

Yemen Warring Parties Agree to Truce

Nearly four years after an escalated fight between the Government of Yemen and Houthi opposition movement, known officially as Ansar Allah, which is described as the worst humanitarian crisis in the world, the warring parties in Yemen have agreed to a ceasefire in the Houthi-held port city of Hodaydah, on 13 December, and placed it under local control at the close of talks on Thursday, in a breakthrough for UN-led peace efforts to end the war. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said he hoped this would be the starting point to bring nearly four years of civil war to a close.

Yemen has been devastated by a conflict that escalated in early 2015, when the Houthis seized control of much of the west of the country and forced President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi to flee abroad. At least 6,660 civilians have been killed and 10,560 injured in the fighting, according to the UN. Thousands more civilians have died from preventable causes, including malnutrition, disease and poor health. The World Health Organization (WHO) warned in October that about 10,000 new suspected cases of cholera were now being reported every week. Some 20 million are food insecure and 10 million of these people do not know how they will obtain their next meal in Yemen.

The UN Secretary-General stated that the agreement will see a mutual re-deployment of forces from the port and the city, and the establishment of a Governorate-wide ceasefire. This will facilitate the humanitarian access and the flow of goods to the civilian population. It will improve the living conditions for millions of Yemenis, he further stated. While noting that “pending issues” have yet to be resolved, the UN chief said that representatives from the internationally-recognised Government of Yemen and the opposition had made “real progress” which had yielded “several important results”. These included a “mutual understanding to ease the situation in Taizz”, Mr Guterres said, in reference to the country’s third largest city. “We hope this will lead to the opening of humanitarian corridors and the facilitation of demining,” he added.

On the previously-agreed issue of a mass exchange of prisoners, the UN Secretary-General noted that both delegations had drawn up a timeline and provided further details on when it might happen. Looking ahead to a new meeting between both parties in the new year, he insisted that another “very important step for the peace process” had been agreed, namely a willingness to discuss a framework for negotiations. Noting that the parties would have to continue to discuss this further at the end of January during the next round of negotiations, Mr. Guterres said, adding that it was a “critical element” of a future political settlement to end the conflict.