

17 May 2019



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

King Charles Street
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Secretary of State

Dear Colleagues,

I am writing to update you on recent developments in Yemen - a subject on which there has rightly been substantial parliamentary interest.

On Saturday 11 May, the Houthis began redeploying their forces away from the ports of Hodeidah, Ras Issa and Saleef, in line with one of the agreements reached in Stockholm. The UN verified this redeployment on Tuesday.

This is the first such withdrawal by the Houthis since the conflict began in 2014. The UN describes these Red Sea ports as a “lifeline” for Yemen’s people, with over 70% of bulk food such as wheat entering through them last year. The redeployment should enable this “lifeline” to stay open to receive the supplies that Yemen so desperately needs.

I congratulate General Michael Lollesgaard, the head of the UN support mission, for overseeing this development and Martin Griffiths, the UN envoy, for his heroic efforts to bring the parties together. The next stage is to complete the outstanding negotiations and allow full implementation of a mutual redeployment from the three ports and the city of Hodeidah. In the meantime, we should revive work towards a political settlement of the conflict, which remains the only way of ending the bloodshed and relieving the suffering.

We can draw encouragement from these developments, but I am anxious not to give false hope. The progress is fragile and reversible. This is not the time for provocations, such as the drone attack on two oil installations in Saudi Arabia on Tuesday, for which the Houthis claimed responsibility. The targets were pumping stations on Saudi Arabia’s East-West oil pipeline, linking Eastern Province with the port of Yanbu on the Red Sea. Saudi Arabia retaliated with air strikes in Yemen’s capital, Sana’a. Tensions are rising across the Middle East and I am deeply concerned by the danger of unintended escalation.

Since I became Foreign Secretary last July, I have made the quest for a peaceful settlement of Yemen’s conflict a priority for British diplomacy. I attended the Stockholm meeting in December, the first direct peace talks between the Houthis and the Government of Yemen since 2016. In March, I was the first Western Foreign Minister to visit Yemen since the conflict began. On these occasions, I met the leadership of both the Houthis and the Government of Yemen. I urged them to cooperate with Martin Griffiths in order to advance the peace process.

Meanwhile, British diplomats in New York have made full use of our permanent seat on the UN Security Council and our position as “pen-holder” for Yemen. The UK drafted UNSCR 2451 - unanimously adopted in December 2018 - which endorsed the Stockholm agreements and gave international backing to the work of Martin Griffiths. This was followed by UNSCR 2452 – also adopted unanimously – which mandated the creation of a UN mission to support the Hodeidah Agreement and verify the redeployments on the ground.

The people of Yemen are enduring one of the heaviest burdens of suffering in the world. In the space of just six days last month, the UN recorded nearly 28,000 suspected cases of cholera. Some 10 million Yemenis – around a third of the population – now depend on emergency food aid.

The UK has pledged another £200 million of humanitarian funding for the Yemen crisis this year, bringing our total contribution to £770 million since the conflict began. This will be used to meet the immediate food needs of over a million Yemenis every month, treat 30,000 children for malnutrition, and provide over a million people with clean water and basic sanitation.

Britain has always sought to live up to our responsibilities and use our influence to bring peace and reduce suffering in the Middle East. We will not relent from doing everything possible to help resolve the conflict in Yemen.

Jeremy Hunt

THE RT HON JEREMY HUNT MP