‘Signs of hope’ toward a political settlement in Yemen, UN special envoy tells Security Council

The momentum to reach a political settlement in Yemen “has been building”, the United Nations Special Envoy to the country told the Security Council on Friday, attributing the positive development to compromises on “a range of issues”.

“We have seen the parties work together”, said Martin Griffiths, including on the situation in southern governorates, the de-escalation of hostilities and economic crisis facing the war-torn nation, where a Saudi-led coalition backing the Government has been trying to defeat Houthi rebel forces during more than four years of brutal fighting.

“These are not small issues”, he argued. “Reaching compromises has been no small achievement”.

Mr. Griffiths avowed that Yemen now needs “the kind of leadership that creates peace”, a leader who practices “the art or concession, of inclusion, and who encourages forbearance over entitlement”.

Since the initial uprisings against the former leadership in early 2011, the Secretary-General has used his good offices to engage with Yemeni political leaders and civil society to promote a peaceful, orderly and inclusive political transition process.

Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Mark Lowcock, Remarks to the Security Council on the Humanitarian Situation in Yemen

Thank you, Mr. President

On 21 September, I warned you we were losing the fight against famine in Yemen.

Since then, the situation has got worse.

That is why, as required in Security Council resolution 2417, which you adopted in May this year, we issued the White Note circulated late last week. In line with our obligations under your resolution, my briefing today focuses on the risk of famine.

Mr President,
‘Signs of hope’ toward a political settlement...

Encouraging developments

The Special Envoy said momentum was building thanks to developments such as the Riyadh Agreement, signed on 5 November between the Government and the Southern Transitional Council; a decrease in violence - with the observation that there have been 48-hour periods without airstrikes “for the first time since the conflict began” - and the implementation of the Stockholm Agreement, which among other things, has enabled fuel ships to enter the crucial port city of Hudaydah, averting a worsening humanitarian crisis.

However, he did express concern over increasing movement restrictions on the UN Mission to Support the Hudaydah Agreement (UNMHA), saying that they not only hamper the mission’s day-to-day operations but also threaten its mandate.

“I hope that the relevant authorities will take all necessary measures to ensure the freedom of movement necessary for UNMHA to carry out its mandate”, said Mr. Griffiths.

Women leaders

The UN envoy went on to recount two days of meetings with 20 Yemeni women leaders from across the country to discuss elements that would ensure that any political settlement take their perspectives into account.

They also illustrated the “intrinsic” and “unique” contributions Yemen’s women’s groups have made in improving local conditions during conflict. “We know how important it is to include both a gender perspective and women’s participation in the processes of peace”, he stressed.

‘What peace should look like’

In closing, Mr. Griffiths reiterated that “signs of hope in Yemen…are beginning to produce results”. He stated that Yemen’s leaders “must now ask themselves what peace should look like”.

In doing so, the Special Envoy asserted the need for Yemen’s warring parties to reach agreements on political and security arrangements to end the fighting; lead in rebuilding society and the economy; and deal pragmatically with complex political challenges that remain.

“The ground-work in addressing all of these issues must start now”, he concluded “I believe that they are ready”.

World’s largest humanitarian operation

Ursula Mueller, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, underscored that some 250 humanitarian partners are working with the UN to assist more than 13 million people across the country.

A famine is declared when three thresholds of food insecurity, acute malnutrition and mortality are together all breached. The three criteria are:

- At least one in five households faces an extreme lack of food;
- More than 30 percent of children under 5 are suffering from acute malnutrition (wasting);
- At least two people out of every 10,000 are dying every day.

Assessments conducted a year ago identified 107 districts out of Yemen’s 333 districts to be at risk of famine, where two of these thresholds were either already exceeded or dangerously close. A further assessment exercise is now under way across the country, and initial results are expected in mid-November.

Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs…

It has been more difficult to confirm the position on the third criterion, the number of deaths due to starvation or starvation related disease. But while mortality-related data is difficult to collect and triangulate, health workers are pointing to the rising number of deaths linked to food-related factors.

We also know that many deaths are hidden. Only half of health facilities are functioning – and many Yemenis are too poor to access the ones that are open. Unable to reach care, people often die at home.

Very few families report these deaths; the stories of those people go unrecorded.

At the end of last year, one aid agency estimated that 130 children under 5 were dying every day from extreme hunger and disease. Nearly 50,000 little children during the course of a year.
Over 1 million health consultations provided in Yemen in 2019: UN migration agency

Since the beginning of the year, the UN Migration Agency has carried out over one million health consultations for displaced and conflict-affected Yemenis and migrants struggling to reach the help they need.

Yemen’s public sector has been pushed to “a breaking point”, as the country enters its fifth year of conflict, prompting the closure of half of the country’s health facilities. As of 11 September, 1,095,072 health consultations were provided by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) as part of its emergency lifesaving services and support to the health sector to ensure it continues to operate in the war-battered country.

Over 19,000 people received psychosocial counselling, 113,000 others received reproductive health consultations, and more than 71,000 were part of health awareness-raising activities.

Public health facilities were already strained before the onset of Yemen’s crisis in 2015. Now, people must travel long distances for essential services, while some are forced to go without.

Further, dried up financial resources and a lack of health professionals has catalyzed the problem, while the number of people seeking medical assistance continues to rise in certain areas, overwhelming health centres.

The country’s humanitarian situation remains the worst in the world, according to the UN Population Fund (UNFPA). Around 80 per cent of the population is in need of some kind of assistance, roughly 24 million people, and some 14.4 million find themselves in acute need, nearly two million more than just one year ago.

In its latest monthly update on the situation, the agency cited examples of health centres rendered inoperable due a swell in fighting, with expecting mothers turned away from hospitals not equipped to handle births.

One woman living in Birali, Lahj governorate, where IOM helped re-establish the local health centre recalled that before the centre was running again, “we had to travel to Hadramout or Aden”, approximately 120 and 450 kilometers away, respectively. “A women in labour couldn’t do that”, she added.

IOM is supporting restoration and operational needs of 86 facilities across the country to help ensure Yemenis have access to effective, safe, and free health care, through over 120,000 consultations every month.

To reach migrants and displaced persons unable to access traditional health facilities, the organisation also operates nine mobile health teams, four of which provide newly-arrived migrants with emergency health services along Yemen’s coast.

Warehouses around the country store stockpiles of critical medicines, antibiotics or disease management medications to ensure a constant supply.

IOM’s Health Programme Coordinator in Yemen, Dr. Nedal Odeh said that with health needs rising, and many people living in places “with virtually no health services,” the organisation’s aid to conflict-affected communities “is vital to the continuation of accessible health services and strengthening of the overall health system in Yemen.”
Keeping dreams alive in the face of death
How one woman completed a degree and opened the first dental clinic in her community during Yemen’s war

“Struggling motivated me to become the first female dentist to open a clinic in Zinjibar, Yemen.”

Twenty-seven-year-old Mariam Saleh’s dream of becoming a dentist may seem ordinary, but her will and determination to advance her education and training throughout Yemen’s civil war were extraordinary. In 2011, near the end of her first semester of dental school, Mariam returned home to visit her family in their rural hometown. At the same time, armed elements of Al-Qaeda had taken control of a number of cities in the region – forcing her family to flee. Mariam’s family suffered their second wave of displacement in 2015, during her final semester of dental school.

Mariam explained: “I could not finish the semester. My dream of completing my degree and becoming successful was almost lost to the war.”

This story is not unique in a country that has been ravaged by a civil war and ongoing conflict for over 8 years. The pervasive state of economic deterioration; the steady decline in the value of Yemen’s currency and gross domestic product; the ongoing ban on fuel products; and the failure to compensate workers for jobs performed have increased the (already heavy) burden Yemeni people are carrying. Many have been left unable to pay for their housing or to take a family member to the hospital in the event of an emergency, let alone pay for an education.

The deepening crisis has led to a near-collapse of key sectors, especially health care. According to the World Health Organization, only 51% of Yemen’s health facilities are still functioning and providing services, while 19.7 million people are in need of health assistance.

Through hard work, resilience, and determination, Mariam was able to complete her studies and graduate. For the next two years, she had no choice but to work for free at a public hospital in Ja’ar, Abyan. Eventually, she landed a job in a private clinic, opened by another dentist and they shared whatever profits they made.

With the help of the USAID-funded Yemen Emergency Crisis Response Project (YECRP), in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Small and Micro Enterprise Service (SMEPS), Mariam was 1 of 336 women supported to lead businesses of their own in the health sector.

The YECRP’s objective is to create life and work opportunities for the most vulnerable groups (including youth, women, and those who have been forced from their homes), to rebuild communities from the bottom up. In this way, the program helps to make households stronger, better able to cope, and capable of assisting and contributing to their communities.

Mariam is now the owner of the first dental clinic in Zinjibar, Abyan, Yemen.

She describes the programme as giving her a “new life” after she had become desperate and was almost convinced to stay home and give up on her dream of becoming a dentist. Through the funding she received, Mariam purchased essential medical equipment to open her own clinic, including a dental chair, operating equipment, an electrical system with solar panels and batteries, a sterilization apparatus, and a dental filling device.

Within its opening month, Mariam noticed a high turnout of people coming from the city and nearby villages and now plans to expand her practice and business hours:

“My main concern now is serving my people regardless of the profits. My clinic provides the services of tooth extraction, dental fillings, crowning, and teeth cleaning for all the patients based on their needs and circumstances.”

Through the YECRP, nearly 5,390 Yemenis can now access improved private health services.
30 Years of Child Rights Yet Yemen Remains One of the Worst Places to be a Child- UNICEF

Children to participate in first ever nation-wide sports activities since the escalation of conflict in 2015

Despite historic gains made for children since the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was adopted 30 years ago by the United Nations General Assembly, Yemen remains one of the worst places to be a child.

A Continuing brutal conflict and a subsequent economic crisis have left basic social services systems across the country on the brink of collapse with far reaching consequences on children. Today, over 12 million-nearly every child- in Yemen is in need of urgent humanitarian assistance.

In 1991, Yemen ratified the CRC, making it among the first countries in the world to commit to improving rights for children in the country and reporting on progress.

“Those who bear the responsibility, including the Yemeni authorities have fallen short of their promises and commitments to the children”, said Sara Beysolow Nyanti, UNICEF Yemen Representative. “The 30th anniversary of the convention should serve as a stark reminder to all of us to urgently recommit to our accountabilities to help the children of Yemen to survive and grow in a safe and peaceful environment”.

Too many children have been killed by the war in blatant attacks. Children have been killed while playing outdoors with their friends, on their way to or from school or in the security of their homes with their families.

On 20th November, to mark the 30th anniversary of the CRC in Yemen, UNICEF is organizing sports activities for boys and girls in each of Yemen’s 22 governorates to highlight the right to play as an important aspect for the physical and mental development of a child. This also serves as an opportunity to remind parties to the conflict that children should not require such special arrangements just to be able to come outside at the same time to play.

“Every day we strive to deliver on our promise to meet the needs and help realize the rights of the children of Yemen. But the purest form of childhood - play, is so often neglected,” Ms Nyanti said.

“The sports activities organized by UNICEF and partners mean that children can come together, without fear of attack, to play across the country. We have also asked all parties to the conflict to exercise restraint and allow a day of tranquility on 20th November so that children can play without fear of attacks. Although this does not end their daily suffering, it does show the potential for a peaceful future for Yemen. We hope through this symbolic gesture we can remind the world about the children of Yemen, children who continue to carry the heaviest burden of the ongoing conflict.” Ms Nyanti said.

While UNICEF and partners continue to deliver lifesaving services for children in health, nutrition, water and sanitation, as well as protection services, only peace can provide a lasting solution to the deteriorating humanitarian crisis and alleviate the situation of children.
The World Food Program (WFP) provides nearly $8 billion worth of aid annually to about 12 million people in Yemen, a senior WFP official said.

WFP chief officer in Yemen Asif Ali Bhutto made the remarks during a meeting with the head of the Aden Free Zone during which they discussed the facilities provided by the zone and how they could serve the program’s activities.

Deputy Director of Promotion and Marketing in Aden Free Zone Riyam Al-Marfadi quoted Bhutto as saying that the organization manages and supervises 12 warehouses across the country that serve millions of people in need despite the unfavorable work conditions.

Al-Marfadi pointed out that the zone’s officials have expressed their readiness to help the WFP enhance its humanitarian activities in Yemen.

Impoverished Yemen has remained in a state of civil war since 2014, when Houthi rebels overran much of the country, including the capital Sanaa. In 2015, Saudi Arabia and its Arab allies launched a massive air campaign aimed at reversing Houthi military gains and shoring up Yemen’s embattled government.

According to Armed Conflict Location and Event Data project, more than 100,000 people have been killed in the war, while more than 11 per cent of the country’s population has been displaced.
The Nairobi Summit on ICPD25 concluded today in the Kenyan capital, with partners making bold commitments to transform the world by ending all maternal deaths, unmet need for family planning and gender-based violence and harmful practices against women and girls by 2030.

“The Nairobi Summit represents a renewed, re-energized vision and community working together to act and deliver. Together, we will make the next ten years a decade of action and results for women and girls, keeping their rights and choices at the centre of everything we do,” said UNFPA Executive Director Dr. Natalia Kanem.

The Summit, co-convened by the governments of Kenya and Denmark with UNFPA, the United Nations sexual and reproductive health agency, unveiled critical new data about the cost of achieving these goals. It mobilized more than 1,200 commitments from around the world, including billions of dollars in pledges from public and private sector partners. It also raised the voices of marginalized communities, youth and grassroots advocates, who were able to directly engage heads of state and policymakers about how to realize the rights and health of all people.

"The Nairobi Summit on ICPD25 was a massive success," said Director-General of the Kenya National Council for Population and Development Dr. Josephine Kibaru-Mbae. "But it was only a start. We leave Nairobi with a clear roadmap of actions we must all take to advance the ICPD agenda and transform the world for women and girls."

The Summit opened with the release of new research showing the price tag to achieve “three transformative results” -- zero maternal deaths, zero unmet need for family planning, and zero gender-based violence and harmful practices -- within the next decade. The total cost to the world would be $264 billion, according to the analysis by UNFPA and the Johns Hopkins University, in collaboration with Victoria University, the University of Washington and Avenir Health.

Summit attendees then stepped up with specific and concrete commitments to help the world reach these ambitious, but achievable, goals. Pledges were made by governments, civil society, youth groups, faith-based organizations, academia and many more.

Governments including Austria, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom, together with the European Commission, committed around $1 billion in support. The private sector also stepped in: Children’s Investment Fund (CIF), The Ford Foundation, Johnson & Johnson, Philips, World Vision and many other organizations announced that they will mobilize some $8 billion in combined new pledges.

“There will be no ICPD50. Women and girls around the world have waited long enough to have rights and choices,” said Ambassador Ib Petersen, Denmark’s Special Envoy for ICPD25. “Looking towards 2030, we now enter a decade of delivery during which we will walk the talk and hold all of us to account for the commitments we made in Nairobi.”

Over 9,500 delegates from more than 170 countries took part in this radically inclusive conference, uniting behind the Nairobi Statement, which establishes a shared agenda to complete the ICPD Programme of Action.

The same way the original 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo was a turning point for the future of women and girls, the Nairobi Summit will be remembered as a watershed moment that set in motion actions that saved lives, lifted millions of women and girls, their families and communities from exclusion and marginalization, and enabled nations to harness the demographic dividend to grow their economies.
UN Secretary General's Message on

The International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People

Resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains one of the most intractable challenges facing the international community. Regrettably, over the past year, there have been no positive developments, and the situation on the ground continues to deteriorate.

The intensification of illegal settlements, demolitions of Palestinian homes and the pervasive suffering in Gaza must stop. The establishment of settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, has no legal validity and constitutes a flagrant violation of international law, as stated in Security Council resolution 2334. These actions threaten to undermine the viability of establishing a Palestinian state based on relevant United Nations resolutions. At the same time, the indiscriminate launching of rockets and mortars towards Israeli civilian populations must cease.

I call on Israelis and Palestinians, and all their supporters, to take steps that will restore faith in the two-state solution. There is no viable alternative. It is a dangerous illusion to think that the conflict can be managed or contained in perpetuity. Only constructive negotiations between the parties, in good faith, with support from the international community and adhering to long-standing United Nations resolutions and long-agreed parameters, will bring about a just and durable solution, with Jerusalem as the capital of both states. What is needed, first and foremost, are leadership and political will. The efforts of civil society and those on all sides who seek to bridge the gap between Israelis and Palestinians also need to be supported.

On this International Day of Solidarity, let us reaffirm our commitment to upholding the rights of the Palestinian people. The United Nations will not waver in its commitment to the Palestinian people as we strive to achieve their inalienable rights and build a future of peace, justice, security and dignity for Palestinians and Israelis alike.