**ASRSG Stephanie Williams Briefing to the Security Council**

**28 January 2021**

*Mr. President, (Ambassador Mr. Tarek Ladeb, Tunisia),*

*Members of the Security Council,*

I wish to congratulate Tunisia for assuming the Presidency of the Council for the month of January.

This month marks one year since Chancellor Merkel of Germany and the Secretary-General convened the Berlin Conference on 19 January 2020. The Conference did not put an immediate end to the conflict and the suffering of the Libyan people. Nor did foreign support to the warring parties relent and indeed, this blatant foreign interference continues.

However, the 55-point communiqué agreed by the Member States and partner organizations in Berlin articulated a comprehensive framework to address the full range of issues fuelling the Libyan conflict. Its subsequent endorsement by this Council, through resolution 2510, anchored our effort to bring the Libyan parties to the negotiating table.

One year later, the intra-Libyan dialogues, facilitated by UNSMIL through the complementary political, military and economic tracks, have produced tangible progress: a ceasefire is in place; the Tunis Roadmap, adopted in mid-November has charted the course for the restoration of democratic legitimacy through setting a clear date for national elections and for the establishment of a unified, temporary executive authority; and, long-overdue economic-financial reforms are well under way.

What is now evident is that the Berlin process did what was envisioned: it created an international umbrella for the United Nations to work directly with the Libyan parties, military officers, political forces and thought leaders to seek a Libyan-Libyan resolution.

Mr. President,

Today, the contours of unity and reconciliation can be more clearly discerned. Libyans are keen to turn the page, to reclaim Libyan sovereignty and ownership of their destiny as a people after many years of relentless armed conflict, societal fragmentation, and crippling institutional division.

This rejuvenation of Libyan patriotism must be sustained, harnessed, and supported by this Council to open a new path for Libya towards democracy, respect for human rights, accountability and justice under the rule of law.

Ten days ago, I participated in a digital dialogue with 1,000 Libyans from across the country and abroad. Seventy-six per cent of the participants were in favour of conducting national elections on 24 December 2021, and the majority called for an end to the years-long transitional period. Sixty-nine per cent of participants believed that a unified interim executive authority in the run-up to elections is needed.

However, over 70 per cent of participants feared obstruction from what they described as the “status quo” party. They also called for a stronger United Nations role in ending foreign interference in the country, and for the continuation of the UN-facilitated dialogues.

*Mr. President, Members of the Council,*

I am pleased to report that the ceasefire signed in Geneva on 23 October continues to be observed and that the 5+5 Joint Military Commission (JMC) remains active. The professionalism and selfless commitment of its members is exemplary.

Ahead of the 23 January deadline set by the ceasefire agreement for foreign fighters and mercenaries to depart Libya, the 5+5 on 20 January affirmed to the Security Working Group of the International Follow-Up Committee that the they will continue their work to implement all provisions of the agreement. The JMC reiterated in a public statement the need for the immediate repatriation of all mercenaries and foreign fighter from the entire Libyan territories.

I welcome the JMC’s determination, though I am concerned by continued fortifications and defensive positions created by the Libyan Arab Armed Forces (LAAF) inside Gardabiya Airbase in Sirte and along the Sirte-Jufra axis in central Libya.

Air cargo activities continued with flights reaching Libya’s western region and Government of National Accord military bases and airbases. In the southern region, there was an increase in assets and activities in the airbases seemingly aimed at strengthening LAAF presence and control. These activities undermine the 5+5 process.

In Tripoli, the Presidency Council in mid-January established another new security structure under its control, composed and led by prominent armed groups, which could complicate the 5+5 led efforts to transition Libya towards a state monopoly on security.

The multiplication of security agencies under the leadership of armed groups, with overlapping responsibilities, unclear lines of command and control, and financed with public resources further erodes the state’s security architecture and undermines future security sector reforms and demobilization, reintegration and integration of armed groups.

I would like to stress that responsibility for the implementation of the ceasefire agreement rests not with the JMC but with the political and military leadership of both sides.

I call on the GNA and LAAF to fully assume their responsibilities and fully implement the ceasefire agreement. I also wish to echo the Secretary-General’s appeal to all regional and international actors to respect the provisions of the ceasefire agreement. The JMC has repeatedly requested the enforcement of the UN arms embargo and for international assistance to expedite the departure of foreign fighters, to underpin their valiant efforts to negotiate the opening of the coastal road to reconnect eastern and western Libya.

*Mr. President,*

The determined and constructive cooperation between the Libyan parties within the JMC paved the way for the political talks to resume. Since the Tunis dialogue, after over 50 hours of virtual discussions, the LPDF established a temporary advisory committee to resolve the deadlock on the selection mechanism for the executive authority.

I want to commend the crucial role played by women, youth, and representatives from Libya’s south in building bridges and relentlessly working to reach a compromise. Based on a proposal elaborated consensually by the Advisory Committee, on 19 January, the LPDF voted to approve the proposed selection mechanism for a new executive authority to govern Libya in the lead up to national elections, with 73% of the votes cast.

The one-week nomination period for the submission of candidacies for the positions of a three-member Presidency Council and of Prime Minister closes today. The LPDF will convene outside Geneva, with the generous hospitality of the Swiss Federal Government, for the voting process from 1 to 5 February.

I strongly welcome the many expressions of international support and I call on all Libyan parties and institutions to get fully behind this process in line with the Tunis Roadmap.

In parallel, UNSMIL has continued to facilitate the deliberations of the LPDF legal committee tasked to follow-up on the constitutional basis necessary for the holding of elections. UNSMIL has also supported the meeting of the constitutional committee formed by the House of Representatives and the High Council of State.

This committee met on 20 January in Hurghada, Egypt, and agreed to hold a constitutional referendum before the national elections in December and to amend the referendum law reviewed by the House of Representatives at the end of 2018. While this path is not without challenges, it is positive that they met within the framework of the LPDF roadmap and I welcome the declared commitment of the committee to hold national elections on 24 December.

I welcome the GNA’s disbursement of LYD 50 million to the High National Elections Commission (HNEC) for the preparations of national elections scheduled to take place on 24 December 2021. On 28 December, HNEC Chairman Al-Sayeh briefed the LPDF’s legal committee on measures taken by the HNEC to strengthen its institutional capacity as part of planning for different scenarios to implement elections on 24 December.

Dr. Al Sayeh reiterated the Commission’s technical readiness to implement the elections while pointing out that the HNEC’s ability to start concrete preparation for the elections will be dependent on the allocation of sufficient resources and remains limited until an electoral legislation is put in place.

I also welcome the holding of eight municipal council elections conducted by the Central Committee for Municipal Council Elections (CCMCE) in and around Tripoli, despite the challenges of operating in a post-war context. I appeal to all stakeholders involved to respect the integrity and inclusivity of electoral processes in Libya.

Three municipal elections were also held in the eastern Wahat municipalities. All stakeholders must work together to ensure the uniformity of electoral processes across Libya. The achievement of conducting over 130 council elections since 2013 must be preserved; it is time to unify the two institutions under one roof.

*Mr. President,*

Steady progress has been made on the economic track with significant economic reforms advanced over the period. If these reforms are fully implemented, they will smooth the way toward durable economic arrangements, including the transparent management of oil revenues.

With the holding oil revenues in abeyance by the National Oil Corporation (NOC), the past month has witnessed unprecedented and long overdue economic reforms, including the reactivation of the Central Bank of Libya (CBL) Board of Directors, the unification of the exchange rate, progress on the financial review of the CBL, and the launching of the first comprehensive audit of the Libyan Investment Authority.

Despite these reforms, two critical measures remain outstanding. The first is the easing of the banking crisis through the issuance of loans to commercial banks in order to clear the backlog of cheques issued on credit lines created by the eastern branch of the CBL.

The other outstanding issue is the consolidation and unification of the national budget for 2021. Both Ministers of Finance have developed a unified budget and UNSMIL has supported the World Bank with convening two meetings in January between the ministries to work on unifying the charter of accounts.

There are limitations, however, to fully unifying the budget in the absence of a unified executive. As a result of UNSMIL facilitated mediation, I am pleased to report the relevant Libyan parties have reached essential agreement on the budget components and arranged for a working level group to meet to finalize a two-month budget and the procedures for implementation. Upon conclusion, this process now actively underway is designed to enable immediate implementation.

*Mr. President,*

While the guns have fallen silent, communities continued to face the repercussions of war and the convulsions of the gross violations of human rights committed during the conflict. In Tarhouna, additional mass graves were discovered in January with at least 18 bodies found. Lack of accountability and justice in Tarhouna led to protests by victims’ families on 23 January, which sadly degenerated to violence with some protestors setting five homes on fire. The root causes of the tensions in Tarhouna should be addressed through a multifaced approach combining human rights protection and the rule of law, security sector reform, and reconciliation and transitional justice mechanisms.

The situation regarding the uncontrolled proliferation of arms, ammunition, and explosive ordnance continues to pose a major threat. I would like to pay tribute to the teams who have worked tirelessly to eliminate the threats in the most dangerous areas, 71 of whom have been killed or injured since May 2020, while also confronting the added threat from COVID-19. The Ceasefire Agreement presents a critical opportunity to mitigate this threat through the commitment by both sides to implement the measures outlined in the accompanying Mine Action protocol, which will save lives and help restore peace.

Since the suspension in fighting in June 2020, families have continued to return to Tripoli, with approximately 114,000 people returning since the end of fighting. Across Libya there has been a 26 per cent reduction in the number of displaced people, from a high of 426,000 people in June to 316,000 people.

For those that remain displaced, they face many perils and uncertainty. On 19 January, an ammunition depot exploded at the Naval Academy in Janzour, Tripoli. The Naval Academy is home to over 600 displaced families who fled Tawergha in 2011. Among the casualties were four IDPs, one who died instantly. Many other displaced families face evictions from places where they have been living. We continue to work with the authorities to ensure that people who have been displaced from their homes are provided with dignified and durable solutions.

The UN and partners continue to advocate for, and support, the release of migrants and refugees from detention and the closing of detention centres. We welcome the release of the remaining 121 migrants and refugees earlier this month from the Zintan Detention Centre into the community in Tripoli. UNHCR, WFP and partners are providing released detainees with assistance. Despite these positive developments, as of 19 January, more than 900 migrants and refugees remain in official detention centres in Libya.

We were also saddened to learn that on 19 January, at least 43 people drowned, and 10 survivors were rescued, in the first shipwreck of 2021, off the coast of Libya. In 2020, more than 11,900 migrants and refugees trying to reach Europe were intercepted at sea and returned to Libya, which by all definitions is not a safe port for return.

The impact of COVID-19 continues to make life more challenging for some of the country’s most vulnerable people. The number of COVID-19 cases and deaths continues to increase month-on-month. As of 23 January, there are 113,688 confirmed cases and 1,763 deaths.

Prices for food and basic supplies remain well above pre-COVID levels while many others have lost access to their livelihoods. In 2020, 1.3 million people are in need of some form of humanitarian assistance. Of those, the UN and humanitarian partners, through the 2021 Humanitarian Response Plan released this month, is requesting $189 million to reach 451,000 people with food, health, protection, shelter, education, as well as water, sanitation and hygiene.

*Mr. President,*

As I head to Geneva tomorrow for a decisive round of intra-Libyan talks which is expected to result in the creation of a new temporary unified executive, I remind all prospective candidates that high office comes with high responsibilities. In this, my last briefing to this Council, I also remind all parties, States with vested interests in Libya, and importantly those Libyans who seek executive office, that Libya’s future is in your hands.

I want to pay tribute to all the Libyans who have worked courageously and in good faith to plant the seeds of reconciliation and fulfil the aspirations of their fellow citizens.

I also want to thank this Council for its support to my efforts as Acting Special Representative of the Secretary-General over the past 11 months and to the members of the Berlin Process and the many generous donors that have accompanied and sustained the UN -facilitated intra-Libyan dialogue. This Council should signal its clear support for the new Libyan unified government through the issuance of a resolution that also calls for the dissolution of all remaining parallel executive entities.

As incoming Special Envoy Jan Kubis, Coordinator Raisedon Zenenga and Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator Georgette Gagnon take over the reins of the UN Mission in Libya, I wish to pay special tribute to former SRSG Ghassan Salame for his inspired leadership, mentorship, and guidance in laying the solid foundation upon which this process rests and to former DSRSG and Humanitarian Coordinator Yacoub El-Hillo for his distinguished service.

Last, but not least, I wish to thank the entire UN team working on Libya for their dedication and commitment, working tirelessly to make this process possible.

Thank you.