

Briefing by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Libya and Head of UNSMIL to the Security Council

26 August 2015

Madam President, Distinguished Members of the Council,

1. You have before you the Secretary-General's latest report on the activities of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya detailing the Mission's work over the past five months.
2. The report paints a mixed picture of evolving security dynamics in Libya. A year since the country's most serious outbreak of armed hostilities and the disruption to the political process, local communities in western Libya are increasingly taking the lead in ceasefire and reconciliation initiatives between different towns and cities, contributing to a marked reduction in military tensions across that part of the country and the wider Tripoli area. This is in stark contrast to security dynamics elsewhere in the country.
3. Fifteen months since the start of military operations in Benghazi in the east, it is clear that the confrontations between the parties, have gradually transformed into a war of trenches with no imminent end foreseen. In the interim, the status quo is exacting a heavy toll on the civilian population, and on whatever remains of the city's much damaged infrastructure. Over a hundred thousand of Benghazi's population remain internally displaced and seventy per cent of health facilities in the city are either inaccessible or non-functional.
4. The situation in the south is equally appalling. The absence of the State and of a proper functioning security apparatus has exacerbated local competition by tribal groups for power and resources, a conflict that has its roots in decades' long marginalisation and neglect by central authorities.
5. At the national level, the scale of human suffering is staggering for a country with large oil reserves and strong economic potential. According to different United Nations agencies, an estimated 1.9 million people require urgent humanitarian assistance to meet their basic health care needs. Access to food is now a major problem for some 1.2 million people, mostly in Benghazi and the east. The figure for internally displaced persons across Libya now stands around 435,000. The healthcare system is on the verge of collapse, with many hospitals across the country overcrowded and operating at severely reduced capacity, many reporting acute shortages of medicines, vaccines and medical equipment. Power cuts are endemic in many areas of the country; some neighbourhoods such as in Benghazi are enduring electricity cuts almost round the clock.
6. Close to 250,000 migrants are estimated to be in the country or transiting through, many of them facing significant protection issues, including arbitrary arrest and detention in abusive conditions, sexual abuse, forced labour, exploitation and extortion. This year

alone has seen over 2,000 migrants drown in the Mediterranean Sea, the vast majority in a desperate bid to make the sea crossing from Libya to Europe's southern shores.

7. At the same time, the country's economy continues to contract rapidly, the result of a significant reduction in oil revenues due to falling oil prices and low oil production from Libya's oilfields. Libya's financial reserves are also being heavily depleted, in large part the result of unsustainable expenditures on non-productive items. The political-institutional crisis in the country has also manifested itself in a growing competition over key financial and other sovereign institutions.

Madam President,

8. Against this grim backdrop of growing hardship and misery stemming from deteriorating security and general lawlessness, widespread violations and abuses of international human rights and humanitarian law continue with impunity across the country.

9. Armed groups from all sides continue to abduct civilians on account of their political opinions or identity, often in the hope of exchanging them in return for a ransom or for the release of fighters or other civilians taken by rival groups. Not even humanitarian aid workers have been spared.

10. Permit me, Madam President, to use this platform to reiterate my call on all sides in the conflict to undertake the necessary steps to protect civilians from direct and indiscriminate attacks, facilitate their evacuation and allow unimpeded and safe access to humanitarian aid.

11. I also wish to remind all parties of their obligations to end all forms of arbitrary detention and to protect all those detained from torture or other ill-treatment. While we welcome the release of some of the illegally detained persons, we continue to urge all parties to do more to complete this process as soon as possible.

Madam President,

12. When I last briefed the Council in mid-July, I spoke of ISIL, or Daesh, having asserted control of the strategically located city of Sirte in central Libya. That control has now been extended to more than 200-kilometre stretch of coastline east and west of Sirte. Despite an attempt by local armed groups on 11 August to dislodge the group from Sirte, Daesh fighters regained control of the city three days later. Casualty figures are difficult to confirm but witnesses report brutal revenge attacks by Daesh against their opponents.

13. There can be no doubt that the danger posed by Daesh to Libya and the Libyan people is real, imminent and palpable. Libyan security and military actors, as well as political stakeholders on either of the divide, are fully cognizant of the danger posed by Daesh-affiliated militants. However, they must recognise that no strategy aimed at containing, if not eliminating, the Daesh threat, will be viable unless it is part of a

concerted, unified and coordinated effort that brings all Libyans together under a single banner whose allegiance is to the Libyan State, and to a Government that is inclusive and representative of all Libyans. The message to Libya's leaders is clear: there is simply no other alternative to unified and collective action if Libyans are to successfully prevent a repeat of the catastrophic advances that Daesh has made in countries like Syria and Iraq.

Madam President,

14. Since my last briefing to the Council in which I updated the Council on the progress in the Libyan political dialogue process, I reconvened the main dialogue track for a new round of talks in Geneva between 11 and 12 August. The two-day talks focused primarily on ways of expediting the dialogue process ahead of the critical 21 October deadline, the date by which the mandate of the House of Representatives would end according to the Constitutional Declaration.

15. Although the General National Congress in Tripoli did not initial the main text of the Libyan Political Agreement along with other dialogue participants on 11 July, I am confident that their concerns can be addressed in ongoing discussions on the annexes of the Agreement, including those pertaining to the formation of the Government of National Accord.

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Madam President,

17. Seven months since the United Nations Support Mission in Libya launched the Libyan political dialogue process, I am increasingly confident that the process is finally drawing to its final stages. This has been a difficult and challenging process, but one that has proven increasingly resilient, despite repeated attempts by spoilers on all sides whose narrow interests and agendas dictate against a peaceful solution to the conflict in Libya. That a majority of stakeholders have sought to engage in the different tracks has been a reassuring sign of the grassroots support that the dialogue process has gradually acquired from different segments of the Libyan population.

18. The talks have come a long way in narrowing the trust deficit that exists among Libya's political stakeholders, and in forging agreement over a roadmap that lays out a vision for bringing an immediate end to the country's political crisis and military conflict that have ravaged Libya for over a year now.

19. Overcoming the political polarisation and divisiveness in Libya will be no easy task. The magnitude of the challenges should not be underestimated, nor of the resources required to pull Libya back from the brink of economic meltdown and total collapse of State institutions.

20. But most importantly, it will be the determination and commitment of Libyans themselves, more specifically their political leaders, which will safeguard Libya's

national unity and territorial integrity, and spare its people the scourge of long-term civil strife and instability.

Madam President,

21. With respect to the respective leaderships of the House of Representatives and the General National Congress. I appeal to both that they do not squander the historic and unique opportunity they have before them to be peacemakers.

22. I call on both not to squander the hard work they have invested over the past seven months to arrive at the point where they are today. The Agreement they have negotiated may not be perfect, but it is a fair and reasonable one, in which the only winners are the Libyan people.

23. I would also like to reiterate that the United Nations, along with the international community, will remain steadfast in its commitment and support to Libya's democratic process. Any attempt to derail the political process through undemocratic means should not be tolerated. The dialogue process remains the only credible and legitimate mechanism by which Libyans can safeguard the continuity of the democratic process in their country.

24. Time is running out. The onus is on Libya's leaders on all sides, and at all levels, to make that final push towards peace.

Madam President,

25. As Libya's dialogue process enters its final phase, I wish to thank the Members of this Council for your support to my mediation efforts, and I wish to reiterate my sincere and profound gratitude and appreciation to the Libyan people and its representatives, as well as to the various Member States and regional organisations that have supported the dialogue process. In particular, I wish to thank Algeria, Egypt, Germany, Italy, Morocco, Qatar, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey, Tunisia, and the United Arab Emirates, as well as the African Union, the European Union and the League of Arab States.

26. The collective effort and determination of the international community will be vital to articulating a clear strategy for the delivery of technical assistance. Equally important, the international community must also move quickly to present a clearly articulated strategy in support of the Libyan State and the efforts by the Government of National Accord to contain and eliminate the threat that groups like Daesh are posing not only to the stability of Libya, but equally to regional and international security.

Thank you.