

Remarks of SRSB Ghassan Salamé to the United Nations Security Council

17 January 2018

Mr. President,

Members of the Security Council,

I would like to congratulate Kazakhstan for its Presidency of the Security Council this month.

I also wish to thank you for this opportunity to brief upon the work of the United Nations to address the crisis in Libya.

Mr. President,

Members of the Security Council,

I wish to inform you that the United Nations is poised to increase its presence in Libya.

Our compound and protection arrangements have been made ready so that we can multiply the number of staff we have staying and working in the Capital – of course as security permits.

At the same time, we are expanding our presence across the country, visiting communities throughout Libya.

In the coming weeks and months, we will continue to reach out to more cities and towns, as it is only by truly understanding the country that we can succeed in the implementation of the Action Plan for Libya and help its citizens put an end to a too long transition.

Mr President

17 December 2017 saw the second anniversary of the Libyan Political Agreement. Despite very differing views about what the anniversary might mean, Libyans ultimately chose for the day to pass without violence or significant protest.

That the anniversary proceeded peacefully is in no small part due to the unity of this Council. The 14 December Presidential Statement sent a clear message. The

international community stands behind the Agreement and will not accept attempts to undermine it. This was reiterated by three neighboring countries, whose Ministers of Foreign Affairs met in Tunis on the 17 December 2017.

Whether it be the adoption of electoral legislation or the appointment to sovereign positions, such as the Central Bank Governor, all actions need to proceed in line with the Agreement, for its duration. This practically means harmony between the House of Representatives and the High Council of State.

Mr. President,

Members of the Security Council,

We must remain alert. Though 17 December is behind us, the specter of violence remains present. Military forces are flexing their muscles in many parts of the country.

Close to the border with Tunisia, clashes occurred between forces affiliated with two rival communities. The area at the eastern vicinity of Tripoli remains a worrying flashpoint. Tension has also heightened around the city of Derna.

The very reason that I am not briefing from Tripoli, but from Tunis, as I had planned, is because bloody clashes at the airport have halted all flights in and out of Mitiga Airport for the whole week.

Civilians, men, women and children, continue to be killed or injured in crossfire. Armed groups fight recklessly in residential areas, with no thought to the safety of civilians.

The arms embargo has never been more important. It is for this reason that recent reports of a large shipment of explosives intercepted by the Greek Coast Guard are particularly alarming. A country with 20 million pieces of arms does not need a single piece more. I have received the Panel of Experts today, and they are looking into this matter, with the professionalism you know of them.

The efforts of UNSMIL have been pivotal to the relative quiet Libya has enjoyed over the last months. These extremely time-consuming conflict prevention efforts must continue if hope in the political process is to be maintained.

Mr President,

This fragile and shaky status quo is not sustainable.

Libya needs a competent and efficient government. One which can deliver the public services the people desperately need. One that is able to unify the institutions of the country. One that will preside over the elections that will end the transition.

Amending the Libyan Political Agreement is in our view the most appropriate means to achieve this endeavor and we have not spared a day pushing for it.

I am encouraged by the efforts of members of the House and of the State Council to achieve this goal, and by several initiatives generated to reach the consensus needed for this end.

The work of the Joint Drafting Committee has crystalized consensus on the adjustments to the executive authority. Although a formal agreement is yet to be reached, this consensus is desirable and reachable.

Mr. President,

In line with the Action Plan, three goals are the ultimate focus of our work.

Firstly, the Constitution.

Libya requires a strong permanent legal framework. The transition cannot definitively end until Libya stands upon a true constitution.

The draft constitution, as provided by the Constitutional Drafting Assembly, is currently undergoing judicial review. Out of respect for the Libyan judiciary we await the decision of the courts. I expect this will be concluded very soon, in fact in the next ten days.

Once a decision is reached, we will determine how we can best support this process.

Secondly, National Rebuilding.

The fabric of Libyan society is frayed, and requires meaningful reconciliation if it is to be mended.

Unless a national polity is rebuilt, no meaningful progress can be made in unifying institutions, preventing outbreaks of violence or achieving widespread acceptance of the election results.

Rebuilding a Libyan national polity necessitates two parallel efforts.

Firstly, the United Nations has successfully facilitated numerous dialogues between local communities formerly in conflict. Agreements have been adopted and meaningful steps to address the past have been taken. Communities once at odds have shown their willingness to build a common future.

The Government of National Accord has recently started to play its part in this effort. This has been demonstrated by its support to the Misrata-Twargaha agreement and their provision of funding. On this matter, we will also do our part. In particular to guarantee safe return to that area.

Our other nation-rebuilding track consists of reaching out to the major players and groups previously marginalized. They are gradually being brought into the political fold, as equal and accepted partners, as long as they commit to the political process.

Through townhalls, shuttle visits and whatever other tools at our disposal, we are intensely working on tearing down the walls among Libyan political factions and untangling past local and political animosities, and therefore moving towards the National Conference, which will provide a space for Libyans from all quarters to come together and adopt a common vision for Libya.

The third focus of our work is elections.

On 6 December 2017, the High National Election Commission launched a Voter Registration update.

I am pleased by the remarkable eagerness of the Libyan men and women to register. Our expectations for participation have been exceeded. Six hundred thousand Libyans have newly registered to vote in just over six weeks. The number of people on the electoral register now exceeds two million, and continues to rise.

The United Nations has been able to provide extensive technical support to the Commission for voter registration and will continue to assist the arrangements for the next steps.

However, before credible elections can be conducted, much work remains to be done.

A constitutional framework must be agreed upon. The security conditions must be conducive for a free and fair process. There must be confidence that the results will be accepted by all.

For either a referendum, presidential or parliamentary election, laws are also needed. Libya's relevant institutions have an obligation to produce the requisite legislation, and to do so in a manner consistent with the Libyan Political Agreement. I urge these institutions to avoid mutual suspicion and unilateral action, and to put the interest of the Libyan people above all considerations.

Mr. President,

I thank the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Algeria, Egypt and Tunisia for taking the time to meet with me, and for their strong backing to the Action Plan for Libya.

I also express my gratitude to the Kingdom of Morocco for receiving me and for its continued support to our work in Libya.

It was also an honor to meet with the Secretary-General of League of Arab States whose support has been highly valued.

This month, I also traveled to two of Libya's southern neighbors, where I had the privilege to meet with President Mahamadou Issoufou in Niger and President Idriss Déby in Chad; two countries substantially affected by the evolution of the Libyan scene. I have greatly benefited from their wisdom.

Of utmost importance for UNSMIL is our relationship with the African Union. This week I return from Addis Ababa where I met with the AU Commission to discuss deepening our cooperation in support of Libya. Twice this month I had the honor to meet and exchange with AU Commission Chairman Moussa Faki, and we share common views on the way forwards.

Mr. President,

The political crisis in Libya has been accompanied by an equal humanitarian crisis. Only a strong effective government can turn the tide and put an end to the suffering.

But those suffering cannot wait. To address the most urgent needs, next week the United Nations will launch a humanitarian response plan. The plan will target those in especially vulnerable situations, focusing on life-saving interventions such as basic services, shelter, food and demining.

The Stabilization Fund in Libya is another important tool to help communities. These concrete actions are now widely recognized by the Libyan people.

I thank the donors who have contributed to either of these two funds, and I urge the Government of National Accord to do its part as well.

Mr. President,

A matter of great humanitarian concern is the dire situation many migrants in Libya continue to face. I saw some of this first hand last month when I visited a detention centre in Gheryan.

Further, we have evidence that many migrants are subject to grave abuses inside and outside official places of detention, including various forms of sexual violence.

We keep pressing the authorities to eradicate these egregious crimes, and bring those responsible to justice. And in view of several serious incidents against humanitarian actors in the conduct of their duties, I urge the government to ensure their safety.

I also salute the strong cooperation between the African Union, the European Union and the United Nations. As you know, a task force has been established between our three organizations, and it has made progress in supporting voluntary returns of migrants. Co-chairing the operational group here in Tunis, UNSMIL is dedicated to these efforts.

The concentration on migration should not however allow us to forget those many Libyans held without judicial process, and often subject to ill-treatment. Failure to address custodial abuses fuels local conflicts, and undermines national reconciliation and efforts to build a rule of law based state.

Mr. President,

Transformative change is overdue. Most worrying for us are the individual predatory agendas which continue to dominate at the expense of the collective good.

No political solution is durable unless an end is put to the predatory economics which have dominated the Libyan scene in the past few years. Where public resources are more often than not used for various purposes other than in the service of the Libyan people.

Conflict over resources is indeed at the heart of the Libyan crisis. The Mission will not spare any effort to advocate that national wealth be directed toward the provision of public services rather than to special interests.

This is all the more necessary as fuel shortages, electricity shortages, water shortages are common across the country.

It is a painful irony that a country of such plenty is consistently so short.

I would note again that it is our collective responsibility to ensure that Libya's remaining frozen funds are effectively managed as a safeguard for the future.

Additional work is still needed to make this truly happen.

Mr. President,

As you know, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Jeffrey Feltman visited Libya from 9 to 12 January.

Mr. Feltman's visit was timely and much welcome. It was an opportunity to reinforce messages to Libyan political and military leaders that it is time for compromise, in the interest of the Libyan people. On behalf of the Secretary-General, Mr. Feltman urged Libyan interlocutors to truly commit to working together and implement the Action Plan to create the necessary conditions to end the transitional period.

Mr. President,

I would once more like to express my appreciation to this Council for its steadfast commitment and support to the Action Plan for Libya and our efforts to end the crisis in Libya.

Thank you.