their support contributed to the Organization's efforts to secure a replacement vessel, contract a salvaging company and start the operations. However, as we heard today from our briefers, we are not there yet. The United Nations urgently requires \$25 million to fully complete the operation, including establishing a permanent solution to prevent a similar crisis from occurring in future. We call on all Member States and private partners to step up their contributions to meet that target on short notice.

I would like to underline and welcome the strong progress made thus far. After years of continued joint effort, the first steps of the operation to transfer the oil off the vessel are about to commence. A Dutch salvaging company has executed the necessary inspections and the last preparations are under way. We urge all parties involved in the operation to proceed as quickly as possible to allow the replacement vessel to sail to its destination in order not to lose any valuable time and momentum.

In conclusion, this is a time for international solidarity. The United Nations-led *SAFER* operation is also a unique example of Sustainable Development Goal 17 — a partnership between the United Nations, Member States from different regions and the private sector. The Kingdom of the Netherlands is fully committed and will do its part to help the people of Yemen and the region, to prevent a catastrophe. This is an opportunity not to be wasted.

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

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

The meeting rose at 11.55 a.m.