BRIEFING BY HIS EXCELLENCY AMBASSADOR SMAIL CHERGUI

COMMISSIONER FOR PEACE AND SECURITY

AT THE MEETING OF THE UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL,

ON LIBYA

8 July 2020

(Check Against Delivery)
Mister President,

Distinguished Members of the Security Council,

I want to thank you, Minister Maas, and indeed, the Security Council for convening this important meeting on the situation in Libya. This is a testimony once again of the determination of Germany to sustain the current momentum in the search of a durable solution to the ongoing unstable situations as you successfully did by organising the Sudan Partnership Conference on 25 June 2020 to ensure a safe political and economic transition in this country.

Mr. President,

The situation in Libya remains of great concern to the African Union. Since the beginning of this year, the African Union High Level Committee has met four times; first in January in Brazzaville, second in February during the AU Summit, last March in Oyo and in May during a High level virtual meeting. This is a demonstration of our resolve as a continent to find a lasting solution to the crisis in the brotherly country. As we speak, there are ongoing efforts by our leaders to secure a ceasefire and bring the parties to the negotiation table.

Unfortunately, on the ground, despite limited direct confrontation between the Government of National Accord (GNA) and the Libyan National Army (LNA) in the last few weeks, we are observing a military build-up on both sides in anticipation of more fighting particularly near the town of Sirte. The LNA is preparing to defend the town of Sirte and Al Jufra, which are home to important oil installations and have called them the “red lines”. Meanwhile the GNA considers that leaving the two towns into the hands of the LNA is also a “red line”.

In a more recent development, on July 5th, foreign fighting jets targeted the Al-Watiya airbase in western Libya and damaged air defence systems installed at the airbase. This incident raised concerns that the airstrike could further deepen foreign military involvement in the country.

Mr President,

It is unfortunate that despite numerous calls, and despite commitments made during the Berlin conference, the flow of sophisticated weapons and mercenaries into Libya continues unabated. This is in violation of numerous United Nations Security Council resolutions and arms embargo on Libya. The time has come for this Council to take action and consider appropriate measures for those who consistently make it difficult to find a solution to this crisis.

On the political front there is little progress to report. The diplomatic engagements witnessed in the last few weeks have been each side lobbying for support for their positions or mediation to lift the oil blockade. No tangible results was registered in securing a lasting ceasefire. The 5+5 Joint military Commission meetings that met last June virtually discussed preconditions for a ceasefire.
We need to redouble our efforts to secure a lasting ceasefire, a pre-requisite for genuine dialogue and reconciliation. It is also high time for the international community to recognize the value of a political track that is bottom up and people-centred approach. Indeed, it is the Libyan people who are the sole custodian of legitimacy.

On the economic front, the country continues to suffer from the ongoing civil conflict and the oil blockade that was imposed by the LNA on 17 January 2020 has resulted in over US$ 6 billion in lost revenue for the Government.

Mr. President,
We are pleased that the UN Human Rights Council adopted a resolution on 22 June to establish an international fact finding mission to Libya to promote accountability for the human rights abuses in the country. We were also encouraged by the UN’s intention to investigate possible war crimes and crimes against humanity in Libya and to look into the recently uncovered mass graves in and around Tarhouna. The AU has made similar calls for an independent and transparent investigation into the mass graves not only in Tarhouna but into the human rights violations carried out in the country since the beginning of the civil conflict.

The already difficult humanitarian situation in the country has been further complicated by COVID 19. As of July 5, the number of COVID 19 cases stood at 1046 including 25 deaths. The epicentre of seems to be southern Libya which has registered half of the cases reported. Meanwhile, civilians continued to be impacted by the conflict. Humanitarian access and clearances remain difficult to obtain in the cities of Tarhouna, Bani Walid and Sirte. The military build-up, by both parties compromise the fate of 125,000 civilians in and around Sirte, with an estimated 60,000 remaining inside the city and deemed to be at immediate risk.

This year, a total of approximately 5,300 refugees/migrants have been intercepted/rescued at sea and returned to Libya, the majority of them taken to detention facilities. Just this week more than 300 were rescued from the sea.

The African Union and its Member States continues to grapple with the issue of human trafficking and we are deeply concerned about the fate of African migrants in Libya. I would like to take this opportunity to call once again for the international protection of African migrants held and detained in Libya with the purpose of utilizing them as combatants and/or human shields and for their repatriation to their countries of origin.

Mr. President,
We are pleased that all four International Follow up Committee on Libya (IFCL) technical working groups have continued their interactions and are making progress. We would like to see their work translated into an impact on the ground to alleviate the prolonged suffering and despair of the Libyan people.
In conclusion, I count on my colleagues today around this table to go above and beyond a review of the political and security situation, and to focus on an immediate cessation of hostilities and return to the political dialogue. It is also time for accountability. This war was imposed on the people of Libya 9 years ago. The least we can give them is to hold accountable those who refuse to end their suffering.
I thank you for your kind attention.