A year on from Yemen talks breakthrough, top UN Envoy hails ‘shift’ towards peace, despite setbacks

When warring parties in Yemen met in a renovated castle outside the Swedish capital last December for UN-brokered talks, they showed that perhaps there could be a way out of brutal conflict and the world’s worst humanitarian crisis.

Martin Griffiths sat down for an exclusive interview with UN News to review the Stockholm Agreement, the historic outcome of the talks which marked the first time in two years that the internationally-recognized Government and the Houthis, formally known as Ansar Allah, had come to the negotiating table, to talk face-to-face.

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Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mark Lowcock: Statement on Yemen, 23 December 2019

In the early hours of 21 and 22 December, unknown individuals attacked the premises of three international humanitarian organizations in Al Dhale'e, Yemen, using rocket-propelled grenades. The attacks wounded one person and damaged property.

These events represent an alarming escalation in the risks faced by humanitarian workers in Yemen. Twelve organizations have now been forced to suspend aid programmes in Al Dhale'e, which will affect 217,000 local residents. Several organizations are working with local staff to ensure the most essential activities can continue.

I condemn these attacks unreservedly. I urge a thorough investigation, and I express my appreciation to the Government of Yemen for the work they have begun in this regard. I also remain gravely concerned by the continuation of media campaigns in parts of Yemen that spread rumours and incitement against aid operations.

Humanitarian agencies reach more than 12 million people every month in Yemen and rely on the authorities to ensure a safe, enabling environment for humanitarian operations across the country.
A year on from Yemen talks breakthrough, ...

“We came out of the Sweden talks very buoyed up by the fact that, for the first time ever, the two parties had made a voluntary agreement between themselves. So, we were very pleased about that”, he said.

The Stockholm Agreement resulted in a ceasefire in the rebel-held but contested port of Hudaydah, on the Red Sea, vital for the flow of food and humanitarian aid into Yemen.

At the time, the World Food Programme (WFP) called it “key” to importing roughly 70 per cent of humanitarian needs.

“Yes, certainly, there have been achievements”, Mr. Griffiths stated in his interview just ahead of a closed-door Security Council meeting on Yemen in New York on Thursday. “People's lives have been saved, the humanitarian programme has been protected, and I think it also showed that the parties could actually agree on a different way out of a crisis.”

However, he reported that negotiations are still ongoing over re-deployments to “de-militarize” Hudaydah, where pro-Government and Houthi forces have continued to largely observe the fragile ceasefire throughout the year.

The Special Envoy also expressed grave disappointment over lack of progress on prisoner exchange, one of the key elements under the Agreement.

“Yes, many people, and I'm one of them, believe we could have done a much better job of implementing the Stockholm Agreement in these 12 months. And it has been for many of us, but particularly for the people in Yemen for whom it's a primary issue, a disappointment in many, many ways”, he said reflectively.
A new United Nations Development Programme report highlights the expanding nature of global inequality, pointing to a new generation of inequalities which may trigger a new great divergence in society of the kind not seen since the Industrial Revolution nearly two centuries ago.

These are among the findings of the 2019 Global Human Development Report, released today by the United Nations Development Programme and entitled “Beyond income, beyond averages, beyond today: inequalities in human development in the 21st Century.”

The Human Development Report (HDR), which pioneers a more holistic way to measure countries’ progress beyond economic growth alone, says that just as the gap in basic living standards is narrowing, with an unprecedented number of people escaping poverty, hunger and disease, the necessities to thrive have evolved and a new generation of inequalities is coming into view.

“This is the new face of inequality,” said Achim Steiner, UNDP Administrator. “And as this Human Development Report sets out, inequality is not beyond solutions.” The Report analyzes inequality in three dimensions: beyond income, beyond averages, and beyond today, proposing a range of policy options to tackle it.

Regional lens

While the report is global in scope, its data and findings can be unpacked at regional levels to identify contours of inequality across world regions.

The Arab States region has experienced significant growth in human development over the past two decades, as measured through the report’s accompanying 2019 Human Development Index (HDI). But according to the HDI and its sister index, the 2019 Inequality-Adjusted Human Development Index (IHDI), the unequal distribution of education, health and living standards has stymied progress in the region, with up to 24 percent of its human development value lost when adjusted for inequality.

“Analysis of inequality can be a powerful lens to understand recent events in the region,” said Mourad Wahba, UNDP Acting Associate Administrator and Regional Director for Arab States. “This report calls on us all to examine inequalities in order to support efforts to promote a more equitable distribution of opportunities among people everywhere.”

In the Arab States region, gender inequality and vulnerability to conflict persist

Describing the ‘next-generation’ inequalities likely to impact development progress, the report notes for example that in countries with very high levels of human development, subscriptions to fixed broadband are growing 15 times faster and the proportion of adults with tertiary education is growing more than six times faster than in countries with low human development.

The HDI records a 14 percent gap in human development between men and women in the Arab States region. Whereas worldwide the share of non-farming employment for women is 39 percent, that figure plummets to only 16 percent for the Arab States. The region has one of the widest gaps in the world for women’s labour force participation, as well as one of the lowest percentages of women without access to banking services.

Vulnerability to conflict or crisis has also rolled back the region’s human development progress, with new data showing that Syria has lost 15 per cent of its value on the Human Development Index since 2010, and Libya has shed 10 per cent in the same period. Since 2014, Yemen has lost 8 per cent of progress by this measure, rounding out research commissioned by UNDP Yemen which shows that the country’s human development has been pushed back by 21 years due to the ongoing conflict.
Call to civil society organizations to apply for funding

The United Nations Democracy Fund invites civil society organizations to apply for project funding. Project proposals may be submitted on-line in English or French, the two working languages of the UN, between 22 November 2019 and will close on 06 January 2020 at www.un.org/democracyfund. You can find guidelines, FAQs and lessons learned for applicants at https://www.un.org/democracyfund/content/call-project-proposals.

UNDEF supports projects that empower civil society, promote human rights, and encourage the participation of all groups in democratic processes. Most UNDEF funding goes to local civil society organizations. In this way, UNDEF plays a distinct role in complementing the UN’s other work -- the work with Governments -- to strengthen democratic governance around the world.

UNDEF projects cover one or more of eight thematic areas:
- Media and freedom of information
- Gender equality
- Community activism
- Rule of law and human rights
- Youth engagement
- Strengthening civil society interaction with Government
- Tools for knowledge
- Electoral processes

As always, we welcome project proposals in all the above areas, and in this Round we particularly welcome projects on media and freedom of information. This covers a range of topics, such as promoting citizen journalism, including in conflict and post-conflict settings; training journalists in legal know-how as well as personal safety and security, both physical and online; building peer support networks for freelance journalists; developing investigative journalism skills; understanding and advancing legislation for access to information; combating hate speech; developing public media literacy, with a focus on learning to digest material critically and to evaluate sources -- both online and in other media.

This is the Fourteenth Round to be launched by UNDEF, which provides grants of up to US$300,000 per two-year project. Proposals are subject to a highly rigorous selection process.
The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) have helped 5,087 Somali refugees return home from Yemen since 2017.

In this latest departure, a boat carrying 145 Somali refugees left the Port of Aden today, and will arrive at the Port of Berbera Friday December 13. The voluntary returns are part of UNHCR’s Assisted Spontaneous Return (ASR) programme to which IOM is a partner.

UNHCR manages a Return Help Desk (RHD) as part of ASR in Aden, Al Mukalla city in Hadramaut governorate and Kharaz in Lahj governorate. Somali refugees can visit the RHD to receive counselling on ASR and get registered.

UNHCR, in collaboration with IOM, supports Somali refugees who wish to return home with documentation, transportation and cash assistance to facilitate the journey.

IOM provides operational support to refugee return movements through chartering a boat, providing medical support upon arrival and transportation assistance to the refugees’ final destinations.

“The ongoing conflict in Yemen has made it difficult for many refugees to cover basic needs for their families and to sustain themselves given the limited work opportunities and economic hardships,” said Martin Manteaw, UNHCR Deputy Representative in Yemen.

“Some refugees are now opting to return home and it is important for UNHCR to continue to help those voluntarily wishing to go home to do so in dignity and safety,” said Manteaw.

Yemen hosts the world’s second largest Somali refugee population, around 250,000 refugees. It is a long-standing refugee host nation and the only country in the Arabian Peninsula which is signatory to the Refugee Convention and its protocol.

But, after more than four years of conflict in Yemen - the situation for civilians, refugees, asylum seekers and migrants has deteriorated. More than 24 million people need assistance in the world’s largest humanitarian crises.

“For refugees who have made the choice to return from Yemen, it is important that they can travel home safely and that reintegration into their communities of origin is facilitated,” said Christa Rottensteiner, IOM Yemen Chief of Mission.

Thirty-nine organized departures have now taken place from Yemen to Somalia since the ASR programme commenced two years ago. The programme is facilitated by UNHCR in partnership with IOM, and in cooperation with humanitarian partners and authorities in Yemen and Somalia.

Amongst those who departed today was 20-year-old Naima who is hoping to go back to school in Somalia. She had to stop her education 10 years ago when her father got sick. Naima was left helping her mother around the house and working in the family business.

“I hope to be able to go back to school, complete my education, study medicine, and one day become a doctor,” said Naima.
United Nations Calls for Nominations for Nelson Mandela Prize

The United Nations is calling for nominations for the 2020 United Nations Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela Prize.

The Prize was established in June 2014 by the United Nations General Assembly to recognize the achievements of those who dedicate their lives to the service of humanity by promoting the purposes and principles of the United Nations while honouring and paying homage to Nelson Mandela’s extraordinary life and legacy of reconciliation, political transition, and social transformation.

First awarded in 2015, the Prize recognized two outstanding individuals: Dr. Helena Ndume of Namibia, an ophthalmologist whose life’s work has been the treatment of blindness and eye-related illnesses, both in Namibia and throughout the developing world; and former President of Portugal, H.E. Mr. Jorge Fernando Branco Sampaio, a leader in the struggle for the restoration of democracy in his country.

Nominations for the 2020 prize will be accepted until 28 February 2020.

The Award is presented every five years to two individuals: one female and one male.

Laureates will be selected by a United Nations committee chaired by the President of the General Assembly and composed of representatives of six Member States, including representatives from each of the five regional groups, a representative of the Permanent Mission of South Africa to the United Nations and five eminent individuals who will serve as ex officio members. The United Nations Department of Global Communications will serve as the committee’s secretariat.

It is expected that the laureates will be announced in May 2020, with the prizes awarded at United Nations Headquarters in New York during the commemoration of Nelson Mandela International Day, marked on 18 July.
Raising our voices is essential to the creation of a future of peace, justice and sustainable development. And this has been a year of tremendous activism – notably by young people.

In every region, people are working for hope.

From the accelerating climate crisis to the fight against inequality and repressive institutions.

From the right to make informed decisions about our own bodies to the right to participate in defining policies for our countries.

I am inspired by the courage, clarity and principle of the women, men and young people who are rising up peacefully, to create greater freedom and justice.

Their voices are the living expression of human rights – a movement that is fundamentally about building dignity and equality for everyone.

Policy-makers everywhere need to listen to these calls. And in response, they need to shape more effective, more principled policies.

We have a right to live free from discrimination on any grounds. We have a right to access education, health-care, economic opportunities and a decent standard of living.

This is about our future, our livelihoods, our freedoms, our security and our environment.

We need to mobilise across the world – peacefully and powerfully – to advance a world of rights, dignity and choice for everyone.

With renewed determination, we all need to stand up for human rights.
Secretary-General's Message on

World AIDS Day

Ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030, as we committed to in the Sustainable Development Goals, will require a continuous collaborative effort. The United Nations, Governments, civil society and other partners have been working together to scale up access to health services and to halt new HIV infections. More than 23 million people living with HIV were receiving treatment in 2018.

Communities around the world are at the heart of this response—helping people to claim their rights, promoting access to stigma-free health and social services, ensuring that services reach the most vulnerable and marginalized, and pressing to change laws that discriminate. As the theme of this year’s observance rightly highlights, communities make the difference.

Yet unmet needs remain. A record 38 million people are living with HIV, and resources for the response to the epidemic declined by $1 billion last year. More than ever we need to harness the role of community-led organizations that advocate for their peers, deliver HIV services, defend human rights and provide support.

Where communities are engaged, we see change happen. We see investment lead to results. And we see equality, respect and dignity.

With communities, we can end AIDS.