

REMARKS OF SRSG GHASSAN SALAMÉ TO THE UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL ON THE SITUATION IN LIBYA 29 JULY 2019

Video: <http://bit.ly/2GCd2Qe>

Mr. President [Ambassador Gustavo Meza-Cuadra, Peru],

Allow me to congratulate Peru for its Presidency of the Security Council.

Before beginning my briefing, I would like to pay tribute to the late President of Tunisia Beji Caid Essebsi. President Essebsi was a great supporter of the United Nations and was an active and committed partner to the UN Support Mission in Libya in our efforts to end the Libyan crisis through Tunisia's generous hosting of the Mission. I will personally miss his wisdom, frankness and friendship. He will be greatly missed. *Allah yarhumo.*

Mr President,

Members of the Council,

The armed conflict in Libya shows no signs of abating. The war around Tripoli has already left nearly 1100 dead, including 106 civilians. Hundreds of thousands of people have fled their homes in the capital and neighbouring districts as a result of the fighting, tens of thousands crossing the border to Tunisia seeking safety for their families.

More than 100,000 men, women and children are immediately exposed to the frontlines, and over 400,000 more in areas directly impacted by clashes. The war has worsened humanitarian conditions and hindered access to food, health and other life-saving services.

The parties, ignoring calls for de-escalation, have intensified air campaigns, with precision airstrikes by aircraft and armed drones.

The geographical scope of the violence has also spread. For the first time on 26 July, Government of National Accord forces launched an air attack on the main rear base of the LNA in the Jufra region. On 27 July, General Haftar's forces launched airstrikes at a Government of National Accord airbase in Misrata.

There is increased recruitment and use of foreign mercenaries, alongside the use of heavy weapons and ground attacks. Forces on both sides have failed to observe their obligations under international humanitarian law.

The most tragic example of indiscriminate attacks was the airstrike that hit a migrant detention centre in Tajoura on 2 July, killing 53 and injuring at least 87, including children. What is even more appalling is that the precise coordinates of the Tajoura detention centre, and other such centres, were shared by the UN with the parties following a previous incident in May. While the vast majority of the fatalities were due to

the airstrike, several victims were cruelly struck down by those guarding the center as they attempted to flee. To make matters worse, following UN supported efforts to move the migrants to more secure locations, authorities have in recent days deposited more than 200 migrants back into the bombed facility.

Mr. President,

The tragedy of up to 150 migrant deaths at sea on 25 July again underlines the urgent need to address the root causes of the migrant issue and their immediate suffering.

The UN humanitarian agencies have worked hard to mitigate the terrible conditions in these detention centers. Over 5,000 refugees and migrant people are currently being held at detention centres run by a government agency, of which 3800 are exposed to the fighting. What is required is that they be shuttered. Towards this end, I urge the Council now to call upon the authorities in Tripoli to take the long-delayed but much needed strategic decision to free those who are detained in these centers. UNSMIL has devised a plan for an organized and gradual closure of all detention centers and seeks your support for its implementation.

So far, in 2019, nearly 4,500 refugees and migrants were disembarked in Libya, with serious risks of detention, arbitrary arrest and being trapped by the fighting. The international community can prevent another tragedy. I urge European countries to respond to the Secretary-General's repeated pleas, revisit policies and move migrants and refugees to safety.

Mr. President, I note with alarm the increasing frequency of attacks on Mitiga airport, which serves as the only functioning airport in the greater Tripoli area. Several of these attacks have come perilously close to hitting civilian aircraft with passengers on board. I am afraid that with the almost daily bombardment, luck will run out. I call upon the authorities in Tripoli to cease using the airport for military purposes and for the attacking forces to halt immediately their targeting of it.

Mr President,

On June 26, pro-GNA force retook the city of Gheryan, located some 80 kilometers south of Tripoli. It was a notable development as Gheryan was the first city that the LNA forces entered on their march to Tripoli. There are unconfirmed allegations that human rights abuses may have taken place in the town, which we are investigating.

The recent uptick in violence may worryingly presage a new phase in the military campaign but I do not judge that this will fundamentally alter the strategic stalemate. The parties still believe they can achieve their objectives through military means. Prime Minister Serraj and General Haftar have publicly reaffirmed their commitment to a future political and electoral process but have yet to take practical steps to stop the fighting. The LNA maintains that they will not stop their attack until Tripoli is conquered while the GNA forces insist they can push General Haftar's forces back to eastern Libya.

Libya's present and future need not be taken hostage by the warring parties. While engaging with political leaders and armed groups, UNSMIL is also actively engaging a wide range of constituencies and hosting second track dialogues.

From 13 to 15 July, a meeting gathering 72 Members of the House of Representatives under the auspices of the Egyptian Parliament affirmed the role of the House in a political solution to the Libyan crisis, and called for the formation of a government of national unity without any mention of the need to cease all hostilities. While I commend the efforts of those who met in Cairo to seek an end to the conflict and to form a unified government, I urge them to reach out to their fellow MPs to forge a truly national project. I discourage the trend towards establishing a parallel parliament in Tripoli.

In the same vein, I am troubled by the insistence of authorities in eastern Libya to press forward with the establishment of a parallel municipal elections committee to the national body for municipal elections which already exists. Efforts to delegitimize the work of the national body short-change Libyan voters themselves given the paucity of expertise and resources available to the parallel institutions, cause confusion at the local level, and ultimately impede the country's fragile transition to democracy.

Mr. President,

The hatred and invective on social media and satellite television stations is fueling the violence on the ground. I note that the owners and editors-in-chief of these publications and television stations have invited individuals using a despicable vocabulary of incitement; aired and published calls to violence and assassinations; spread intentionally false news and allowed ad hominem attacks. I urge those who dwell in their self-contained silos of enmity to cease spewing hatred and start talking face-to-face with their compatriots.

Mr. President,

Libya has become a terrain of experimentation of new military technologies and recycling of old weapons. Armed drones, armoured vehicles and pick-up trucks fitted with heavy armaments machine guns, recoilless rifles, mortar and rocket launchers have been recently transferred to Libya with the complicity and indeed outright support of foreign governments. The weapons discovered after the retaking of Gheryan illustrated the advanced systems that are provided. There is no doubt that external support has been instrumental in the intensification of airstrikes.

Without the full cooperation of all Member States regarding the implementation of the measures related to the arms embargo in accordance with Security Council resolution 2473, the flow of weapons to Libya will continue to fuel this needless conflict.

The security vacuum created by the conflict in and around Tripoli continues to be exploited by Da'esh in remote areas in the country's southern and central regions. Among other incidents, Da'esh claimed responsibility on 2 June for a car bomb attack in Derna which resulted in 11 wounded.

Even more worrisome are the indications that the arsenal of weapons being delivered by foreign supporters to one side or the other is either falling into the hands of terrorist groups or being sold to them. Some extremist elements have sought to legitimize themselves by joining the battle. This is nothing short of a recipe for disaster, not only for the safety and security of Libyans themselves, but to Libya's neighbors and international peace and security. It is high time the warring parties cease all hostilities, redeploy their forces, and focus on the common threat before Libya becomes more of a safe haven for terrorist organizations. While I can report that some heed has been recently taken of our warnings, the parties must be urged to decisively disassociate themselves from any violent extremist elements and to actively prevent them from joining the conflict.

Mr. President,

While UNSMIL had to reduce its footprint in Libya due to the security situation, I have also decided that the Mission should not leave Libya. This allows the UN to respond to growing humanitarian needs and human rights concerns, and to remain fully engaged with all interlocutors regarding de-escalation of the fighting and the resumption of the political process.

Since the start of the conflict in and around Tripoli, the UN, in support of local efforts, has provided humanitarian assistance to over 75,000 people. I regret to report that only 30 per cent of the \$202 million requested under the 2019 Humanitarian Response Plan has been received to date. The humanitarian community will be unable to respond to increased needs and assist some 100,000 highly vulnerable people impacted by the conflict if no additional funding is received.

Critical infrastructure and vital installations providing water, electricity and other essential services to the population have been damaged by the war. With Libya already in peak demand during the hot summer, deficits in water and electricity supplies have been aggravated by the fighting and deliberate attacks targeting the Man Made River facilities. While Libya's oil continues to flow, the risks to its continued production are as grave as those that imperil the supply of water and electricity. Earlier this month, the National Oil Corporation declared force majeure after valves in the Hamada area were closed by an armed group. The

Mission used its good offices to facilitate a quick resolution to the dispute and force majeure was lifted several days later.

The parallel eastern National Oil Corporation continues its efforts to sell oil in violation of Security Council resolutions. There is a serious danger of the weaponization of oil in this conflict, the consequences of which would be disastrous to the Libyan economy.

The conflict situation has limited the ability of Libyan authorities to meet the basic needs of the population. International and national humanitarian partners provide emergency relief, including in response to floods in Ghat in early June. I led an exceptional

humanitarian visit to Ghat on 13 June, where UN agencies delivered emergency food, water and sanitation supplies amongst other provisions needed in the town.

The situation in the South of the country is dire, with a rise in communal violence, particularly in the city of Murzuq. Southern communities face terrible fuel and electricity shortages and an absence of bank notes, in addition to a renewed security vacuum and an increase in terrorist attacks.

UNSMIL has re-established an operational presence in the East, with the re-opened UN hub in Benghazi. My deputy for political affairs conducted an eight-day mission to the east, covering 1,000 kilometers and visiting five cities to demonstrate UNSMIL's commitment to serving all Libyans. We are working hard to open similar hub in Sebha, the capital of the South.

Mr. President,

In the course of the current fighting, serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law by all parties have been committed. Residential areas have been hit by indiscriminate shelling and targeted airstrikes. I am particularly worried to see that health workers and facilities are repeatedly targeted, with 19 ambulances and four health facilities struck, many medical doctors and health workers killed including 5 yesterday and others wounded. Impunity should not prevail especially for those who attack hospitals and ambulances. Protecting civilians and humanitarian workers requires sanctions against those committing crimes.

There has been an unacceptable spike in enforced disappearances and arbitrary detentions since the outset of hostilities. On 17 July, elected House of Representatives member Siham Sergewa was violently abducted from her home in Benghazi by an unknown group. I have raised Ms. Sergewa's case with the authorities in the east, including yesterday with General Haftar. Ms. Sergewa must be immediately released and those responsible for her abduction must be held accountable. Abductions have also risen at an alarming rate in Tripoli, with numerous government officials, including the Deputy Director of Food and Drugs Administration kidnapped by armed groups to settle scores and extort ransoms.

Mr. President,

Nearly four months into third war since 2011 -- it should be abundantly clear to all that the risks of either an open-ended low-intensity conflict or a full escalation to outright war on the shores of the southern Mediterranean are equally unacceptable.

The decision to stop the war cannot be postponed indefinitely. I therefore submit the following three-part immediate action out of the conflict:

First, I call for a truce to be declared for the Eid al-Adha, which will fall on or about August 10. The truce should be accompanied by confidence-building measures between the parties to include the exchange of prisoners, release of those arbitrarily detained or abducted, and the exchange of mortal remains.

Second, and following the truce, I request a high-level meeting of concerned countries to: cement the cessation of hostilities, work together to enforce the strict implementation of the arms embargo to prevent the further flow of weapons to the Libyan theatre; and promote strict adherence to international humanitarian and human rights law by Libyan parties.

Third, the international meeting should be followed by a Libyan meeting of leading and influential personalities from all over the country to agree on comprehensive elements for the way forward. Such a consensus was on the verge of being built in the run-up to the National Conference in April. It is past time for Libyans to end this long season of mutual suspicion, fear and division.

This triple action will require consensus in this Council and amongst the Member States who exert influence on the ground.

As for the Libyans, they need to listen to their better angels. They are now fighting the wars of others and in so doing destroying their country.

Proposals to revive political talks should be the basis for re-unification of Libyan national institutions. I believe a comprehensive solution to the Libyan conflict will require tackling the underlying drivers of what is ultimately, through not exclusively, a war over resources. The solution, therefore, will need to factor in much-needed structural economic reform and an equitable method to distribute the country's vast wealth.

We have taken a step forward in reinvigorating the audit of the central bank and its parallel eastern branch which will be vital in promoting the unification of the bank and increasing transparency on how national funds are being spent. We have also devised concrete proposals to allow the largest number of Libyans benefit from oil rent, replacing predation with fairness, and self-interested disbursement with welfare for all.

Robust efforts will also be required to combat the smuggling of people, fuel, weapons and drugs – sources of wealth for the armed groups and associated criminal elements. Measures must also be taken to combat the rampant corruption which has infested almost all elements of the state.

Economic reform should be coupled with comprehensive reform of the security sector that would allow Libyan authorities to fight terrorism and secure the country's borders.

Structural security issues, namely the fragmentation of armed groups and the proliferation of small arms, combined with the absence of a unified and professional army have not been addressed since the fall of the former regime. The Libyan state cannot be effective without having an undisputed monopoly over force of arms; this will require collection of weapons outside of the control of the state and a clear civilian oversight over the security structures. Much of the groundwork for these efforts was laid during the military

unification talks sponsored by the Egyptian government in addition to the UNSMIL supported steps taken following last September's violence in Tripoli to reinforce and reform the Interior Ministry. We urgently need to revive that momentum.

Stopping the war requires the will of the parties and the support of the international community. Should the parties agree to silence the guns, the UN and international partners should stand ready to provide material and technical support enabling the parties to negotiate a comprehensive agreement on cessation of hostilities and appropriate mechanisms for its implementation and monitoring. Since the outbreak of the conflict, national governments and regional organizations have called on the Libyan parties to stop the fighting and resume the political process. For that, I am deeply appreciative of the efforts of the African Union, the European Union and the League of Arab States.

People in Libyan cities stop me to convey a clear message: The majority of Libyans believe that it is now time for the Security Council to join this chorus and decisively call for an end to this needless war before it grows into a full-blown civil war with serious, potentially existential consequences for Libya and its neighbours.

Almost seventy years ago, the United Nations decided to create an independent Libya. This body bears a particular responsibility to ensure that Libya does not fracture into weak and unstable pieces but remains the collected strength of the Libya that united in 1951. Only with your imprimatur we can together help the Libyans move past this dark and violent episode and towards a more hopeful and promising future.

Thank you.