

Security Council Briefing, 15 September 2014
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The Security Council has before it the Secretary-General's report (S/2014/653) on the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL). The report provides details on the work of the Mission over the past six months, and highlights some of the critical political and security developments that have taken place in Libya during that period. It provides a sombre reading of the rapidly deteriorating political and security landscape in the country.

Tomorrow will mark three years since the Council established the United Nations Support Mission in Libya. Despite the initial sense of optimism that accompanied the Mission's establishment, today we find ourselves at a critical moment in Libya's democratic transition — a faltering political process that has brought the country closer to the brink of protracted conflict and civil strife.

Since assuming my duties just over two weeks ago, I have been in contact with Libyans from across the political spectrum. On 8 September, I undertook my first official visit to Libya as Special Representative, traveling to Tobruk, Al-Baida, Tripoli, Misrata and Zintan. Following frank and open exchanges with Libyan interlocutors, I am confident of the willingness of all the parties to engage constructively with our efforts to explore options for a peaceful way out of the current crisis. All acknowledged the deep political differences and profound sense of mistrust, yet all underscored the need to overcome those differences and to end armed hostilities, and for the political process to resume as soon as possible in order to prevent further polarization and division.

In my discussions with the elected House of Representatives, currently seated in Tobruk, I reiterated the international community's unequivocal recognition of it as the sole legislative authority in the country. But I also impressed upon its members the need for brave, responsible leadership. Given that a group of parliamentarians continues to absent itself from the House of Representatives' proceedings, I underlined the importance of active inclusiveness and for immediate steps to be taken to address the concerns cited by these parliamentarians. In this respect, I am encouraged by the apparent willingness of the House to display the necessary flexibility in pursuit of a mediated resolution of the current crisis surrounding it. I have also received positive signals from the other side that it intends to move in a similar direction.

I also had the privilege of meeting with members of the Constitution Drafting Assembly in the city of Al-Baida. Despite the difficult political and security challenges that confront its work, I was heartened by the sense of perseverance and commitment conveyed by

members of the Assembly. At that meeting, UNSMIL agreed to facilitate an event that will bring together the various committees established by the Assembly with a number of legal experts to provide technical assistance.

In Tripoli, Misrata and Zintan, I had the opportunity to meet with various political leaders and other key figures associated with the recent outbreak of military conflict in Tripoli and its environs. I conveyed to all the Council's commitment to Libya, as made clear in resolution 2174 (2014), to hold accountable anyone actively undermining the country's political process or responsible for a continuation of armed conflict or for violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.

I stressed that the solution to Libya's current crisis can be achieved not through military means, but through political consensus based on key principles, including respect for the Constitutional Declaration, the democratic process, the 25 June legislative elections, an end to incitement and provocation, the unequivocal rejection of terrorism, and a meaningful and inclusive political process. This would have to be accompanied by steps on the security front to enable the State to assert its control over vital installations, and for Government to exercise its authority without the threat of armed intimidation. There can be no compromise on these principles.

In all my meetings, I warned of the dangers of creating parallel political institutions and processes, which can only contribute to further division and polarization. I impressed upon my interlocutors the need to refrain from taking any action that would further exacerbate current divisions, and stressed that any solution to the current crisis would have to be negotiated within the framework of the current political legitimacy emanating from the elections. While the parties reiterated their willingness to engage according to these principles, there remains a huge trust deficit. The parties will need to move quickly to translate their stated commitment into actions.

In the east, renewed military confrontations in Benghazi threaten to exact an increasingly heavier toll on the civilian population. In the west, an unrelenting campaign of indiscriminate shelling continues to target large sections of the Warshafana area near Tripoli, causing untold suffering for the civilian population. Tens of thousands of civilians are now known to have fled their homes; many, including women and children, have also lost their lives as a result of the shelling. We also have credible reports — including one I received just a few minutes ago from the local councils in Warshafana — of severe shortages of medical supplies and further suffering. Our appeals for an immediate halt to military operations have gone unheeded, as have our calls for urgent humanitarian access.

Efforts aimed at resolving the current crisis and resuming the political process cannot make progress against the backdrop of continued fighting. Despite repeated calls for an immediate cessation of hostilities, including from the Security Council, the situation on the ground remains extremely volatile and precarious. I continue to remind

all concerned parties of the urgent need to heed the Security Council's call to bring an immediate end to armed hostilities in the country.

In Tripoli, reports of retaliatory attacks against individuals and property of those associated with the Government of Prime Minister Al-Thinni, as well as individuals hailing from Zintan, are a cause for concern. Camps in Tripoli housing displaced members of the Tawergha community, one of which was attacked on 30 August, have now been vacated for fear of shelling and abductions. We have also received credible information from eastern Libya about incidents of intimidation and other retaliatory attacks targeting individuals hailing from Misrata. The growing number of acts of human rights violations and abuses has created a climate of fear, and countless political and civil society activists, including women, are known to have left the country out of concern for their safety and security.

I have also reminded all parties of their obligation not to take hostages and to treat humanely anyone whom they have detained in the course of the recent fighting. I urge all armed groups holding people to release them or hand them over to the justice system. Armed groups must also account for the fate of those under their control who are presumed missing. In that regard, UNSMIL offered to assist in addressing the issue of detainees. Both sides expressed their readiness to cooperate.

Given the scale of the humanitarian situation across Libya, the United Nations humanitarian country team is urgently taking steps to mobilize additional resources to cover the high demand for relief support. Within the past month, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) dispatched a humanitarian convoy to assist some 12,000 displaced people in the western town of Zuwara. The World Food Programme, which is already providing assistance to some 50,000 internally displaced persons, will participate alongside UNHCR to reach an additional 6,000. Separately, the International Organization for Migration has taken steps to repatriate thousands of stranded migrants to their countries of origin.

Within the past two weeks, United Nations teams have carried out an initial assessment of contamination by explosive remnants of war in Tripoli as a result of the recent fighting. It is clear that the scale of the contamination is significant and poses a threat to civilian lives. Plans to deploy risk-education and explosive-ordnance disposal teams as immediate priorities are under consideration.

Three years following the fall of the former regime, the Libyan people find themselves nowhere closer to realizing their hopes and aspirations for a better future and for a State that safeguards their safety and security. Accordingly, many Libyans are deeply disillusioned with their country's democratic transition.

The United Nations remains committed to its mission in Libya and will continue to impress upon all Libyans the urgent need for progress in overcoming their differences

through dialogue. I believe that is the only way to spare the country further chaos and violence, and to prevent it becoming a magnet for extremist and terrorist groups.

I have no illusions regarding the difficulties and challenges ahead. Political divisions are deep, the sense of mistrust is almost overwhelming and, given the proliferation of arms outside the effective control of State authorities, the security situation remains extremely fragile. But I nonetheless remain a fervent supporter of the Libyan people's desire to safeguard their country's national unity and social fabric.

The small window of opportunity before us for a peaceful resolution to the current crisis should not be missed. Libya's leaders will have to act quickly and seek a political solution through a meaningful and inclusive dialogue. Given the urgency, I intend to follow up shortly with further visits to Libya. Our engagement and that of the international community — next week at the General Assembly we will have new opportunities for this, as well as next Wednesday at an international conference of regional actors in Madrid — will remain solidly anchored in the principles of unbiased engagement with all parties, and that of non-intervention in Libya's internal affairs and respect for its national sovereignty.