

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Remarks by A/SRSG Williams to the Security Council

19 November 2020

Madam President, Ambassador King (*St. Vincent and the Grenadines*), Excellencies,

Since I last briefed you on 2 September, we have made substantial progress in the search for peace and stability in Libya. After many years of oppression, division, chaos, misery, and conflict, Libyans are coming together, for the sake of Libya, for the sake of their children and grandchildren, to chart a Libyan vision for the way forward that has the opportunity to preserve the country's unity and reassert its sovereignty.

As the de facto truce on the ground continued to hold, UNSMIL, with your support and the support of the Berlin group, facilitated open dialogue to build stability, security and national unity among the Libyan parties. These efforts resulted first in the signature of a countrywide, permanent, ceasefire agreement in Geneva on 23 October to start with immediate effect. There, the 10 military officers comprising the 5+5 Joint Military Commission set their differences aside and, guided by their patriotic spirit, responded to the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire. This historic agreement provides for the withdrawal of all military units and armed groups from the frontlines; the departure of all mercenaries and foreign fighters from the entire Libyan

territory within a period of 90 days. In a further show of Libyan determination, this decision was followed by two subsequent rounds of discussions, taking place on Libyan soil to expedite the operationalization of the agreement.

In the southern Libyan city of Ghadames, from 2 to 4 November, I joined both delegations as they developed the terms of a Libyan-led and UN-supported ceasefire monitoring mechanism to be initially established in an area running from Sawknah to Abu Grein and Bin Jawad, in central Libya. In Sirte, from 10 to 13 November, the Commission established its headquarters at the Ouagadougou Conference Centre. Participants identified the reopening of the coastal road between Misrata and Sirte, supported by the deployment of a joint security force as well as the withdrawal of foreign forces and mercenaries from the area.

I am pleased to report that tangible progress was achieved as part of the package of confidence-building measures agreed in Geneva: flights between Benghazi and Tripoli as well as to Sebha, Ghat and Ubari have resumed and I am hopeful to see the reopening of flights to Ghadames happening soon. The exchange of detainees continues, facilitated by the elders' council and with the support of the Joint Military Commission. The sharp decrease in the number of civilian casualties compared to the second quarter of 2020 is another stark reminder that when guns are silent, civilians are protected.

Following arrangements to remove foreign forces from the oil installations, the National Oil Corporation progressively lifted the force majeure on oil installations, ending the oil blockade imposed on the country for over nine months. Oil production is now back to pre-blockade levels at 1.2 million barrels per day. Progress on a transparent economic arrangement on the management of oil revenue would help support this very positive development. The resumption of oil production, in addition to the ceasefire, created conditions to address underlying security issues. On 16 November, I joined a meeting with the Chairman of the National Oil Corporation and the eastern and western commanders of the Petroleum Facilities Guard in Brega to discuss the unification and restructuring of the guard force.

In another sign of progress, on 13 October, the Board of Trustees of the Libyan Investment Authority announced that it would conduct its first comprehensive audit since it was created in 2008. In combination with the ongoing UNSMIL facilitated financial audit review of the two branches of the Central Bank of Libya, these twin audits will significantly increase transparency in how public funds are being managed.

Madam President, Excellencies,

The high standard of professionalism and responsibility displayed by the Joint Military Commission and progresses achieved on the security track paved the way for the resumption of the political process.

Last week, starting formally on 9 November, I convened the first in-person session of the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF) in Tunis on the basis of the Berlin Conference Conclusions endorsed by UNSC Resolution 2510 (2020). In the lead up, I held separately a series of virtual consultations with large groups of Libyan mayors, women and youth to hear their recommendations and priorities and inform the discussions of the LPDF. I would like to reiterate the Organization's and my personal gratitude to the Tunisian Presidency's gracious hosting of this first round of intra-Libyan political talks.

Among the 75 participants representing the main Libyan geographical, social and political constituencies, 26 were elected by the House of Representatives (HoR) and the High Council of State (HCS), and 49 - including 16 women - selected by UNSMIL. I am pleased to report that discussions took place in a constructive and collegial atmosphere and I applaud the participants for their good will and perseverance.

On 15 November, the LPDF adopted a political road map to presidential and parliamentary elections to be held on 24 December 2021. The agreed document, entitled "The Preparatory Phase for a Comprehensive Solution" complements the Libyan Political Agreement and sets general principles and objectives guiding the transition period under reconstituted and unified institutions as well as the main timeframes for the endorsement of a new executive authority by

the House of Representatives, and milestones for the constitutional arrangements and elections.

With a the date of elections fixed in 12 months, the roadmap sets out clear deadlines by which relevant institutions must take action on the appointment for sovereign positions, and the endorsement of the new executive authority, failing which the LPDF will reconvene and take decisions, in line with the Berlin conclusions and resolution 2510. The LPDF has been mandated to meet regularly to monitor the implementation of the roadmap to ensure that the benchmarks towards elections are met. These mechanisms are set up to prevent a new open-ended transition and as a guarantee to the overwhelming demand of the Libyan people for national elections.

Key human rights principles that emerged from consultations with civil society actors, including women rights activists, were also included in the roadmap, further serving to underpin a rights-centered process.

The Forum's participants also consensually agreed on the new prerogatives and eligibility criteria for the executive positions. Notably participants agreed to reform the powers and competencies of the Presidency Council and establish a separate Prime Minister. A government of national unity will be led by a Prime Minister and two deputies whose main mandate will be to lead the transitional period towards election, reunify state institutions, and provide security and basic services to the population until elections are held.

I am particularly grateful to the women participants who played a critical role in the LPDF and made important contributions as bridge builders. They issued a statement outlining a series of principles and recommendations for improving women's participation in the political process and governance. They called for better representation in political life, and for the State to fulfill its international commitments regarding the rights and protection of women. Their demand that women should account for no less than 30 per cent of leadership positions in the reformed executive authority was also echoed in the roadmap, attesting to the leading role women played in the dialogue.

Next week, I will reconvene the LPDF virtually to continue talks on the modalities for selection of executive positions.

Madam President, Excellencies,

Libyans have made it clear. Organization of presidential and parliamentary elections is their demand and must be common objective. The chairman of the High National Election Commission (HNEC), Dr. Emad Sayeh, confirmed that this sovereign institution has the technical capacity to implement elections within an enabling political and security environment, a feasible legislative framework and a timely and sufficient budget. I am encouraged by Prime Minister Sarraj's announcement on 16 November that the government will allocate funds and resources for the HNEC. I trust this statement

will be promptly translated into facts, as I believe that, together with the LPDF's agreement to hold elections on 24 December 2021, and the exceptional work led by the JMC on security arrangements, there is now a more conducive environment for holding inclusive and credible elections.

I am also gladly acknowledging that the Central Committee for Municipal Council Elections (CCMCE) has been able to continue with elections in another five municipalities including in Misrata, the third largest Libyan city. I congratulate the CCMCE for succeeding in holding credible elections with all necessary precautionary measures in the midst of an ongoing pandemic and despite a challenging post-war environment.

Madam President, Excellencies,

More work certainly remains to be done, but the Libyans stood up and did their part. We owe it to them to do ours by fully respecting and supporting these Libyan-Libyan agreements which were reached under the authority of Security Council resolution 2510 (2020) and the outcomes of the Berlin Conference. This includes respect for the principle of non-interference in Libya's internal affairs and full implementation of the UN arms embargo on Libya.

This Council has tools at its disposal including to prevent obstructionists from jeopardizing this rare opportunity to restore peace in Libya. I call on you to use them.

Madam President, Excellencies,

Allow me to reiterate that the situation remains volatile; there is no time for complacency.

While the Joint Military Commission seeks to operationalize the ceasefire agreement, the two sides have not yet begun to withdraw their forces. Government of National Accord forces remain stationed at Abu Grein and al-Washkah, with patrolling activities reportedly taking place. Military cargo flights were monitored at al-Watiya and Misrata airports. The Libyan Arab Armed Forces and auxiliaries continued to set up fortifications and military outposts equipped with air defence systems between Sirte and al-Jufra, and in the northern area of al-Jufra airbase. Intense cargo aircraft activity was monitored between Benina airport, al-Jufra and al-Gardabiya airbase. I request this Council to support by the enforcement of relevant resolutions pertaining to the arms embargo.

On the economic front, negotiation of a durable economic arrangement for the transparent distribution of oil revenues remains dependent on advances made in the political track. Under the arrangements for resuming oil production, the National Oil Corporation is holding oil revenue in reserve until an agreement is found. While the Libyan economic dialogue has developed policy options to improve wealth management, negotiating such an arrangement remains challenging given the polarisation between the two executive polities.

Madam President, Excellencies,

The killing of Ms. Hanan al-Barassi, a lawyer and vocal critic of corruption, abuse of power and human rights violations, should lead all Libyans to put their differences aside and swiftly forge an inclusive solution to the protracted crisis to restore justice and accountability and end the prevailing climate of impunity. Her brutal slaying illustrates the threats faced and the personal risks Libyan women take for speaking out.

Many people remain arbitrarily detained in Libya, without the judicial systems in place to challenge the basis for their detention. In addition, as this Council has heard before, illegal detention facilities operated by armed groups are part of the war economy, using torture, extortion, rape and other human rights abuses as tools of control. I once again reiterate calls for all illegal facilities to be identified and closed.

Humanitarian needs, compounded by the increasing impact of COVID-19, will remain in the near-term as agreements materialize on the ground and the economy rebounds. It is estimated that for the beginning of 2021, 1.3 million people will be in need of some form of humanitarian assistance, an increase of 40 per cent compared to last year.

Following the suspension of hostilities, the number of displaced people in Libya reduced from 426,000 people in June to 392,000 people, but their return to their homes has been slow as basic services remain lacking. The risks posed by booby-traps, including IEDs, landmines, and explosive remnants of war will continue to

impede safe and dignified returns until all contaminated areas are cleared.

This year, more than 11,000 migrants and refugees trying to reach Europe have been intercepted at sea and returned to Libya, which is by all definitions not a safe port for return. The numbers already far surpass the total for 2019. Hundreds have paid the ultimate price, with more than 900 migrants and refugees drowning, or presumed drowned, in the Mediterranean in 2020. On 12 November, three deadly shipwrecks, recorded in one day, claimed over 100 lives.

Migrants and refugees remaining in Libya have faced an upsurge in grave protection risks and violations of their human rights. On 10 November, a 15-year-old Eritrean asylum seeker was killed, and two others were injured when armed men entered the property where they were staying and started shooting. The young victim was waiting resettlement out of Libya to a third country. This follows other incidents this year where migrants and refugees have been killed or injured; many others have been arbitrarily detained. As of 8 November, more than 2,000 migrants and refugees are in official detention centres in Libya.

The number of COVID-19 cases and deaths in Libya continues to increase month-on-month. As of 15 November, there are 74,324 confirmed cases and 1,025 deaths. The first two weeks of November saw a 22 per cent increase in the number of COVID-19 cases, with Libya's biggest cities - Tripoli, Misrata and Benghazi - witnessing the largest increases. With limited testing capacity

and poor mortality surveillance, the numbers are a fraction of what health experts suspect to be the true scale of the problem.

At a time when we need to focus efforts on combatting COVID-19, the continued closure of primary health care facilities due to shortages of health care workers, power cuts and lack of personal protective equipment affects not just the ability to effectively combat the virus but also for people to continue to access other essential health services.

Equally, a recent assessment of vaccines in Libya shows that supplies of vaccines for common childhood diseases will run out by the end of the year if no immediate measures are taken to procure and distribute additional supplies. This will be Libya's second vaccine stockout in 2020. This means that many children have missed or may miss their scheduled vaccine doses, which increases the risk of outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases.

The UN and our partners are at the forefront supporting the national authorities with their COVID-19 response, including providing health supplies and personal protection equipment, as well as capacity building of health workers. We are also supporting to alleviate the suffering of those most affected and in need of assistance due to the protracted conflict and socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19, reaching more than 309,000 people with humanitarian assistance this year.

Madam President, Excellencies,

I am optimistic about the way forward in Libya yet clear-eyed about the many challenges that lie ahead. Ten years of war cannot be solved in one week of political talks, but we hear more now the language of peace rather than the language of war. For the sake of Libya, seventy-five Libyans came together in Tunis last week in a good faith effort to start the process of healing their nation's wounds. They sat, they talked (*gamiz wa hadriz*), they extended their hands, if not their hearts, to each other. I have witnessed in the past several months the potential for a paradigm shift in how Libyan military, political, and leaders view their role in charting the country's path forward from one of a transactional power-sharing arrangement in which the riches are divided up amongst the privileged few to one of sharing responsibility in order to save the country from further destruction. Only shared responsibility, nurtured by patriotism and love of the country, can lead to the shared security and prosperity for which so many Libyans yearn. Libyans deserve if not the support, then at least the non-interference of the main international actors as they seek to forge a sovereign political path forward for future Libyan generations.

Thank You.