

**Interview of Asharq Al Awsat with the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen
Martin Griffiths, 28 January 2019**

Q: What pre-occupies Mr. Griffiths nowadays? The Hudayda Agreement, the exchange of prisoners or convening the upcoming round of consultations? Or other issues?

A: All the issues you have mentioned. We are working to ensure that tangible progress is achieved in all these issues. There is a window of opportunity that was opened for Yemen in Sweden, and it is important to seize this opportunity, and to capitalize on the momentum we have seen during and after Sweden. That momentum is still there, even if we have seen the timelines for implementation extended, both in Hudayda and with regard to the prisoner exchange agreement. Yet such changes in timelines are expected, in light of the facts that: 1-the timelines were rather ambitious; and 2-we are dealing with a complex situation on the ground.

What is important to me is that both parties continue to demonstrate political will in abiding by the Stockholm Agreement, and both parties are constructively and seriously engaged for the full implementation of the Agreement. What is important now is to stay the course, and to continue working with the two parties till we see the full implementation of the Stockholm Agreement.

Q: What is on your schedule next months, in terms of travel and meetings? And do we expect to see another round of political consultations soon?

A: As you know, General Patrick Cammaert and I have just had a series of very constructive meetings in Sanaa and in Riyadh. I return to Sanaa again as of Monday, and General Cammaert also will be there. I am planned to visit Hudayda too this time. Also next week I will visit Aden to meet with Prime Minister Main Abdelmalek. Our focus now is to see redeployments take place in Hudayda in a credible and verifiable way. We are working with the parties to ensure this takes place very soon.

We are planning to convene the next round of political consultations soon. As I mentioned, we do not want to lose the momentum created in Sweden. However, we all are on the same page that we need to see progress in implementing what was agreed in Sweden before convening the next round of consultations. We hope we will be able to announce the date of the next round of consultations very soon.

Q: If your level of optimism in Sweden was 10 out of 10, what is your current level of optimism about implementing the Stockholm Agreement?

A: It remains 10 out of 10. As I said when we were in Sweden, hope is the currency of the mediator. We need to remain hopeful and have faith in the process that we started. This is not by way of wishful thinking. What we have seen in Sweden, and what we continue to see now, is that both parties demonstrate political will to put Yemen back on the path of peace. This is not an easy path, but as long as we have the political will, the patience and the perseverance, we will get there. I believe that the political leadership of both parties is determined to put an end to the suffering of the Yemeni people.

Q: Based on the reports you get from the field, to what extent are the parties abiding by the Hudayda Agreement?

A: our assessment is that the ceasefire in Hudayda is generally holding, despite any security incidents that have been taking place. We have a new situation in Hudayda that was not there before Sweden. Also, it is worth noting that there are reports about the inhabitants of the city

returning to their homes, which they fled before for fear of the intensified fighting. This is an important indicator that the situation is much calmer than it used to be.

Moreover, we have a new mechanism; the Redeployment Coordination Committee (RCC), which is a joint committee that was not there before Sweden. RCC is working on the operational implementation of the Hudayda Agreement. That said, we also acknowledge that the situation in Hudayda remains volatile. That is why we are working hard, with General Cammaert and RCC members, to make sure that the provisions of the agreement are implemented, and that redeployments are carried out in a credible and verifiable way.

Also we are working with the office of the UN Resident Coordinator, Lise Grande, as well as WFP and UNDP to make sure arrangements are made to stabilize the current calm, and to ensure the smooth and unhindered flow of humanitarian aid through the port and the surrounding roads. We do hope to see this happen sooner rather than later. The full implementation of the Hudayda Agreement will be a turning point. I believe it will have a large impact on the dynamics of conflict resolution in Yemen.

Q: When do we expect to see the 75 UN monitors dispatched in Hudayda, per to SCR 2452? Are they expected to arrive with the new incoming chair of RCC?

Right now, we have an advance team that was dispatched with General Cammaert to work on activating the RCC, and on laying the ground for the new mission in Hudayda. I think they have done a very good job, in light of the very short time they had to prepare for such an important mission, and in such a complex situation. Over the coming weeks we will see a bigger mission operating in Hudayda, in accordance with SCR 2452. We are currently working on the logistics of establishing the new mission.

Q: There are demands that you should name the party obstructing the implementation of the Stockholm Agreement. How would you respond to such demands? Do you intend to do that in confidential reports to the Security Council? Or would you inform the public about it?

A: I tend to categorically disagree with that proposition. The current situation is that we have an agreement that needs to be implemented. Both parties reached this agreement, and both parties continue to demonstrate commitment to implement this agreement. What we currently need is to close the gap on some issues that stand in the way of the rapid and full implementation of that agreement. This is our job; to work with the parties to close the gap, and this is what we are committed to do. We will continue to be honest in our reporting, but pointing fingers is not the way to conduct a constructive mediation.

Q: There have been a lot of reports about disagreements between you and General Patrick Cammaert, that resulted in his resignation. Some also said that Houthis put pressure to replace General Cammaert. Do you have clarification on that?

A: There is no element of truth to such reports. As a matter of fact, General Cammaert and I have been working closely to close the gap between the two parties on the operational implementation of the Hudayda Agreement. Our meetings with all the parties were very constructive last week. General Cammaert's plan was to stay in Yemen for a rather short period of time, to activate the RCC and lay the ground for establishing the Hudayda mission. All the speculations about other reasons for General Patrick's departure are not accurate.

Q: And General Cammaert's decision is related to the shooting incident of his convoy in Hudayda?

A: I do not think the two issues are related. I believe this was General Cammaert's plan from the beginning.

Q: How would you assess the commitment of the two parties to the ceasefire?

A: As I said, the ceasefire in Hudayda has been holding generally, which means that the two parties are committed to fulfil their obligations in abiding by the agreement. This is an important thing to highlight. We have seen the two parties demonstrate remarkable political will, first to reach a ceasefire agreement, and then to abide by it. What we need to see now is the implementation of the provisions of the agreement, fully and rapidly.

Q: And on the prisoner exchange, when do we expect to see the actual exchange of prisoners take place?

A: We do hope to see that happen very soon. The two parties have been working closely on this file. As you know the prisoner exchange agreement was the first agreement to be signed between the two parties since the war started. It was signed right before the Sweden Consultations. The leadership of both parties informed me as soon as I started my mission that this issue should be a priority for our work. Also, this is a humanitarian issue, that will mean a lot to thousands of Yemeni families, who look forward to being reunited with their loved ones. There is a follow up committee that met earlier in January in Amman, and is expected to meet again very soon to discuss a final round of comments on the lists of prisoners.

Q: The issue of re-opening Sanaa airport was supposed to be a low hanging fruit in Sweden. However, the consultations ended without an agreement on the airport. Are you still working on that?

A: Definitely. This is an issue that is important to alleviate the suffering of the Yemeni people. I have heard a lot of stories from people who have not been able to see their families in Sanaa, because of their inability to endure travelling by road. I do hope we will be able to reach an agreement on the airport. There are a number of ideas to reach a compromise between the two parties on that.

Q: Do you expect the upcoming round of consultations to discuss a framework for a political agreement?

A: Yes. So far, we have been focused on achieving some progress on the humanitarian issues, and on de-escalating the conflict. It is important not to lose sight of the big picture necessary to resolve the conflict in Yemen. A framework that will draw a road map towards a political agreement will provide us with a basis for the end game; that is the political solution for the conflict in Yemen.

Q: What kind of messages have you been receiving from Yemen after the Sweden Consultations?

We have been receiving encouraging messages from all parties. I believe that more than any time in the past, there is a political will demonstrated by all parties to put an end to this conflict. I think now we are all on the same page that the way to do this is through the negotiations' table, and not the battlefield. After four years of war, I think the political leadership of the two parties is

convinced that war will not resolve this conflict. Also there is a consensus in the international community as well as in the region on that.

Q: Mr. Griffiths, this March you will have completed your first year in this mission, what were the main challenges that you faced? And do you think we are now seeing the beginning of the end for this conflict?

I would not say it has been an easy year. I think the biggest challenge is not to fail the people of Yemen. And that is why the Sweden moment was important. It was a message from the leaders of Yemen, the UN and the international community to the Yemeni people that they are not forgotten, and that we will continue to work to end this devastating conflict. I remain hopeful that we will see the end of this conflict soon. It is not a simple mission, but as long as we have the commitment of the parties, the patience and the perseverance, I do believe that Yemen will be back on the path of peace sooner rather than later.