

KINGDOM OF BELGIUM

Intervention of

H.E. Karen VAN VLIERBERGE, Deputy Permanent Representative of
Belgium to the United Nations

Briefing on Yemen at the Security Council

New York, 15/09/2020

Dear Mr. President, dear colleagues,

Let me start by thanking Special Envoy Griffiths and USG Lowcock for their insightful briefings.

In my intervention today I will focus on three issues: recent political developments; the GEE report and importance of accountability in Yemen and the ongoing saga of the SAFER oil tanker;

Mr. President,

Belgium, together with its EU partners, continues to support the efforts of Special Envoy Griffiths to secure a nationwide ceasefire, confidence-building measures and the restart of an inclusive political process. At our last meeting at the end of August, Mr. Griffiths was concerned about losing the momentum for the Joint Declaration. Indeed, negotiations cannot go on endlessly.

Belgium is alarmed by the recent reports about the Houthis suspending all UN and humanitarian flights to Sanaa. The Houthis appear to make a link between this suspension and the continued blockage by the Coalition of vessels carrying fuel to Hodeidah port. All of this illustrates the need to agree urgently on the pending issues in the Joint Declaration negotiations.

Belgium also remains very concerned about the further escalation of fighting in Marib and Hodeida. It threatens the fragile political process.

Ending the war and resolving deep-rooted differences through dialogue are the only ways to overcome the multiple crises in Yemen. We urge all parties to remain engaged in the peace talks, under the auspices of the UN, and to implement both the Stockholm and Riyadh agreements.

Mr. President,

In this war, like in so many others, civilians bear the brunt of the suffering. The war in Yemen has cost tens of thousands of civilian lives. Just now, USG Lowcock reported once more on the terrible humanitarian catastrophe that besets the country. For millions of Yemeni people, famine is a real risk.

In addition, in its third report, which was published last week, the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen has established that all parties to the conflict continue to commit a range

of violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, noting a consistent pattern of harm to civilians. This does not only occur in the context of hostilities, but also away from the front lines.

These violations are widespread. The report mentions in particular the murder of civilians, torture, cruel or inhuman treatment, rape and other forms of sexual violence, denial of fair trial, and enlisting children under the age of 15 or using them to participate actively in hostilities. These violations may amount to war crimes. Belgium therefore strongly urges parties to fulfil their obligations under international humanitarian law, including in relation to ensuring the protection of civilians, in particular women and children, and their obligations under international human rights law. Ensuring accountability for perpetrators of all violations committed in Yemen remains key and its importance has been underlined by this Council at numerous occasions.

Mr. President,

We were recently informed about yet another water leak, similar to the one in May, onboard the engine room of the SAFER oil tanker. Apparently, the leak has been plugged. But one day, and that day may come soon, we will not be so lucky.

This incident shows once again why it is crucial that a team of UN experts should get full and immediate access to the SAFER. We urge the Houthi leadership to stop delaying the process and to prevent an environmental, humanitarian and economic catastrophe in the making.

I thank you.