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UN SPECIAL ENVOY FOR YEMEN

BRIEFING TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL ON THE SITUATION IN
THE MIDDLE EAST (YEMEN)

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Thank you, Madame President. Let me first welcome the newly elected members to this Council and I will look forward to close cooperation with them as with all Members of the Council.

Madame President, 2022 is starting on a challenging note. The military escalation I described in this Council last month has accelerated as the parties are doubling down on military options. Seven years down the road of war, the prevailing belief of all warring sides seems to be that inflicting sufficient harm on the other will force them into submission. However, there is no sustainable long-term solution to be found on the battlefield. Therefore, I will continue to stress that warring parties can, should, and indeed must talk even if they are not ready to put down their arms.

Before I turn to my core task of finding a way for political talks to sustainably end the conflict, I am compelled to highlight some of the military escalations in recent weeks which have been among the worst we have seen in Yemen for years, and which are taking an increasing toll on civilian lives.

Ansar Allah remains determined to continue its assault on Marib and there is renewed fighting in Shabwa, where three districts have been captured from Ansar Allah. We have seen an increase of airstrikes not only around frontlines, but also in Sana'a, including in residential areas. Airstrikes and shelling in Taiz have increased and fighting continues in southern

Hudaydah. Similarly, attacks on Saudi Arabia have also increased. All of these events have led to civilian casualties and damage to civilian infrastructure. Beyond my repeated calls for de-escalation and restraint, I also reiterate my appeal to the warring parties to respect and uphold their obligations under International Humanitarian Law, which include protection of civilians and protected objects. I also call on all sides to preserve the civilian character of public infrastructure.

Madame President, we appear to once more be entering an escalatory cycle with predictable devastating implications for civilians and for the immediate prospects of peace. I am worried that battles could intensify along other fronts. The recent seizure by Ansar Allah of an Emirati-flagged ship is another matter of concern. In addition, I regret to yet again express my disappointment over the continued detention of UN staff members in Sana'a and Marib. The UN should have immediate access to these staff and be provided with official information pertaining to their arrests.

Madame President, as the tempo of the war increases, the already severe restrictions on the movement of people and goods into and within the country could worsen. The accusations of a militarization of the ports of Hudaydah are worrying, and the threats of attacking them are equally disturbing, given that these ports are a lifeline to many Yemenis. UNMHA is closely monitoring the situation in the ports and has requested as part of its mandate to undertake an inspection. Following the withdrawal of the Joint Forces on the 12th of November, the Mission continues to engage the parties and other interlocutors on the way forward. I would like to take this opportunity to welcome the appointment of Major-General Michael Beary as the new Head of UNMHA. His appointment offers an opportunity to build on these efforts, to address the parties' concerns and to advance the Hudaydah Agreement in this shifted context.

Let me reiterate that restrictions on the movement of goods and people is a challenge throughout Yemen. The continued imposition of road closures and checkpoints across the country, as well as the impediments to imports and the domestic distribution of goods essential for civilians, including fuel, is harming the population in unjustifiable ways. In this regard, I am concerned that the last fuel ship clearance was issued on the 20th of November 2021. As always, it will be Yemeni civilians that will be most affected by fuel shortages.

Madame President, I am glad that Ms. Ola Al-Aghbary is briefing the Council today. As I previously reported to this Council, I was in Ms. Al-Aghbari's home city of Taiz in November. There, I experienced first-hand the severe impact of road closures and checkpoints on the population. Similarly, the fact that the closure of Sana'a airport has prevented Yemenis in the north from travelling, including to seek life-saving medical care abroad for almost six years is unsustainable. As Assistant Secretary-General Rajasingham will elaborate on, the multi-layered challenges surrounding the operations of Sana'a airport have critical implications also for UN operations. Yemeni, regional and international leaders all have a responsibility to address these matters for the sake of the entire Yemeni population. They have suffered enough from these restrictions.

One part of the population that suffers particularly from these restrictions are Yemeni women. Moreover, and despite the tireless efforts, women broadly continue to be excluded from decision-making in war and peace. My Office will continue to convene consultations with women leaders from political parties, civil society and the private sector. These diverse women are all actively involved in sustaining and improving life in Yemen in different ways – from supporting their families and communities to working for peace or providing valuable services and goods. Unfortunately, many are harassed and targeted for their work, and I therefore urge all actors to respect the rights and work of women peace actors and women human rights defenders. I welcome the focus of the Council's Presidency on the crucial Women Peace and Security agenda, but we all need to do more.

While developments on the ground pose significant challenges to peace efforts, my work continues along the path I have set out before this Council. I have explored tangible ways to address the parties' stated priorities and to unlock a nation-wide ceasefire to end the fighting. Unfortunately, but unsurprisingly, these efforts have faced the same obstacles that hindered similar efforts in the past: that is, the parties' disagreements over sequencing, competing priorities and a lack of trust. I remain convinced that part of the challenge is that the parties' preconditions are linked to broader political and governance questions, and as such, a comprehensive political solution is necessary to achieve sustainable results. This will require difficult discussions with and among the warring parties and those who have been left out during the war. I will nevertheless continue to explore options for fast-tracking de-escalation, if and when the parties are ready to pursue these options.

Madame President, I have been focusing on developing a comprehensive, inclusive multitrack approach that covers political, security and economic issues. This Framework will be aimed at facilitating incremental progress in these different areas in parallel. The overall process will be geared toward reaching a durable political settlement.

In the coming period, I plan to deepen consultations, both with the conflict parties and with a wider range of Yemeni stakeholders to identify and develop the short-, medium- and long-term priorities that need to be addressed in each of these three areas. As the country is increasingly politically, economically and militarily fractured, Yemenis must be supported in reversing this trajectory through a serious, sustained and structured process backed by the international community.

Madame President, we have been far too long without a political process that can produce options for improving immediate conditions, and that can prepare the ground for a realistic and durable settlement. Consultations with me and my Office is a start but it will not be enough to settle the conflict. Eventually, Yemenis of opposing views will need to meet to discuss solutions and determine their shared future.

Madame President, I am keenly aware of the political and military context in which my Office is attempting to initiate a political process. Yemen's war, like many, is littered with missed opportunities driven in part by combatants oscillating between feeling too weak to accept or too strong to settle for compromise. Genuine political will, responsible leadership and adherence to the interest of the entire population is needed to sustainably put Yemen on a different trajectory. In addition, I am convinced that to have a chance of breaking this cycle, we need to establish an inclusive, internationally backed political process that can provide a viable foundation for peace. As I convene and consult with Yemenis on the way forward, clear and consistent support from this Council, from Member States and especially regional states will continue to be vital.

Thank you, **Madame President.**