

Remarks of SRSG Ghassan Salamé to the United Nations Security Council - 16 November 2017

Excellency, Distinguished Members of the Council,

I would like to congratulate Italy for its Presidency of the Security Council this month. I am privileged to have Minister Alfano chair this session, which is a reflection of Italy's strong commitment to support the United Nations' effort to end the crisis in Libya.

It has been two months since the launch of the Action Plan for Libya. The Action Plan is made of a number of ingredients which UNSMIL has simultaneously started working on, including: amending the Libyan Political Agreement, organising a National Conference, preparing for elections and providing humanitarian assistance.

The Libyan case may appear simple. As a nation without stark ethnic or sectarian divides, but with a good education and a wealth of natural resources; many challenges faced elsewhere are not there.

But what might be mistaken for a homogenous nation, is actually a country divided at an atomic level. Sparked by the 2011 conflict and fueled over the subsequent years, the national polity has imploded. In its place, there has been an explosion of competing individual agendas, often masquerading as representing regions, cities or tribes.

Reconstituting the Libyan national polity is a must. For without it, effective institutions cannot form, and rebuilding a state can only be a Sisyphean endeavor.

Excellencies

I am pleased to report that over the last two months, the Action Plan has made significant headway. The United Nations convened two sessions of the Joint Drafting Committee, composed of members from both the House of Representatives and of the High Council of State to agree on a set of amendments to the Libyan Political Agreement in UNSMIL's offices in Tunis.

For the first time, with these meetings, Article 12 of the Libyan Political Agreement has been implemented. I welcome the mutual recognition of the two assemblies, and their acknowledgment of the Libyan Political Agreement as the sole available framework to end the crisis in Libya.

Since the meetings, the two bodies have been in constant contact. Though much progress was made, a few remaining points are still to be agreed. I am quite confident we are close to a consensus.

We will not tailor a process to pick particular candidates, and any mechanism to select a new Presidency Council and Government must be transparent and fair. I am pleased to report that the Libyan public has overwhelmingly welcomed this principled approach.

It is expected that politicians are over excited with the “Who” question. But for us, what is important is the “How” question. By which we mean, there must be a fair, open and competitive process.

Mr. President, Members of the Council

Work is also ongoing on other aspects of the Action Plan.

UNSMIL is well into preparations for the National Conference, al-Multaqa al-Watani, which is to take place in February 2018. We are currently exploring the possibility of hosting it inside Libya, and I welcome the many Libyan offers of assistance we have received.

The National Conference will give Libyans from all across the country the opportunity to come together in one place; to renew their common national narrative; and to agree on the tangible steps required to end the transition.

I insist that the Conference be inclusive, in order to allow the adoption of a true National Charter, and provide guidelines for the legislation needed to end the transition.

Such a Conference is needed now more than ever in light of the renewed threats to national unity taken by parallel authorities.

As for elections, we are intensively trying to establish the proper political and technical conditions for their occurrence.

Elections should not take place until we are certain that they will not add a third Parliament or fourth government. Libyans deserve national uncontested institutions.

To ensure preparedness, the High National Election Commission is working to initiate a voter registration update before the end of the year, which will be the first such exercise since 2014. The international community stands fully ready to support the process.

On its part, the House of Representatives must assume its duty to pass the requisite electoral legislation.

There must also be a clear constitutional framework. The Constitutional Drafting Assembly was elected and mandated to produce a new constitution and they have completed their draft. I salute their fortitude for the pressure they have faced and condemn the threats made against CDA members.

The constitutional process must now move forward.

While we work together to implement the various parts of the Action Plan, no vacuum is acceptable. The Libyan Political Agreement of 2015 therefore must stand, amended or not, as the framework for the conclusion of the transition.

Excellencies

As part of the Action Plan, the United Nations is also working to create a more secure and normal life for all citizens so that Libyans can go about their daily lives free from fear and want.

We are intensifying our engagement with armed groups and developing our strategy for their gradual reintegration into civilian life.

In Tripoli, our experts are working closely with state security forces to empower them to secure the capital more effectively.

Moreover, we continue our engagement with military leaders across the country on the future shape of Libya's defence institutions.

The sustainable delivery of human security in Libya also needs an empowered judiciary and professional law enforcement and security agencies. The United Nations is working with the Ministry of Justice and other Libyan actors on initiatives, in particular reforming the appalling detention system.

The mission continues to work to facilitate dialogue between local communities and institutions, such as recently the preliminary agreement between Tripoli and Zintan.

In this context, I commend the decision by the Presidency Council to create a National Reparations Fund for all victims of the conflict.

Mr. President, Members of the Council

We cannot ignore the dire humanitarian situation in Libya. In the past the country has been a donor to much of Africa, now 25 percent of the population have humanitarian needs.

In particular, Libya's health sector is in crisis. Only a fraction of the country's public hospitals are functioning. Medicines are in short supply and modern equipment is often left in disrepair. Foreign staff, the traditional backbone of Libya's health care system, have fled. Some Libyan practitioners warn that the country is vulnerable to a potential epidemic outbreak. We plan to call a high-level coordination meeting among local and international stakeholders early in 2018.

It is outrageous that a country which stands upon such vast wealth has so many suffering. However, it does, and so we must assist them tackle the urgent concerns.

Our Humanitarian Strategy seeks to help address the acute needs of the most vulnerable groups. I hope you can consider supporting our Program for 2018.

This is not to mention the now critical two-year-old Stabilisation Facility that has brought tangible benefits to communities in Ubari, Benghazi, Sebha, Sirte and Kikla. Encouraged by the success, the Facility is expanding to Bani Walid and Greater Tripoli. Owing to the Stabilization Facility, hospitals have been reopened, children have classrooms.

Yet this is not enough. Much more remains to be done.

On migrants and refugees, despite emergency assistance, we have seen an increase in the number of people arbitrarily detained in a system with no accountability or due process.

Migrants continue to be subjected to extreme violence, forced labour, extortion and killings and other grave abuses inside and outside official places of detention.

We urge the Libyan Government to address frontally and comprehensively this challenge, to find a solution that respects the rights of migrants and host communities across the country.

The United Nations stands ready to work with the Libyan authorities, and their Northern and Southern neighbors to develop innovative and sustainable solutions.

Mr. President, Excellencies,

Beyond the Action Plan, three very serious challenges have imposed themselves on our agenda; impunity for grave crimes, the economy of predation and the erosion of frozen assets.

First, impunity and lawlessness continue to prevail across the country in face of increasingly heinous crimes committed every day.

A few recent examples include, on 26 October, 36 corpses were found in al-Abyar, near Benghazi. The corpses showed signs of having been tortured before they were executed. This is one in a long series of discoveries of corpses being dumped in and around Benghazi over the past months.

Days later, a fighter jet bombed a family on the outskirts of the city of Derna. Fourteen civilians were killed, most of them children and many women, in an appalling incident tantamount to a war crime.

On 20 October in Tripoli, the bodies of three men were handed over to families hours after having been taken alive during clashes in the al-Ghrarat area, raising concerns of extra-judicial killings.

We are still investigating the recent events that led to the death of numerous fighters in the Warshafana area in western Libya. There are suspicions that a number may have been killed in a manner which violates international law.

Events such as these shake popular faith in the political process. I once again call on the Libyan authorities to investigate these incidents and hold the perpetrators to account.

However, I cannot ignore that such events take place across the country with alarming regularity, and I cannot accept that repeated calls for justice go unattended. If Libyans alone cannot combat impunity for war crimes, it is time for the international community to consider mechanisms that can help them do so; possibly including joint tribunals.

Second, politics in Libya is strongly shaped by economic predation.

In an environment of protracted insecurity and lack of accountability, the shadow economy has been flourishing. Billions of dollars are lost every year in illicit money transfers.

The gap between the official exchange rate set at 1.4 Libyan dinars to the dollar and the black-market exchange rate of 9 dinars to the dollar provides ample opportunities to earn huge profit margins. Brokers benefit from the selling of letters of credits and checks. The traffic of subsidized fuel to foreign countries

robs the country of hundreds of millions every month. Other measures include the issuing of overvalued government contracts. The result is that Libya's financial reserves are depleting rapidly.

Libya is a textbook example of the apparition of instant millionaires, and of the extremely rapid tempo of middle class impoverishment. And it is the Libyan people who pay the highest price for this. Two of every five Libyan youth are unemployed.

The third challenge, beyond predation which, robs the country of much, hundreds of millions more are being silently lost due to poor management of Libya's frozen assets. Freezing the assets is one thing, however, their mismanagement is another. We should revisit how Libya's external wealth and investments are taken care of, so that they are not silently and gradually lost for future generations.

Excellencies,

The re-launch of the political process has created a new momentum. I am pleased to see many constructive and peaceful debates on the future of the country. It is testimony to the commitment of the Libyan people that on a daily basis I receive new ideas and suggestions on the political process from ordinary citizens keen and free to participate in shaping their country's future.

These are citizens not prepared to sacrifice their rights for security, and they do not need to. In a society based on institutions; neither rights nor security must be compromised.

I am committed to doing my utmost to assist the Libyans resolve their political crisis. The United Nations is ramping up our presence in Libya, and have already significantly increased our footprint in the country.

Allow me to end by thanking Council Members for their commitment and support to our efforts to resolve the crisis in Libya. And I would like also to thank our Quartet partners; the African Union, League of Arab States and European Union. Your unified efforts are key to the success of the Action Plan, and the better future that it promises the people of Libya.

Thank you.