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UN-brokered Yemen peace talks end with no deal, ceasefire

UN calls for \$ 1.6 billion to help millions of Yemenis avoid a "looming humanitarian catastrophe."

Yemen's exiled government and Houthi rebels who control the capital failed to agree on even a temporary ceasefire on Friday as they wrapped up UN-brokered talks aimed at ending a conflict that has killed over 1,000 civilians and displaced more than a million since March.



The collapse of the talks came as Saudi-led airstrikes continued to pound the Iran-backed rebels and their allies, killing at least 10 civilians in a northern rebel stronghold, witnesses said. The UN meanwhile called for \$ 1.6 billion to help millions of Yemenis avoid a "looming humanitarian catastrophe."

UN envoy Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, who mediated the talks in Geneva, told reporters that the two sides broadly favour a ceasefire that would have rebels withdraw from cities and towns seized in recent months and the coalition halt its air campaign against them.

"We didn't reach a final agreement. We have to be clear and transparent," he said, adding that a deal "will require further consultation."

"I come out with a certain degree of optimism," he added. "It's a matter of time."

The fighting in Yemen pits the Houthis and allied troops loyal to former President Ali Abdullah Saleh against southern separatists, local and tribal militias, militants and loyalists of President Abderabbo Mansour Hadi, who is now based in Saudi Arabia. The rebels seized the capital, Sanaa, in September.

Iran supports the rebels, known as Houthis, but denies arming them. The US backs the Saudi-led coalition, which began launching airstrikes against the Houthis and their allies in late March, but has made little progress in pushing the rebels back.

The exiled government had demanded the implementation of a UN Security Council resolution requiring the rebels to withdraw from cities and towns, including the capital.

The Houthis had called for a temporary ceasefire, but the government rejected it, saying the rebels had used a previous humanitarian pause to grab more land. Mediators had hoped to broker at least a temporary ceasefire for Ramadan, which began on Thursday.

Ould Cheikh Ahmed said the Houthis had signaled their willingness to implement the UN resolution in a proposal presented to him on Thursday, without elaborating on its contents. Another proposal called for deploying civilian observers to verify a ceasefire, he said.

"There is no doubt that there is ground for reaching a ceasefire accompanied by withdrawal. What is important is that we all remember that there is a miserable humanitarian situation in Yemen," he said.

UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said there has been no date set for a second round of talks but that "discussions can still happen without people meeting in Geneva."

"We're taking this day-by-day, step-by-step," Dujarric told reporters at UN headquarters in New York. He said Ould Cheikh Ahmed would return to New York to brief the Security Council before likely embarking on another trip to the region for further consultations.

Yemen's Foreign Minister Riad Yassin had earlier told the Al Jazeera network that international partners are "frustrated," and said the Houthis would bear the blame if the talks failed.

The Friday morning airstrikes targeted Sanaa, the southern city of Aden and the provinces of Lahj and Jouf, officials and witnesses said. The 10 civilians were killed in strikes on the rebels' northern stronghold, Saada, witnesses said. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak to the press. The witnesses insisted on anonymity for fear of retribution.

UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Stephen O'Brien meanwhile warned of a "looming humanitarian catastrophe," with at least 11.7 million people affected by the conflict. He requested \$ 1.6 billion dollars in emergency aid.

"People across the country are struggling to feed their families. Basic services are collapsing in all regions. Millions of families no longer have access to clean water, proper sanitation or basic healthcare. Deadly diseases such as dengue and malaria have broken out, and supplies for acute trauma care are running dangerously low," he said in Geneva.

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