

Statement by H.E. Mr Marc Pecsteen de Buytsverve,
Ambassador, Permanent Representative

to the United Nations Security Council

Yemen – Briefing + Consultations

New York, 18 February 2020

Belgium is extremely **concerned by the escalation of violence in Yemen this past month** that has resulted in one of the deadliest incidents since the start of the war.

The resumption of the **political process** is necessary now more than ever. Talks between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis constitute a strong basis, but, at a given time, the government of Yemen will have to be involved in the talks and the process will have to be overseen by the UN. The **next steps in the political process** should start as soon as possible under the auspices of the United Nations. **It must be inclusive**, with significant participation by women and young people reflecting the ethnic, geographical, social and political diversity of Yemen's population.

Belgium hails the plan recently agreed between the parties in Amman for the implementation of **the Prisoner Exchange Agreement**, which could mark a first step towards the resumption of the political process. Belgium encourages its swift implementation.

That said, do not forget the **agreements already concluded which are still struggling to be implemented, such as the Riyadh Agreement**. We also again remind all the parties to enforce all the elements of **the Stockholm Agreement**, including the Hodeidah Agreement and the Agreement on Taiz.

The operational environment of humanitarian stakeholders in Yemen, especially in the north, has deteriorated rapidly and the humanitarian zone has been greatly reduced. Obstacles are constantly being imposed, hampering humanitarian access and the supply of aid. International and national humanitarian personnel are threatened and report on being subject to direct attacks in many regions of the country. Following their **meeting in Brussels on 13 February, donors** have confirmed their full support of the United Nations, international NGOs, and other humanitarian stakeholders that are working in extremely difficult conditions in the field. The participants have declared unanimously that this situation is untenable. All restrictions, obstructions and interferences violating humanitarian principles must be removed once and for all.

Belgium notes the intention announced by the Houthis to **remove the 2% contribution levied on humanitarian projects** and urges them to put this announcement into practice and also abandon the other obstacles which hamper the distribution of humanitarian aid to children and other civilians.

Belgium welcomes the **medical flights**. The civilian population must be the focus of our attention. It is these innocent victims who continue to endure the most serious effects of this conflict.

We also encourage the Houthis to grant access to the **SAFER oil tanker** to facilitate a review of the situation and to avoid a potential ecological catastrophe.

Lastly, all the parties must respect their obligations and commitments under **international humanitarian law and, if applicable, international human rights law**.

As the President of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, we welcome the exchange of letters between the SRSG Gamba and the **Coalition. On this basis, it has been possible to approve and formalise a programme of activities** along with deadlines implementing last year's Memorandum of Understanding. We call for its implementation by the Coalition as soon as possible. Last week, the Secretary-General presented here at the Council the **UN's Practical Guidance for Mediators to Protect Children in Situations of Armed Conflict**. We would like to invite the parties in the conflict and the Special Envoy Griffiths to use this guide in the political talks which, we hope, will start soon.

Thank you.

Consultations:

Mr Griffiths, can you please explain the plan that was drawn up during the meeting of the prisoners' committee held in Amman recently? Can we really expect to see its enforcement soon?