

Help build solid basis for Libyan elections and don't fixate on dates, Security Council told

Tue, 2022-01-25 01:17

NEW YORK: Mediators need to take into account the lessons learned in Libya in the past two years and focus on "creating milestones" for the country's political transition, rather than fixating on the time frame involved, according to Elham Saudi, co-founder and director of Lawyers for Justice in Libya.

These milestones include an electoral law, a code for conducting elections, and a solid constitutional basis "that appropriately sequences presidential and legislative elections in line with the broader road map to complete (the) transition effectively," he said.

Addressing the UN Security Council on Monday during its regular meeting about developments in Libya, Saudi said that when these steps are implemented, elections will naturally follow and will be "far easier to manage, protect and successfully deliver."

Stephanie Williams, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres's special adviser on Libya, recently reiterated the importance of holding elections "in the shortest possible time frame." She said this month that "it is possible, and needed, to have elections before the end of June."

However, Saudi said that "focusing on the dates for the elections instead of a clear process to facilitate them risks once again compromising due process for the sake of perceived political expediency."

Growing polarization among political powers in the country and disputes over key aspects of the electoral process – including shortcomings in the legal framework for the elections, contradictory court rulings on candidacies, and political and security concerns as cited by the High National Commission for Elections – resulted in the postponement of the elections, which had been scheduled to take place on Dec. 24 last year.

Saudi reminded members of the Security Council that "accountability is a prerequisite to political progress. Poorly defined and fundamentally weak vetting criteria applied to candidates applying for elections resulted in individuals implicated in corruption or crimes against humanity and human rights violations, including persons who have been indicted by the ICC (International Criminal Court), being accepted as candidates."

Following the postponement of polling in December, Libya's House of Representatives established a "road map committee" to develop a new path toward national elections. The committee will present its first report for debate on Tuesday in Tripoli.

Rosemary DiCarlo, the UN's under-secretary-general for political and peacebuilding affairs, welcomed what she described as renewed efforts by Libya's Presidency Council to advance national reconciliation but lamented the political uncertainty in the run-up to the elections. which she said has "negatively impacted the overall security situation, including in Tripoli, resulting in shifting alliances among armed groups affiliated with certain presidential candidates."

She expressed concern about the human rights situation in Libya, citing "incidents of elections-related violence and attacks based on political affiliation, as well as threats and violence against members of the judiciary involved in proceedings on eligibility of electoral candidates, and against journalists, activists and individuals expressing political views."

DiCarlo added: "Such incidents are an obstacle to creating a conducive environment for free, fair, peaceful and credible elections."

Taher El-Sonni, Libya's permanent representative to the UN, told the Security Council that while some people had been surprised by the postponement of elections, it had been widely expected.

"In light of the crisis of trust and the absence of a constitution for the country, or a consensual constitutional rule as advocated by most political forces now, it will be very difficult to conduct these elections successfully because the elections are supposed to be a means of political participation and not a means of predominance and exclusion, and a means to support stability and not an end in itself that may open the way for a new conflict," he said.

El-Sonni called on the UN to offer more "serious and effective" support to the electoral process and send teams to assess the requirements on the ground.

"This would be a clear message to all about the seriousness of the international community in achieving elections that everyone aspires to, without questioning it or its results," he said.

The Libyan envoy invited the council to "actively contribute" to the processes of national reconciliation and transitional justice, "two concomitant and essential tracks that have unfortunately been lost during the past years, although they are the main basis for the success of any political solution that leads to the stability of the country."

He also once again called on the African Union to support his country's efforts in this area.

Ambassador Jeffrey DeLaurentis, senior advisor for special political affairs to the US mission at the UN, said it is time for the wishes of the millions of Libyans who have registered to vote to be respected.

"It is time to move beyond backroom deals between a small circle of powerful individuals backed by armed groups, carving up spoils and protecting their positions," he said "The Libyan people are ready to decide their own future."

“Those vying to lead Libya must see that the Libyan people will only accept leadership empowered by elections and that they will only tolerate so much delay.”

Like many other ambassadors at the meeting, DeLaurentis also addressed the migrant crisis and reports of violence and abuses directed at migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in Libya.

“Libyan authorities must close illicit detention centers, end arbitrary detention practices and permit unhindered humanitarian access to affected populations,” he said.



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[Coalition in Yemen begins military operations in Sanaa](#)

Tue, 2022-01-25 00:55

RIYADH: The Coalition to Restore Legitimacy in Yemen said on Monday that it had begun “military operations” against “legitimate targets” in the capital, Sanaa, Saudi state TV reported.

The coalition said the operation is in response to threats and out of military necessity to protect civilians from hostile attacks.

The Iran-backed Houthi militia launched missiles toward Saudi Arabia and the UAE earlier on Monday, sparking widespread condemnation from the international community.

Meanwhile, the coalition said it carried out 14 operations targeting the Houthi militia in Marib and Al-Bayda during the past 24 hours, killing more than 50 fighters and destroying nine military vehicles.



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Syria Saudi Arabia leads condemnation of Houthi missile attacks on Abu Dhabi, Kingdom

US 'prepared to meet directly' and 'urgently' with Iran on nuclear issue

Mon, 2022-01-24 23:49

WASHINGTON: The US State Department on Monday repeated that it remains open to meeting with Iranian officials directly to discuss the nuclear deal and other issues after Iran's foreign minister said Tehran would consider this but had made no decisions.

Speaking at a briefing, State Department spokesman Ned Price also said the US had not made Iran's releasing four Americans a condition of reaching an agreement for both nations to resume compliance with the nuclear deal, saying that achieving such an agreement was an uncertain proposition.

Earlier on Monday, the State Department said the US was prepared to hold direct talks with Iran after Tehran said it would consider such an option.

"We are prepared to meet directly," a State Department spokesperson said. "We have long held the position that it would be more productive to engage with Iran directly, on both JCPOA negotiations and other issues," the spokesperson said, referring to the nuclear deal between Iran and major powers.

The spokesperson said that meeting directly would allow "more efficient communication" needed to reach an understanding on what is needed to resuscitate the 2015 deal.

"Given the pace of Iran's nuclear advances, we are almost out of time to reach an understanding on mutual return to full implementation of the JCPOA," the official said.

The comments came after Iran said Monday it will consider direct talks with the United States during ongoing negotiations in Vienna aimed at restoring the deal.

"Iran is not currently talking with the US directly," Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said in televised remarks.

"But, if during the negotiation process we get to a point that reaching a good agreement with solid guarantees requires a level of talks with the US, we will not ignore that in our work schedule," he added.

(With AFP and Reuters)



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Iran: 'Possible' to agree on prisoners, nuclear deal
Iran nuclear agreement unlikely without release of US prisoners – Malley

['Horror scenes' in Syrian refugee camps amid 'extremely cold winter': UN official](#)

Mon, 2022-01-24 23:05

LONDON: Brutal winter conditions in northern Syria have ushered in mass-scale suffering for 2.8 million internally displaced persons, a top UN humanitarian official warned on Monday.

"We're extremely concerned about the situation there," Mark Cutts, the UN's deputy regional humanitarian coordinator for Syria, said in a briefing attended by Arab News.

The IDPs, he added, are "some of the most vulnerable people in the world," the majority of them living in temporary camps and tents.

"During this extremely cold weather, we've seen some real horror scenes in the last few days – about 1,000 tents have either collapsed completely or been very badly damaged as a result of heavy snow," said Cutts, adding that temperatures have dropped to as low as -7 degrees centigrade.

About 100,000 people have been affected by the heavy snow, while 150,000 more have been affected by freezing conditions and heavy rain.

"These are people who've been through a lot in the past few years. They've fled from one place to another. The bombs have followed them. Many of the hospitals and schools in northwest Syria have been destroyed in the 10 years of war," said Cutts, adding that what he and his team are seeing in camps now is a "real disaster zone."

He said: "Our humanitarian workers have been pulling people out from under their collapsed tents ... They've been clearing snow from tents with their bare hands."

Children, the elderly and the disabled are suffering the most from the conditions, added Cutts, who appealed to the international community to "do more, to recognize the scale of the crisis, to help us get these people out of tents and into safer, more dignified temporary shelter."

In a final plea, he said: "It's absolutely unacceptable that you've got 1.7 million people living in camps in these appalling conditions – most of them are women and children and elderly people.

"These civilians are stranded in a warzone, and now, on top of that, they're dealing with temperatures below zero. No one should have to live in these conditions."



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[Iran: 'Possible' to agree on prisoners, nuclear deal](#)

Mon, 2022-01-24 23:11

TEHRAN: Tehran on Monday said it is "possible" to reach an agreement on the two issues of Iran-US prisoners' release and the Vienna talks to restore the 2015 nuclear deal.

"They are two different paths, but if the other party (the US) has the determination, there is the possibility that we reach a reliable and lasting agreement in both of them in the shortest time," Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said during his weekly press conference.

Khatibzadeh's comments came in reaction to remarks made by the US envoy for Iran, Robert Malley, who on Sunday said it is unlikely that Washington would strike an agreement unless Tehran releases four US citizens.

BACKGROUND

The four US citizens held in Iran are Iranian-American businessman Siamak Namazi, 50, and his father Baquer, 85, as well as environmentalist Morad Tahbaz, 66, and businessman Emad Sharqi, 57.

“Iran has not accepted any precondition from day one of the negotiations,” Khatibzadeh said.

He added that “the negotiations are complicated enough, and should not get more complex with complicated remarks.”



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Iran nuclear agreement unlikely without release of US prisoners – Malley