

SRSG Ghassan Salame Briefing to the Security Council - 18 November 2019

Mr. President

Members of the Security Council,

Seven and half months into the conflict in Libya, and given the recent dangerous escalation in the hostilities in and around Tripoli, we find ourselves ever more in a race against time to reach a peaceful solution that would spare many lives. I will provide you with an update on the security situation before turning to political developments.

I am angry and sad to report to you that today there was another mass civilian casualty event. A biscuit factory in the Wadi Rabi'a neighbourhood of Tripoli was hit by an air strike, according to early information. The attack has caused what we currently believe to be ten fatalities and over 35 injuries. It appears that the majority of the dead were migrants, but that at least two were Libyans. Regardless of whether the attack deliberately targeted the factory or was an indiscriminate attack, it may constitute a war crime. We are working to verify the facts and will update you accordingly.

Beyond today's tragedy, the frontlines in Southern Tripoli are highly fluid. The dangers and direct consequences of foreign interference are increasingly evident. To fill gaps in manpower, there is growing involvement of mercenaries and fighters from foreign private military companies. The insertion of these experienced fighters has naturally led to an intensification in the violence. I am gravely worried by the expansion of artillery fire northwards into the city. Over the past days, the number of civilians killed and injured has been rising and many families are leaving the areas impacted by the shelling. A further escalation of ground fighting in these densely populated areas would lead to disastrous humanitarian consequences.

The use of air power and precision technology has become a dominant feature of an otherwise low intensity conflict. UNSMIL estimates the total number of drone strikes in support of Libyan National Army forces at well above 800 since the beginning of the conflict. The total number of drone strikes in support of the Government of National

Accord is estimated at around 240. It is our judgement that the drone infrastructure and operations are facilitated by external parties to the conflict. There were also several incidents of precision airstrikes conducted by unknown aircraft between September and November. In addition, the increasing use of unguided bombs in airstrikes conducted by LNA forces in populated areas of Tripoli caused an increase in the number of civilian casualties.

The violence is facilitated by Libya's plethora of Gadhafi-era arms, as well as by continued shipments of war materiel brought into the country in breach of the arms embargo. Reports indicate that everything from spare parts for fighter aircraft to tanks, from bullets to precision missiles, are being brought into Libya in support of different groups involved in the fighting.

Mitiga Airport remains closed. It has been more than two and a half months now that this key outlet for the civilian population of Tripoli and Western Libya has been forced to shut due to indiscriminate shelling and airstrikes. Misrata airport, a small mixed civilian-military facility located 250 km east of Tripoli, is now the only exit-point for Libyans in the West of the country -- who comprise the majority of the country's population -- to travel abroad by air. Misrata Airport too has been targeted at least 11 times by precision airstrikes since early September.

Mitiga Airport needs to reopen as soon as possible. Together with the GNA Ministers of Interior and Transportation, I am working on a number of practical steps to achieve this goal, including the clear delineation between the civilian and military sections of the airport, as well as the establishment of a dedicated UN terminal.

Mr. President,

I am determined to see the end of this debilitating conflict. My colleagues at UNSMIL and I are fully engaged and have been working tirelessly with Libyans and international partners to prepare for the Second and Third Steps of the initiative I announced on 29 July.

I would like to thank the Government of Germany for their work in preparing for an international summit. Three Senior Official Meetings have already taken place and there will be a crucial fourth meeting this

Wednesday, on 20 November. In the last discussion on 21 October, participants worked to agree on a draft communique that outlines six baskets of activities necessary to end the conflict in Libya. These six baskets include the need for the return to the Libyan-led political process and accompanying economic reform; a ceasefire, implementation of the arms embargo and security reform; as well as the upholding of international human rights and humanitarian law. Putting implementation of the arms embargo at the heart of international commitment is essential in practical terms and as a message to the Libyan people.

UNSMIL has worked to substantiate an Operational Annex to the draft communique. The annex has two purposes. It serves to outline the commitments of the members of the Berlin Group to ending the conflict and advancing the political process through tangible actions, benchmarked by indicators and outlining responsibility for those actions. It also serves as the "bridge" to the intra-Libyan political dialogue, which will be launched under UN auspices immediately following the Berlin Summit.

One of the tangible outcomes of the international summit would be the establishment of a follow-up committee that would work with UNSMIL to implement the outcomes agreed in the final communique. Such a committee would play a fundamental role in terms of ensuring respect for a ceasefire and better implementation of the arms embargo. It would contribute to supporting a return to the political process, implementation of agreed economic and financial reforms, practical ways and means to ensure no impunity for violations of IHL. The committee would also support the necessary DDR process for groups across the country.

I have been actively engaged with member states on a bilateral basis. I was in particular grateful for the visit to Libya of German Foreign Minister Maas to brief Prime Minister Serraj on the Berlin process on 27 October. Last week, I travelled to Cairo for very positive meetings with Egyptian Foreign Minister Shoukry and other high-level officials. International unity and agreement are essential to stop the violence and pursue resolution of the crisis through political dialogue. I have high hopes that the Berlin process will end in success. Let me stress once more that endorsement of the Berlin Communique does not mean the end of the process, but rather the beginning of the most important

part of our journey to put Libya back on the path to peace and stability.

In support of the Berlin process, I have engaged extensively with Prime Minister Serraj, and the commanders of the Government of National Accord forces and I have also met with General Haftar and politicians who support him. There is a scope for agreement on ending the conflict and the basis for returning to the political process.

UNSMIL has also engaged in extensive outreach to Libyan constituencies, including in the diaspora. These meetings have involved commanders of units engaged in the fighting, their civilian representatives and political constituencies from across the country. The anger and frustration at the conflict and the strong desire for it to end emerged clearly from these discussions.

I am pleased to report that efforts continue to support the political process. The Egyptian government has been working with members of the House of Representative to try to unify the body, as a group of Western members continues to meet independently in Tripoli. We are in permanent contact with the various factions in the House of Representatives encouraging them to maintain their assembly's integrity. Partner organisations have also held second track consultations where participants have emphasised again their desire for peaceful resolution to the conflict and proposed ideas for a way forward. These are all positive developments, reflecting a will and a commitment to ending the conflict and returning to the political track to end the crisis in the country.

Mr. President,

In parallel with our efforts at a national level, work continues directly with Libyan communities. To address the polarisation in the country, we have now hosted two workshops to stem incitement and the use of hateful rhetoric in the media. The workshops brought together journalists, editors and social media activists with instructors in human rights and representatives of social media platforms. Our ultimate goal is to conclude a Code of Conduct for the media in Libya.

At a grassroots level, we held the last in a series of three events in mid-October to support local mediators. Over 120 Libyans, including

23 women, have attended these meetings which aim to establish a national network of mediators which will include tribal leaders, elders, representatives of civil society, youth and women activists, academics and businesspeople, who enjoy credibility and respect amongst their various constituencies.

Municipal elections remain on hold following a June court ruling that cancelled the electoral regulation administering the elections. It is a positive reflection of the democratic spirit in Libya that many mayors are nevertheless requesting to renew the expired mandate of their Councils through elections. I recently met with the chairperson of the Central Committee for Municipal Council Elections who assured me of the readiness of the committee to resume municipal elections once the legal basis is restored. On 4 November the Sebha Court of First Instance validated the results of the municipal elections in Sabha, that took place in 27 April. While another legal challenge against the results remains pending, and, the petitioners' announcement that the validation ruling will be appealed to the Supreme Court, this is nevertheless a welcome and important development for the largest city in Southern Libya.

In Sirte, UN agencies launched a project to support youth and adolescents to become active agents of change and peace. This is a welcome first effort to implement UNSCR 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security in the Libyan context.

Mr. President,

Let me take this opportunity to raise once again the case of Seham Sergewa, the member of the House of Representatives abducted from her home on 17 July. For over four months, authorities in the East have been unable to produce information about the fate of this woman legislator and outspoken rights activist.

Ms. Sergewa's fate is part of a larger pattern of violence against women across the country. The Mission is documenting instances of killing and forced disappearances, including, on 16 October, the case of a 70-year-old Libyan woman abducted from her home in Benghazi after she was accused of practicing witchcraft. In addition, women migrants and refugees in Libya are at risk of rape and other forms of

sexual and gender-based violence, sexual exploitation and forced prostitution in detention and at large.

On a positive note, I am pleased to report that Libyan women were recognised for their peacebuilding efforts. On 16 October, the BBC named Ms. Reda Al-Tabuly – who you will have a chance to hear from today and who is a peace campaigner and the chairwoman of Together We Build It Organization -- as one of the 100 most influential women for 2019.

Mr. President,

In Tripoli, the effects of the conflict continue to impact the civilian population. More than 200 civilians have been killed and more than 128,000 people have fled their homes since the conflict began on 4 April. More than 135,000 civilians remain in frontline areas, and an additional 270,000 people live in areas directly affected by conflict.

Since the beginning of 2019, violence in Libya has had a devastating impact on health care in the country with 60 attacks against health care facilities, medical personnel, and ambulances registered. We have observed a clear pattern of precision airstrikes targeting the medical facilities of Government of National Accord forces. Intentionally directing attacks against medical facilities and personnel, wilful killing or harming of sick or wounded people may constitute war crimes.

Migrants and refugees continue to be at risk of unlawful killings, torture and other ill-treatment, arbitrary detention and unlawful deprivation of liberty, rape and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence, slavery and forced labour, extortion and exploitation. Serious concerns also continue with regard to the transfer of migrants intercepted at sea by the Libyan Coast Guard to official and unofficial detention centres including to Zawiya Detention Centre and the Tajoura Detention Centre, that the authorities reported on 1 August 2019 was to be closed.

A health sector assessment conducted in October 2019 revealed a sharp increase in unmet health needs, particularly for women and girls. More than 24% of health facilities are closed due to the conflict, electricity cuts or structural damage, and services are interrupted in many other health facilities. Children are unable to reach schools,

dozens of which have been destroyed. Nearly 30 more schools are being used as shelters for displaced persons.

The United Nations and its humanitarian partners have reached over 310,000 people with humanitarian assistance this year. Unfortunately, humanitarian needs exceed the means at our disposal. To date, less than half of the appeal for USD 202 million under the Libya Humanitarian Response Plan has been funded. I encourage donors to help us shrink the funding gap.

In southern Libya, the UN country team continues to support the Ahali population displaced from Murzuq, very few of whom have returned to their homes. UNSMIL has continued to meet with Ahali and Tebu leaders to resolve the underlying grievances between the communities and enable the safe and dignified return of the Ahali population.

Mr. President,

I regret to inform you that there are no new developments in my appeal for more information regarding the 10 August attack which killed three UN staff members and severely injured two others. A Board of Inquiry sent from Headquarters arrived some days ago and I call on all Libyan parties to cooperate positively with this body. Our two injured staff members continue to recover. We are committed to remaining in Libya to serve the Libyan people.

Mr. President,

It is somewhat of a cliché to say that the weeks ahead are critical – but once again, it is true for Libya. External investment in the conflict risks surpassing the amount of national involvement, taking control of Libya's future away from the Libyans and putting it in the hands of foreign parties. Once invited in, foreign intervention is the guest that settles and seizes control of the house.

It is in the interests of all Libyans to reject outside interference in their country's affairs, and I look to them for their support in calling for external actors to adhere to the arms embargo and commit tangibly to ending the conflict on the ground, before it's too late.

Ending the conflict and agreeing to the way forward is a realistic prospect. The parties are known. The outlines of the agreement are known. Options for a temporary or longer-term constitutional framework exist. Electoral legislation has been produced before. It is all eminently possible. All that is needed now is for you, the international community, to come together to provide the necessary umbrella for the Libyan parties themselves to join hands to end the conflict and resume dialogue. The United Nations is in Libya, and will remain in Libya, to support the Libyan people on their journey.

Thank you.