

UN condemns Houthi attacks on Saudi oil facilities as detrimental to peace efforts

Mon, 2022-03-21 22:54

NEW YORK: The UN condemned Sunday's Houthi attacks on Saudi Arabia, with Spokesperson Stephane Dujarric saying such attacks on civilians and infrastructure are prohibited by international humanitarian law.

"These actions damage prospects of peace and regional stability and are detrimental to the ongoing mediation efforts of our Special envoy Hans Grundberg," Dujarric told reporters in New York on Monday.

"We call upon all parties to exercise maximum restraint and avoid any further escalation," he added.

On Saturday night and Sunday, Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi militia fired a barrage of missiles and drones strikes targeting a Saudi petroleum products distribution terminal in the southern Jizan region, a water desalination plant in Al-Shaqeeq, a power station in Dhahran Al-Janub, a gas station in Khamis Mushayt and an LNG facility in the Red Sea port of Yanbu.

The Houthi attacks came just as a meeting in Oman was convened by the UN Special Envoy for Yemen Hans Grundberg with Houthi chief negotiator Mohammad Abdulsalam and Omani officials as part of the envoy's efforts to address the dire humanitarian situation in Yemen, including a possible truce during the upcoming Holy month of Ramadan.

Dujarric said that Grundberg, however, is "not discouraged in the least" and will continue to work toward "at least a cessation of hostilities or a truce during the upcoming month of Ramadan."

Dujarric added: "We strongly urge the parties to engage constructively and without precondition with Grundberg and his mediation efforts with the main aim of advancing the political process to reach a comprehensive negotiated settlement to end the conflict in Yemen."

The militia has continued to refuse to allow Grundberg to visit Sanaa. Dujarric declined to comment on whether there has been any progress toward facilitating the envoy's visit there.

The Houthi attacks also come one week ahead of GCC-sponsored peace talks between Yemeni factions. The Houthis have rejected invitations to attend these meetings.

"Given the delicate security situation in these parts, once he's in Sanaa we would announce it. But I have nothing to share with you at the moment," Dujarric said.



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Houthis under fire for ruining peace efforts to end war

[Community mediation aids social justice and peace in Syria's war-torn Deir Ezzor](#)

Mon, 2022-03-21 21:23

BEIRUT: The years of war in Syria has left an indelible mark on the countryside of Deir Ezzor governorate with significant economic, social and security effects, including the widespread destruction of infrastructure, the absence of effective policing and the emergence of extremist groups.

The Syrian Democratic Forces formed by Kurdish units, and the Syrian regime's forces share control of the governorate.

The largest part of the province remained under the control of Daesh for years. This was until the regime's forces and Iranian militias took control of the area south of the Euphrates River in late 2017, while the SDF asserted its authority in the area north of the river in early 2019.

After the fighting stopped and the security situation improved, the local residents in the area sought to restore community relations, but were hampered by the absence of courts. This situation was further exacerbated by the withdrawal of the Syrian authorities from this area, resulting in various local groups vying for control.

Since 2021, a number of activists and social actors, in cooperation with five civil society associations and organizations, namely Dirna, Furatna, Sama, Mary and Ensaf, have called for the formation of community mediation committees to resolve legal and other disputes, and to break the cycle of violence in the conflict-ridden society.

These committees were formed with a number of local dignitaries, jurists, and educated people of good social standing. There was also a significant presence of women activists who worked on resolving issues related to females.

Mohammed Awad Al-Mohammed, chairman of the board of directors of the Ensaf Development Organization, and who is responsible for the body's peace-building projects, told Arab News: "The war has resulted in countless problems of displacement and siege, causing a change in people's behavior and lives, especially during Daesh's 3-year control of the region."

He said this led to a breakdown in social cohesion, with disputes arising over lost property documents, identity cards, and others related to debts and loans.

Al-Mohammed stressed: "People want stability, but in the absence of courts, disputes arose, and some sought to settle old disputes. So the idea of forming mediation committees emerged. The committees include influential and respected clan figures who intervened to resolve disputes at the request of one of the parties ... based on Islamic law and clan custom."

The community mediation committees have resolved many issues, including clan disputes, revenge or murder, and others related to divorce, marriage, and inheritance. They have also contributed to solving economic problems, such as distributing aid to families, and regulating the provision of electricity, water and bread.

These committees also resolved personal disputes resulting from traffic accidents and extortion through social media.

It is estimated that the work of these committees has benefited directly or indirectly nearly 500,000 people residing in the villages and towns of Deir Ezzor.

These bodies have relied on their members' experience and knowledge. Al-Mohammed, who is a lawyer, said the resolution of disputes is accompanied by

awareness-raising efforts which have included supporting women's Islamic inheritance rights, in the face of the "greed" of some men.

"Because the women who lived through the war were in need, they began to demand their rights, something they did not do before the war."

Al-Mohammed said there have been particular difficulties from people still holding onto their arms. "Even traffic accidents may be exploited by armed men. The fragility of the security situation leads to new conflicts or revives old problems."

He indicated that at the onset people were ashamed or hesitated to approach mediation committees because they were accustomed to going through the courts. "There were 50 courts in Deir Ezzor, now there is one court, which is more than 110 kilometers away, (this is) in addition to (the) high costs and the bureaucracy of the courts. We shortened the distance and the time through (these) social justice (bodies) because it gives immediate results, and we have been able to solve individual problems that are over 15 years old."

In promoting and providing continuity to the efforts of the committees, a group of activists, in cooperation with the Dirna, Furatna, Samah, Mary, and Ensaf organizations, launched the "Peace Is Good" campaign.

The campaign coordinator, Ayman Allaw, told Arab News: "The campaign is about five months old, and we are working in a tribal and clan area where problems abound. The idea of Peace Is Good did not exist in this area. It was the force of arms that deterred people, and in the absence of the government, ignorance prevailed and the strong killed the weak. Therefore, the idea of Peace Is Good was welcomed by the clergy, jurists, and reputable clansmen."

Allaw said the area in which they work was controlled during the war by the Free Syrian Army militias, then Jabhat Al-Nusra, then Daesh, followed by the Syrian regime and now the SDF. He said people were psychologically traumatized by the war. Some "individuals exploited the war to gain power and influence" which led people to seek refuge in the mediation committees because they included respected community leaders, he added.

The mediation committees appear determined not to politicize their work, and have called on aid groups and wealthy individuals to provide assistance. Allaw said the committees should operate widely, but added that Deir Ezzor may face the most difficulties because of the lack of educated people to work with the clans.

Al-Mohammed added that the mediation committees have contributed to promoting peace through conflict resolution and he hoped this could become part of the society's culture.





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Anti-Kurdish demonstrations grow in Syria's Deir Ezzor

[Financial crisis in Lebanon escalates as banks begin two-day strike](#)

Author:

Mon, 2022-03-21 21:05

BEIRUT: Lebanese banks on Monday declared a two-day strike in protest against judicial decisions issued against Fransabank, Credit Bank, Banque du Liban et d'Outre Mer, Bank of Beirut, Societe Generale, Bankmed, and Aoudi Bank.

The banks condemned the rulings as arbitrary, noting that some lawsuits filed by depositors are related to their requests to recover US dollar funds that have been withheld by the banks for more than two years.

The strike puts the banks on a collision course with the judiciary. The banks and the political elite are now awaiting the outcome of meetings between Minister of Justice Henry Khoury and the heads of the judiciary, as ordered by Prime Minister Najib Mikati based on the principle of separation of powers.

The situation was exacerbated on Monday after Judge Ghada Aoun, the public prosecutor of appeal in Mount Lebanon, ordered the temporary seizure of real estate properties belong to Rajah Salameh – the brother of Riad Salameh, the governor of the Banque du Liban – who was detained on Friday in connection with activities involving the public treasury “which was proven to have been wasted according to the preliminary investigations.”

Judge Aoun said she has now referred Rajah Salameh to prosecutors after having previously referred him to the first investigating Judge in Mount Lebanon, Nicolas Mansour.

Riad Salameh, meanwhile, on Monday failed to show up for a session during which he was scheduled to appear before a judge. As a result, Judge Aoun filed charges against him, businesswoman Anna Kozakova, and a number of companies on charges of “illicit enrichment and money laundering,” and referred the cases Mansour.

In response to the allegations against him, Riad Salameh told Reuters: "I ordered an audit and it was proven that public money was not the source of my wealth."

Judge Aoun's preliminary investigations were carried out in response to a lawsuit filed by activist group Rouwwad Al-Adalah, which translates as Pioneers of Justice.

The Union of Bank Employees, which supported the banks in their strike, said it hoped that "the judiciary deals objectively with the crisis with the banks, because the last judiciary decisions did not only affect the concerned banks but bypassed them to touch all the banking sector, noting that its results will be disastrous for the sector abroad."

The political and legal debate sparked arguments about the legality and illegality of procedures and the economic effects of targeting the banks. There are fears that the banks might escalate their action, which might include an indefinite strike in protest against decisions by the judiciary in favor of depositors.

The Association Des Banques du Liban called on "political authorities to take the necessary steps to stop the legal violations against the banks, and stop the scandalous infringements of some parties, especially the judiciary, in violating the laws and continuing the arbitrary and barbaric practices that would result in a judicial chaos."

The private banks blame the political authorities and BDL for the deposits crisis, as a result of continuing to take out loans and failing to pay them off, noting that banks continued lending money to the state despite knowing that it would not be paid back because of corruption.

The Federation of Unions of Bank Employees called for the public to be informed "about the reasons which led to the evaporation of the banks' deposits and to the aggravation of the crisis between depositors and the banks," and said that "successive governments continued their borrowing policies and kept on spending money without any monitoring until the country fell into the crisis."

It also queried the role of "the Supreme Judicial Council and the Judicial Inspection Authority in monitoring the work of judges, and the extent to which some judges adhere to the principles of judicial work, especially with regards to the banking sector."

On Monday, the exchange rate of the US dollar against the Lebanese pound further increased in light of the bank strike, raising fears among the public that prices will increase again. Workers in the public and private sectors and pensioners expressed anger about not being able to withdraw their salaries and pensions from the banks.

Sarkhat Al-Moudiin, which translates as Depositors Outcry, and other activists' groups threatened "in the upcoming days to expand their efforts to determine criminal and financial responsibilities that led to the current

financial crisis, in preparation to hold the politicians responsible, and in order for everyone to get what they deserve.”



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Lebanon PM Najib Mikati says some judges stoking tension within country
Lebanon's Fransabank closes all branches after judicial order, source says

[Egypt condemns Houthi attacks on Saudi facilities](#)

Author:

Mon, 2022-03-21 20:45

CAIRO: The Egyptian government has condemned the Houthis' attack on economic and civilian facilities in Saudi Arabia, describing the actions as flouting international law.

In a statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Egypt slammed "in the strongest terms, the Houthi militia's continuation of its despicable terrorist attacks (on) the territory of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the

latest of which was (on) economic and civil(ian) facilities at dawn on Sunday, with drones and ballistic missiles.”

The statement stressed that this was a “great escalation” and violated international law. Egypt reaffirmed its support for the Kingdom.

The attacks took place on Saturday night and in the early hours of Sunday morning. The Houthi actions come ahead of GCC-sponsored peace talks between Yemeni factions that the militia said they would not attend. The talks are due to take place from March 29 in Riyadh.



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Extremists suspected in gunfire on Tunisia police post

Author:

Sun, 2022-03-20 23:42

TUNIS: A firefight broke out between suspected terrorists and police near a national guard barracks on Sunday in the central Tunisian region of Kairouan, police said.

They said in a statement that gunmen in a car opened fire but were repelled by a "massive" retaliatory barrage, without any casualties reported in the exchange.

Those responsible for "this cowardly attack were probably ... part of a terrorist cell," operating between Kairouan and Sousse in eastern Tunisia, that had been dismantled with arrests made, the statement said.

The attack came on Tunisia's independence day and with the country plunged in political crisis.

Following the 2011 revolution, Tunisia saw a surge in militant attacks across the country.

Many Tunisians also traveled to Syria or Iraq to join Daesh or other extremists.

In March 2016, 13 members of the security forces, seven civilians and at least 55 terrorists were killed as Daesh members launched a battle in the town of Ben Guerdane near the border with Libya.

The situation has since vastly improved but Tunisian security forces continue to hunt suspected jihadists.

On March 4, a Tunisian court sentenced 16 people to death in the first judgments against extremists involved in the Ben Guerdane attacks.



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