

KINGDOM OF BELGIUM

Speech by H.E. Philippe Kridelka, Permanent Representative of Belgium
to the United Nations

to the United Nations Security Council

Briefing on Yemen

New York, 15/10/2020

Mr President, Dear Colleagues,

I would like to thank Special Envoy Griffiths and Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for their insightful briefings, including on the role of women and the plight of children in Yemen.

I will focus on three issues today: the rising violence in Hudaydah; the recent prisoner exchange agreement; and the findings of the Group of Eminent Experts on Yemen, particularly regarding children.

Mr President,

Belgium is very concerned by the recent escalation of violence in Hudaydah and the ongoing fighting in Marib.

This violence increases the pressure on an already exhausted civilian population. It undermines the efforts of Special Envoy Griffiths. For months now, we have been waiting for a Joint Declaration that would put the parties back on the road to peace. This lack of progress on the Joint Declaration leads us to question the true political commitment of the parties.

Only dialogue can put an end to the war and resolve the major differences in Yemen. We urge all actors to remain engaged in the peace talks, under the auspices of the United Nations, and to implement the Stockholm and Riyadh agreements.

Once again, I would like to place particular emphasis on the Safer oil tanker issue. No one can ignore the ecological disaster that would occur in the event of a leak. We strongly urge the Houthis to give the UN mission access as soon as possible.

Mr President,

The agreement between the parties to exchange more than one thousand prisoners is good news. It has the potential to contribute to increased confidence, which is fundamental for moving towards lasting peace.

We congratulate all those involved in the implementation of this agreement, in particular the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Allow me to draw attention to a closely related and particularly worrying aspect of the war in Yemen: the fate of those civilians arbitrarily detained and forcibly disappeared - people who have disappeared because of their political views, profession, activism or religious affiliation.

Since 2016, the independent Yemeni organisation "Mwatana for Human Rights" has documented a total of 1,605 cases of arbitrary detention and no fewer than 770 cases of enforced disappearance.

As the American investigative journalist Patrick Radden Keefe writes in his book 'Say nothing', "Perhaps the cruelest feature of forced disappearance as an instrument of war is that it denies the bereaved any such closure, relegating them to a permanent limbo of uncertainty."

Belgium urges all the parties to the conflict in Yemen to respond to the appeals by the victims' families to reveal the fate and whereabouts of those forcibly disappeared, and to urgently release all those arbitrarily detained, including journalists.

Mr President,

I would like to welcome the renewal of the mandate of the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen, as agreed by the Human Rights Council in Geneva last week.

The report by the Group of Eminent Experts on the human rights situation in Yemen is fundamental to the work of this Council. Human rights and accountability for serious violations are inextricably linked to the maintenance of international peace and security.

Belgium is particularly concerned by the GEE's conclusions on children. Over the past year, there has been a high casualty rate among children in several unlawful attacks against civilians, including during air strikes that the GEE has been able to investigate. Children account for nearly one third of the civilians killed or maimed in armed violence in the first half of 2020.

These are horrific numbers. The violence must stop. Accountability must be guaranteed. The Yemeni people have suffered for too long and deserve peace and stability.

Thank you.