



# Security Council

Seventy-ninth year

**9525**<sup>th</sup> meeting

Wednesday, 3 January 2024, 3 p.m.

New York

*Provisional*

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*President:* Mr. De Rivière . . . . . (France)

*Members:*

Algeria . . . . .	Mr. Bendjama
China . . . . .	Mr. Geng Shuang
Ecuador . . . . .	Mr. De La Gasca
Guyana . . . . .	Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett
Japan . . . . .	Mr. Yamazaki
Malta . . . . .	Mrs. Frazier
Mozambique . . . . .	Mr. Fernandes
Republic of Korea . . . . .	Mr. Hwang
Russian Federation . . . . .	Mr. Nebenzia
Sierra Leone . . . . .	Mr. Kanu
Slovenia . . . . .	Mr. Žbogar
Switzerland . . . . .	Mr. Hauri
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Kariuki
United States of America . . . . .	Mr. Lu

## Agenda

Maintenance of international peace and security

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*The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.*

### **Expression of welcome to the new members of the Security Council and of thanks to the outgoing members**

**The President** (*spoke in French*): At the start of this, the first formal meeting of the Security Council this year, I should like to wish a happy New Year to all members of the Security Council, the United Nations and the Secretariat.

In presiding over this first formal meeting of the Council in 2024, I am happy to welcome the new members: Algeria, Guyana, the Republic of Korea, Sierra Leone and Slovenia. We look forward to their participation in the work of the Council. Their experience and wisdom will be of invaluable assistance in the discharge of the Council's responsibilities.

I shall also take this opportunity to express the Council's gratitude to the outgoing members, namely, Albania, Brazil, Gabon, Ghana and the United Arab Emirates, for their important contributions to the work of the Council during their terms.

### **Expression of thanks to the outgoing President**

**The President** (*spoke in French*): I should also like to take this opportunity to pay tribute, on behalf of the Council, to His Excellency Mr. José Javier De La Gasca, Permanent Representative of Ecuador, for his service as President of the Council for the month of December 2023. I am sure I speak for all members of the Council in expressing deep appreciation to Ambassador De La Gasca and his team for the great diplomatic skill with which they conducted the Council's business last month.

### **Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

### **Maintenance of international peace and security**

**The President** (*spoke in French*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Israel to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Khaled Khiari, Assistant Secretary-General for the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific, in the Departments of Political

and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations; and Mr. Arsenio Dominguez, Secretary-General of the International Maritime Organization.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mr. Khiari.

**Mr. Khiari**: There have been further alarming developments in the Red Sea since the last briefing on the subject on 18 December 2023. The United Nations continues to warn against the adverse political, security, economic and humanitarian repercussions of military escalation in the Red Sea and the risk of exacerbating regional tensions. Continued Houthi threats to maritime navigation, coupled with the risk of further military escalation, remain of serious concern and could potentially affect millions in Yemen, the region and globally.

Since this issue was last on the Council's agenda on 18 December, the Houthis claimed responsibility for two attacks using naval missiles on the *MSC United* on 26 December and on the *Maersk Hangzhou* on 31 December. There have been reports of other intercepted Houthi attacks as well.

On 31 December, an armed intervention by the United States of America's forces against the Houthis in response to two distress calls from the *Maersk Hangzhou*, a Singapore-flagged container vessel, reportedly resulted in 10 dead or missing, according to the Houthis. As a result, on 2 January Maersk halted Red Sea shipping again until further notice. On the same day, Hapag-Lloyd said it would continue to avoid Red Sea transits and reroute vessels around the Cape of Good Hope until 9 January in response to recent attacks. This is only one example of the risks of continued escalation of attacks against seagoing merchant vessels and the impact on global supply chains, in particular increasing freight costs and lengthening delivery times.

We continue to share the concerns of the Secretary-General of the International Maritime Organization with respect to the need for the protection of the freedom of maritime navigation, and also about the potential impact of current attacks and disruptions to sea traffic in the Red Sea and environs on international trade. We reaffirm the importance of ensuring the safety and security of maritime navigation in the region.

In that regard, we also call for the immediate release of the *MV Galaxy Leader* and her crew, which were seized by the Houthis on 19 November.

We reiterate that such incidents originating from Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen must stop. No cause or grievance can justify the continuation of these attacks against the freedom of navigation. As regards the overall situation in the region, we encourage all concerned parties to avoid further escalation and de-escalate tensions and threats. This is critical so that traffic through the Red Sea can return to its normal state and the risk of Yemen being dragged into a regional conflagration can be avoided.

The continued assistance of the Council in actively engaging with all concerned parties who may be able to push for restraint remains extremely valuable, so that through our combined efforts we can prevent further escalation in the Red Sea from exacerbating regional tensions or undermining regional peace and security or international trade.

**The President** (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Khiari for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Dominguez.

**Mr. Dominguez**: First, allow me to start by reiterating my condemnation of the attacks against international shipping in the Red Sea area and reiterate the strong commitment of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) to protect seafarers, ships and cargo, which is of the utmost importance to ensure the safety and security of global supply chains. Attacks against international shipping in the Red Sea area are not acceptable. Ships must be allowed to trade worldwide, unhindered and in accordance with international law.

Since the beginning of November, a number of attacks have been launched against international vessels operating and navigating in this vital shipping lane that records around 15 per cent of international trade. The initial targets were ships linked to Israel. But the information that we have received in recent events seems to indicate that this is not currently the case. The International Maritime Organization continues to closely monitor the situation and liaise with the industry representatives and navies.

A significant number of shipping companies — around 18 — have already decided to reroute their vessels around South Africa in order to reduce the attacks on vessels and, of course, the impact

that it has on seafarers, in particular. That adds 10 days to the journey, negatively impacts trade and increases freight rates.

On Monday, 18 December, an extraordinary meeting of the members of the Djibouti Code of Conduct was held to discuss how to deal with increasing threats against international shipping in the Red Sea area. The meeting was attended by the representatives of the signatory States of the Djibouti Code of Conduct and its Jeddah Amendment, as well as international and regional naval forces, regional centres and maritime industry stakeholders. The meeting call for enhanced security measures, including coordination among signatory States, navies and the industry and continuous meetings and reviews and the submission of recommendations to the International Maritime Organization and the Security Council.

The IMO has a European Union-funded regional programme for maritime security in the Red Sea area, and we use it as a major capacity-building programme targeting the southern Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. Through that initiative, together with INTERPOL, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, we continue to engage in coordinating actions to develop capacities and promote the adequate security and safety standards for maritime port- and land-based law enforcement authorities across Djibouti, Ethiopia, Somalia, the Sudan and Yemen.

I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate the call for de-escalation so as to ensure the safety of our seafarers, freedom of navigation and the stability of supply chains. The International Maritime Organization will continue to monitor the situation, in collaboration with the member States, partners from the industry and navies.

I would also like to express our appreciation for the work undertaken by the Djibouti Code of Conduct member States and encourage them all to use it as a forum to ensure communication among all countries of the region. Furthermore, and as a practical exercise in following navigation routes and ensuring the safety of navigation, we would like to encourage ships to continue sending an initial report when entering the voluntary reporting area to the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations centre and other relevant centres in the region, as this covers the entire Red Sea. Ships should also send an initial report when clearing the Suez Canal or when crossing boundaries in the Indian Ocean

in order to enhance the navigational safety of all the vessels in the region.

I thank you again, Mr. President, for this opportunity to brief the Council.

**The President:** I thank Mr. Dominguez for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

**Mr. Lu** (United States of America): I thank Mr. Khiari and Mr. Dominguez for their insights on the grave threats posed by the continuing Houthi attacks against commercial and merchant vessels in the Red Sea.

Just over one month ago, the Security Council warned the Houthis to stop those attacks. Instead, the Houthis continued to strike commercial vessels transiting through the Red Sea's vital shipping lane, with growing consequences for freedom of navigation, regional peace and security and global commerce. Since 19 November, there have been over 20 Houthi attacks.

On 31 December, the Houthis attempted to board the *Maersk Hangzhou*, a container ship registered to Singapore and operated by a Danish firm. The *Maersk Hangzhou* had only resumed using the route a few days earlier, after the United States, its allies and its partners launched a multinational naval operation to protect ships in the southern part of the Red Sea and deter against lawless non-State actors. United States Navy personnel who had come to the aid of the *Maersk Hangzhou* issued verbal warnings to the Houthi attackers, but rather than cease their attacks, the Houthis responded by opening fire. Three Houthi boats were subsequently sunk in an act of self-defence. Additionally, two anti-ship missiles were fired from Houthi-controlled areas at United States Navy vessels that had responded to the *Maersk Hangzhou's* distress call. These unacceptable attacks and clear violations of international law continue. In fact, just this morning, the Houthis announced that they have targeted another container ship.

During a Council meeting held just over 2 weeks ago, many delegations expressed the view that the Council has a responsibility to help ensure that the free flow of lawful transit through the Red Sea continues unimpeded. Today, in the light of both the broad support for Council action and continued Houthi attacks, the United States believes that we are at an inflection point.

These attacks pose grave implications for maritime security, international shipping and commerce, and they

undermine the fragile humanitarian situation in Yemen, damaging the ability of the international community to deliver assistance to more than 21 million people in need. It is vital that the Council speak now on the need to uphold international law, as well as navigational rights and freedoms.

Even as we continue to demand that the Houthis stop these attacks, which are clear violations of international law, we must not overlook the root of the problem. Iran has long enabled these Houthi attacks. Beyond Iran's long-standing provision of financing to aid such Houthi operations, since 2015 it has transferred advanced weapons systems to the Houthis, including unmanned aerial systems, land-attack cruise missiles and ballistic missiles, used in attacks against maritime vessels. Consistent with that long-term support and encouragement of the Houthis' destabilizing actions in the region, we also know that Iran has been deeply involved in planning operations against commercial vessels in the Red Sea.

The United States does not seek confrontation with Iran. Iran has a choice here. It can continue its current course, or it can withhold its support, without which the Houthis would struggle to effectively track and strike commercial vessels navigating shipping lanes through the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. Let us remember that the provision of arms and related materiel of all types to the Houthis is a violation of resolution 2216 (2015). All Member States should adhere to their obligations under that resolution.

The threat to navigational rights and freedoms in the Red Sea is a global challenge and necessitates a global response. Let us remember our responsibilities as members of the Security Council to address those challenges. We look forward to engaging constructively with other members of the Council to that end.

**Mr. De La Gasca** (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate your delegation, on assuming the presidency of the Council, and we pledge our support in the fulfilment of this task. I also wish to welcome our colleagues from Algeria, Slovenia, Guyana, the Republic of Korea and Sierra Leone, with whom, I am sure, we will maintain constructive cooperation throughout the year.

We take note of and are grateful for the information provided by Assistant Secretary-General Khaled Khiari and Mr. Arsenio Dominguez, Secretary-General of the International Maritime Organization.

Ecuador has been following with concern the grave political, humanitarian and economic consequences of the threat Houthi militias in Yemen pose to maritime navigation in the Red Sea. In that context, I will focus my remarks on three areas.

First, I wish to reiterate my country's condemnation of the terrorist attacks perpetrated by the Houthis against various commercial vessels in the Red Sea. Those attacks, which have intensified in recent weeks, constitute a flagrant violation of international law and therefore a threat to international peace and security. We call for the immediate release of the *MV Galaxy Leader* and its crew members. Ecuador stresses the importance of ensuring full respect for international law in the area of maritime navigation. Likewise, we recall the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the repression of acts of piracy.

Secondly, we agree with what Assistant Secretary-General Khiari said in his statement to the Council on 29 December 2023 with regard to the risk of this situation further exacerbating tensions in the region (see S/PV.9522). Given the ramifications of the conflicts in the Middle East, in addition to the fact that they involve various actors, situations that could increase the risk of spillover must be prevented. A failure to do so could lead to devastating effects for the entire region and could destabilize international peace and security.

Thirdly, the attacks on commercial vessels have impeded maritime navigation through the Suez Canal, a critical corridor for world trade in consumer goods and energy supplies that links Europe and Asia and through which some 12 per cent of goods traded globally are transported. The inability to transit through the Red Sea has exacerbated food insecurity and the humanitarian crisis in Yemen and has a global impact, given its negative effects on regional and international supply chains. Indeed, in the face of threats to their security, shipping companies have changed their routes and diverted their vessels around the Cape of Good Hope, which is expected to cause delays and raise the prices of goods.

Finally, Ecuador reaffirms that an intra-Yemeni political dialogue under the auspices of the United Nations is the only path to sustainable peace in that country. We also express our support for the adoption of actions in accordance with international law to ensure the maritime transit of vessels through the Red Sea and to prevent further disruptions to world trade.

**Mr. Žbogar** (Slovenia): I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of January. You can rest assured that you have our full support for your work. We are very pleased to take our seat at the Security Council table today as a new, elected member. I also want to thank today's briefers, Assistant Secretary-General Khiari and Mr. Dominguez, Secretary-General of the International Maritime Organization, for their timely updates on the very concerning developments in the Red Sea.

The deteriorating situation in the Red Sea is indeed deeply concerning, and the escalation witnessed in recent days is particularly worrisome. The Houthis' interference with navigational rights and freedoms over the past weeks is simply unacceptable and poses a serious threat to international maritime security. It also poses a significant threat to the movement of food, fuel and critical humanitarian assistance intended to reach populations across the world. We therefore condemn those attacks and call for their immediate cessation. We furthermore call for the release of the *MV Galaxy Leader* and its crew, seized in November. We also wish to acknowledge the contribution of many Member States to efforts towards ensuring freedom of navigation and reinforcing regional maritime security, in line with international law, at this sensitive time.

As we are all acutely aware, the last months of 2023 have proved to be extremely turbulent for the Middle East. The need to prevent a regional spillover and escalation from the current devastation in Gaza, Israel and the broader region is paramount. We therefore call once again for the cessation of all attacks against commercial vessels operating in the region's crucial waterways, for utmost restraint from all actors and for a calming of the situation. It should be in no one's interest to see a further destabilization and spiral of violence in the region — not for the people of Gaza, nor for the people of Israel, nor for the people of Yemen.

**Mr. Yamazaki** (Japan): Since this is the first Security Council meeting of this month, I would like to join others in congratulating you on your assumption of the presidency, Sir. I would like to welcome the new non-permanent members of the Council: Algeria, Guyana, the Republic of Korea, Sierra Leone and Slovenia. I look forward to working with them very closely.

On today's issue, I would like to first express my appreciation to Assistant-Secretary-General Khiari and



Mr. Dominguez, Secretary-General of the International Maritime Organization, for their comprehensive briefings on this critical issue.

Nearly three months have passed since the devastating conflict in Gaza began. Now, as we had feared, the conflict is spilling over into the wider region. In particular, Japan has grave concerns about the increasingly volatile situation in the Red Sea. Almost weekly or even more frequently, and as recently as yesterday, Houthi militants have been attacking commercial vessels with missiles and drones — we heard additional reports of that today — and they have signalled that they will not stop those hostile activities. Japan is outraged by the armed seizure and continued holding of the Japanese-operated vessel *MV Galaxy Leader* and its 25-person multinational crew since 19 November 2023. It is unacceptable that the innocent crew has been detained for more than 40 days. We see no reason to tolerate such an injustice and strongly demand the release of the *MV Galaxy Leader* and its crew immediately and unconditionally. The Houthis claim that they are acting in solidarity with the Palestinians in their fight against Israel, but there is no justification for attacking commercial vessels engaged in lawful transit through the Red Sea.

The Red Sea is a critical sea lane for global maritime transportation. The Houthis' threats to maritime security and freedom of navigation in that important waterway have already disrupted international trade. Indeed, major international shipping companies, including Japanese ones, have been forced to pause their operations or take the more costly, energy-intensive and time-consuming route around the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa for their travel between Asia and Europe. That causes a significant negative impact on supply chains and the global economy. With all of that in mind, Japan unequivocally condemns the Houthis' reckless conduct and calls for the Houthis and other regional stakeholders not to engage in further destabilizing actions in the Red Sea and the broader region.

It is now time to think about next steps. One month ago, the Security Council issued a press release on the maritime threats posed by the Houthis (SC/15513). That reaction was timely, given the surge of alarming incidents. However, regrettably, there has been no sign of those attacks abating, and instead the Houthis are even escalating their activities. The Council should not let that continue. In that regard, and in view of the urgency and importance of the matter, Japan believes

that the Council should take appropriate action to deter additional threats by the Houthis and maintain international peace and security.

**Mrs. Frazier** (Malta): I too thank Assistant-Secretary-General Khiari and Mr. Dominguez, Secretary-General of the International Maritime Organization, for their briefings.

As this is the first formal meeting of the year, let me take this opportunity to welcome our new Council members — Algeria, Guyana, the Republic of Korea, Sierra Leone and Slovenia — and bid farewell and thanks to our colleagues from Albania, Brazil, Gabon, Ghana and the United Arab Emirates, whose terms finished at the end of December. We also congratulate Ecuador on its successful presidency last month and France on assuming the Council presidency for the month of January.

Malta is gravely concerned by the deteriorating maritime security situation in the Red Sea. Over recent weeks, we have seen a worrisome escalation in attacks against commercial shipping in the area. Such attacks are in violation of international law, as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. They are unacceptable and must be condemned in the strongest possible terms. That is why we have joined other Council members in calling for this meeting today. We call on the Houthis to immediately cease such attacks and actions against commercial shipping and to abide by their obligations under international law.

For over six weeks, the *MV Galaxy Leader* vessel and its 25-person crew have been held illegally by the Houthis. That is unacceptable. We reiterate our call for their immediate and unconditional release.

We have seen great strides towards peace in Yemen over the past 18 months. Parties to the conflict must not allow tensions in the region to threaten those efforts. The maritime attacks undermine the current peace talks and the work of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen.

Maritime security is of critical importance for the well-being of Yemen's civilian population, who rely heavily on imports for essential needs. Imports of humanitarian aid are vulnerable to external shocks and global dynamics, jeopardizing humanitarian assistance to the 21 million Yemenis in need. That includes the import of food to the 17 million Yemenis who are food insecure. Houthi attacks against merchant shipping threaten the flow of aid to Yemen. That could

have devastating consequences for the population, aggravating the already dire humanitarian situation in the country.

Parties to the conflict, notably the Houthis, must remain focused on establishing a formal ceasefire leading to an inclusive Yemeni-led and Yemeni-owned political process under the auspices of the United Nations. We call on all concerned parties to exercise maximum restraint and refrain from taking any additional escalatory actions that could further jeopardize the hard-won gains made towards peace in Yemen and have a destabilizing effect on the region.

In conclusion, the navigational rights and freedoms of commercial vessels in the Red Sea and the Strait of Bab Al-Mandab are of paramount importance. Those rights must be respected and assured. Further escalation in that artery of global trade would have far-reaching consequences, jeopardizing the lives of the millions of Yemenis who rely on humanitarian assistance. The Houthis have a responsibility to the people of Yemen and must act in their best interests. The Yemeni people deserve lasting peace — they have waited long enough.

**Mr. Hwang** (Republic of Korea): Let me begin by congratulating you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency. As one of the new Council members, we will actively engage in and contribute to the various discussions of the Council.

I would like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Khiari and Mr. Arsenio Dominguez, Secretary-General of the International Maritime Organization, for their briefings on the situation in the Red Sea.

The current situation in the Middle East stands at an imminent threat of escalation. The perilous situation in Gaza is triggering fears of a serious spillover and a deterioration in other parts of the region. It is therefore urgent to exert every effort to decrease the tensions in the region, including the Red Sea. We are particularly worried by the reckless and illegal attacks by the Houthis against commercial vessels on the Red Sea. The Republic of Korea calls for the immediate release of the *MV Galaxy Leader*, which has been seized since 19 November, and its 25 crew members. To our dismay, a series of attacks against commercial vessels are ongoing in the Red Sea. We are deeply concerned by the attack last weekend against the Singapore-flagged and Denmark-owned container ship *Maersk Hangzhou*, as well as by reports of the firing of two anti-ship ballistic missiles into the Red Sea just yesterday.

The Red Sea is a crucial waterway for international trade and commerce. Any threat or hindrance to the freedom of navigation recognized under international law is both unacceptable and unjustifiable. In the same vein, the Council adopted resolution 1838 (2008), on Somalia, to protect the safety of commercial maritime routes heading to the Red Sea. The Republic of Korea has actively participated in international efforts to fight piracy off the coast of Somalia by dispatching, in 2009, the Republic of Korea Navy Somali Sea Escort Task Group, or the Cheonghae Unit.

The Republic of Korea strongly calls for the cessation of all provocations that endanger not only the freedom of navigation and lawful traffic, but regional peace and security in the broader sense as well. We support the efforts of relevant countries to protect commercial vessels on the Red Sea and also support members' call for Security Council action on the matter in a timely manner.

Last month, we encountered some relieving news from the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, reporting that the parties in Yemen had committed to a set of measures to implement a nationwide ceasefire and to engage in preparations for the resumption of an inclusive political process under the auspices of the United Nations. The Republic of Korea fully supports a Yemeni-led political transition process alongside the active role of the United Nations, including the Special Envoy, with inclusive participation, as stressed in resolution 2624 (2022), demanding the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in the peace process.

In that regard, the reckless provocations and dangerous escalation in the Red Sea must stop, as those activities do not at all help to ensure the aspirations of the Yemeni people to realize sustainable peace and development.

As Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 2140 (2014), the Republic of Korea will carefully watch the situation on the ground unfolding in and around Yemen, especially with regard to the implementation of sanctions, including the arms embargo.

**Mr. Kariuki** (United Kingdom): Let me start by congratulating France on assuming the presidency for the month of January. France can count on our full support. I also welcome the five new elected members

to the Council and look forward to working closely with them during their terms.

I join the Secretary-General in expressing condolences following the attack on a memorial ceremony in Iran that reportedly killed more than 100 civilians.

I thank Assistant Secretary-General Khiari and Mr. Arsenio Dominguez, Secretary-General of the International Maritime Organization, for briefing us today.

The United Kingdom condemns in the strongest terms the illegal and unjustified attacks on commercial shipping in the Red Sea by Houthi militants. We call on the Houthis to cease those attacks immediately. Today we joined 11 countries in a statement warning against further attacks. We will continue to work with allies and partners to pursue all diplomatic routes to end that threat. If necessary, as the United Kingdom's Defence Secretary has stated, we will not hesitate to take action to deter threats to freedom of navigation in the Red Sea.

Attacks using unmanned aerial vehicles, missiles and small boats are a direct threat to the freedom of navigation, which is protected by international law. They pose a severe economic threat not only to Yemen — where, by driving up food prices, they risk exacerbating the already dire humanitarian situation — but also to global food security and supply lines. Contrary to claims made by the Houthis, those attacks are totally indiscriminate and target shipping that has no connection to Israel. We call for the immediate release of the *MV Galaxy Leader* and its crew — nationals of Bulgaria, Mexico, the Philippines, Romania and Ukraine.

The British Foreign Secretary spoke with the Iranian Foreign Minister on Sunday, making clear our view that Iran shares responsibility for preventing such attacks, given their long-standing support of the Houthis. We call on all parties in the region to exercise restraint and avoid escalation. We are deeply concerned about the impact on civilians, who are suffering the most through this crisis and would bear the brunt of further destabilization. It is in all our interests to avoid that.

**Mr. Bendjama** (Algeria): As this is our inaugural address as an elected member of the Security Council, I would like to emphasize Algeria's firm commitment to actively contribute to the Council's mission of maintaining international peace and security.

Allow me first to extend heartfelt congratulations to France on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of January. Rest assured of Algeria's full support during this crucial period. In addition, we express our gratitude to Ecuador for its commendable leadership in conducting the Council's activities throughout the month of December. I would also like to extend my sincere appreciation to Mr. Khaled Khiari and Mr. Arsenio Dominguez for their insightful briefings, which provided valuable perspectives on recent developments in the region under consideration.

These developments indeed have significant implications for maritime and economic security in the region and beyond. We recognize the Red Sea as a critical route for global trade, responsible for around 15 per cent of the world's maritime traffic, and safe maritime navigation in the Red Sea is of paramount importance for the whole world. Therefore, our opinion is that the recent developments in the Red Sea should be analysed within a broader regional context.

First, the region is currently navigating a challenging period of instability with the potential of a regional spillover at any moment. Therefore, it is of paramount importance to exercise restraint and abstain from escalating tensions to prevent the emergence of any regional conflicts with out-of-control consequences.

Secondly, positive signals have consistently been emerging from Yemen, through the dedicated efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, which are garnering support from local parties and regional actors. It is imperative to steer clear of any actions that could have repercussions or escalate tensions in Yemen itself and compromise the tireless efforts of the Special Envoy.

Thirdly, the primary responsibility for maritime security rests with the coastal States, as they are best positioned to ensure the safety of those crucial waterways. In that regard, we recall the establishment of the Council of Arab and African States bordering the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden as a framework for serving the security and economic interests of those strategic waterways. Consequently, any collective effort lacking the active involvement of the coastal State concerned is likely to fall short of achieving the desired results.

Lastly, a comprehensive analysis of the effective management of any situation necessitates an understanding within its historical and geographical



context. Therefore, addressing the root causes that impede maritime security becomes imperative for ensuring a prompt, efficient and effective response.

In conclusion, the current international and regional instability is a manifestation of yet further profound malaise — that of multilateralism, the erosion of the collective security architecture and the weakening of diplomacy. Efforts to fragment a crisis or conflict are bound to fail. The Red Sea is more than just a trade route; it is a region steeped in civilization and represents a community with legitimate aspirations and hopes.

**Mr. Hauri** (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): As this is the first formal meeting of the year, I assure you, Sir, of Switzerland's full support for your presidency. I would also like to congratulate Ecuador on its successful presidency last month. We wish the five elected members every success as they begin their term of office and look forward to working with them. I thank Assistant Secretary-General Mohamed Khaled Khiari and the Secretary-General of the International Maritime Organization, Mr. Arsenio Dominguez, for their briefings.

Switzerland remains concerned about maritime security in the Red Sea as a result of the continuing Houthi attacks on cargo ships and the risk of the situation escalating. In that regard, we welcome and encourage pursuing the efforts, including those of the United Nations, to de-escalate the situation. We echo the Security Council's press release of 1 December (SC/15513), which condemned the attack on the merchant vessel *MV Galaxy Leader*. We reiterate our demand for the immediate and unconditional release of the entire crew. In that regard, we underline the importance of the navigational rights and freedoms of all vessels in the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea in accordance with international law. The situation in the Red Sea is already having an impact on global maritime traffic. We must prevent an escalation in the region, which would have further adverse consequences for international maritime traffic and could also be detrimental to the ongoing negotiations between the parties to the conflict in Yemen.

With regard to that matter, the announcement by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, Mr. Hans Grundberg, that the parties have agreed on a package of measures to implement a nationwide ceasefire is encouraging. It is important to ensure that the conditions for the effective implementation of those measures are met. The unity of the Council in fulfilling

its mandate in accordance with international law and the call for caution and restraint on the part of all actors remain critical to avoiding a major escalation in the region and to ensuring maritime security.

**Mr. Fernandes** (Mozambique): Allow me to begin by congratulating France on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of January. I also wish to thank the outgoing President, Ecuador, for its exemplary leadership and wisdom in steering the Security Council during the month of December. Likewise, we join our counterparts in welcoming the newly elected members of the Security Council, namely, Algeria, Guyana, the Republic of Korea, Sierra Leone and Slovenia. I also extend our gratitude to Mr. Khaled Khiari, Assistant Secretary-General for the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific, and Mr. Arsenio Dominguez, Secretary-General of the International Maritime Organization, for their comprehensive briefings.

Before I go further, allow me to also express Mozambique's deepest condolences to Japan for the earthquake that occurred in that country recently, claiming more than 60 human lives.

Mozambique observes with great concern the escalating tensions in the Red Sea, marked by an increasing number of attacks against commercial vessels and the involvement of various actors in the region. These attacks pose a serious threat to maritime security and international commerce and overall stability in the region, generating, and rightly so, the collective concern of the international community. Recognizing the crucial role of the shipping industry in global trade, and consequently in our normal way of life, any decline in commercial shipping in the Red Sea will inevitably have adverse effects on both regional and worldwide trade. Maritime security is indispensable for effective trade flows. It is therefore paramount that we safeguard and uphold international navigation, including navigation rights and vessel freedom, in accordance with international maritime law.

Yemen continues to grapple with an extended conflict. Any progress achieved so far towards a comprehensive ceasefire agreement in Yemen should not be overshadowed by the escalating violence in the Red Sea. The Yemeni peace process and any positive outcomes from ongoing peace negotiations between the Houthis and Saudis should be our main priority. The urgency of avoiding any catastrophic consequences from this escalation cannot be overstated. We call for an immediate cessation of the attacks on the vessels and

their crews. We also appeal to all involved, including the regional actors, to exercise maximum restraint. As custodians of international peace and security, it is our collective responsibility to ensure that the ongoing peace efforts in Yemen are not jeopardized by these attacks. The unity of the Security Council and its alignment with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations are fundamental in that regard.

In conclusion, Mozambique actively supports a peaceful resolution to the Red Sea conflict, while emphasizing adherence to international law, and international maritime law in particular. Ensuring open communication between the parties involved should be a priority in preserving peace and stability in the Red Sea and the broader region.

**Mr. Nebenzia** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Let me begin by congratulating you, Mr. President, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of January and expressing hopes that everything will go successfully. Secondly, I would like to thank the Permanent Representative of Ecuador and his team for his excellent presidency of the Council during the month of December. We had quite a few complex issues for the Council to go through and difficult decisions to make in the past month. We managed to get through that. We believe that Ecuador did an outstanding job as President of the Security Council. I also welcome the new members of the Council — Guyana, the Republic of Korea, Sierra Leone, Slovenia and Algeria.

We thank Assistant Secretary-General Khaled Khiari and the Secretary-General of the International Maritime Organization, Mr. Arsenio Dominguez, for their briefings.

We have serious concerns about the situation in the Red Sea. Its trade routes are vital arteries for international trade and play a key role in maintaining the stability and prosperity of the global economy. Free and safe navigation in the region is crucial for ensuring the sustainable delivery of commercial and humanitarian goods, which is critical in terms of providing necessary assistance to countries in difficult socioeconomic situations, including Yemen.

We strongly condemn attacks on civilian vessels. They jeopardize not only the freedom and security of navigation but also the lives and health of seafarers. Moreover, they create additional risks and increase instability in this already troubled region. In that regard,

Russia supported the Security Council's press statement on this topic issued on 1 December (SC/15513). We call on the leadership of the Ansar Allah movement to cease any actions that could pose a threat to commercial vessels and their crews in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, exercise restraint and demonstrate responsible behaviour. The movement should respect the principles of the safety of navigation. We demand the swift release of the vessel *MV Galaxy Leader* and its crew.

The topic that we have gathered to discuss cannot be considered in isolation from regional dynamics. The United States representative asked us to look at the root of the problem today. Well, let us do exactly that. The problem of ensuring freedom of navigation in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden is spiralling in a worrisome manner, and that is not happening in a vacuum. I do not think that any of our colleagues would deny the fact that what is happening in the Red Sea is a direct projection of the violence in Gaza, where Israel's brutal operation has continued for three months now. The situation has also escalated in other occupied Palestinian territories and on the border between Israel and Lebanon. It is no secret that there is strong disappointment in the Middle East region over the fact that the United States, which has been covering up for Israel's actions, is holding the other members of the Security Council hostage, preventing us from adopting a draft resolution demanding an immediate ceasefire. Time after time, they have used their veto to do so. Washington is undermining all efforts to provide humanitarian assistance to the Palestinians. The two Security Council products that were adopted during this time — resolutions 2712 (2023) and 2720 (2023) — remain essentially unimplemented. That causes anger in the Arab world, and that is taking on very dangerous forms, such as the actions of Ansar Allah in the Red Sea. It is becoming increasingly difficult for the Governments of Middle East States to control the sentiment among their populations — and in a situation involving a non-State actor, it is almost impossible.

We see two scenarios in which the situation could evolve.

The first is a favourable one: stepping up the Council's efforts to resolve the long-standing conflict in Yemen and ending the violence in the Gaza Strip. That would address the root causes of the current escalation and safe navigation in the region would resume.

The second option is catastrophic: fanning the flames of the crisis in the Red Sea by pouring gasoline

on it. That is essentially what the United States and its allies are calling on us to do. Their toolkit, as we have repeatedly seen, includes only the use of force to solve problems. In the second scenario, there is not only the risk of the Yemen settlement process being derailed, but also the real risk of a new large-scale regional conflict being sparked, at a minimum around the Arabian peninsula.

The danger of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict escalating into a regional conflict has been mentioned many times. The events in the Red Sea are not the first sign of that. Unfortunately, events are unfolding along the lines of the second scenario. Despite its high-profile name, the so-called international maritime coalition assembled by Washington, as far as we can tell, is in fact largely made up of American warships, and the legitimacy of its actions in terms of international law raises the most serious doubts.

Therefore, our aims today are not only to reiterate the collective signal to Ansar Allah about the inadmissibility of their actions, which we approved on 1 December, but also to cool down the hotheads in Washington, for whom another conflict in the Middle East is just a part of their own geopolitical game.

**Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett** (Guyana): Permit me to extend my delegation's congratulations and best wishes to you, Mr. President, on France's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of January, and also to congratulate Ambassador José De La Gasca and the Ecuadorian team for their excellent presidency in December 2023. I would also like to thank you and all those members who have welcomed us into the Council — we look forward to working very closely with everyone. I would also like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Khiari and Secretary-General Dominguez for their updates and for sharing their assessments of the situation.

Guyana condemns in the strongest terms the recent attacks against commercial vessels in the Red Sea. We are alarmed at the frequency of the attacks, which endanger international navigation and the lives of crew members. It is for that reason that we supported the call for today's open briefing. We are particularly dismayed to note that the attacks have increased since 19 November 2023 and join the international community in calling for their immediate end and for the preservation of the navigational rights and freedoms of all vessels in the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea in accordance with international law. We also demand

the immediate release of the *MV Galaxy Leader* and its crew and reject all violations of international law and attacks on civilians and civilian objects, wherever they occur. We recall the Council's press statement (SC/15513) of 1 December condemning the Houthi attacks against commercial vessels and share members' concern about the potential impact of these attacks on the ongoing conflict in the Middle East.

Guyana urges the perpetrators to cease all attacks and to avoid any further action that could spark an escalation in tensions and compound the already volatile situation in the Middle East. A wider regional conflagration in the present circumstances must be avoided at all costs. We also note that the Red Sea, with its connection to the Suez Canal, is one of the world's busiest shipping lanes. The route's importance to international commerce cannot be overstated, with more than 12 per cent of global trade passing through the Red Sea every day. Consequently, the impact of these attacks can cause severe disruptions to global trade and must be addressed immediately. The longer they are allowed to persist, the greater the eventual cost and disruption to international maritime trade, energy security and the global economy.

In that vein, we urge full compliance with the Djibouti Code of Conduct concerning the Repression of Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in the Western Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Aden and the Jeddah Declaration. We also underline the need for all involved to act responsibly and to refrain from impeding ongoing efforts to de-escalate tensions in the Middle East or to secure a comprehensive ceasefire in Yemen and an inclusive, intra-Yemeni political agreement under the auspices of the United Nations.

**Mr. Kanu** (Sierra Leone): Sierra Leone congratulates you, Mr. President, and the French Republic on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of January 2024, and we extend our best wishes to you and your team. Sierra Leone notes with appreciation the working methods of the French presidency for an effective, open and action-oriented Council. We also take this opportunity to recognize the excellent work of Ecuador during its presidency in the month of December 2023. Furthermore, Sierra Leone congratulates and commends the five outgoing elected members — Albania, Brazil, Gabon, Ghana and the United Arab Emirates — for their distinguished and valuable contributions to the work of the Council.

We thank you, Mr. President, and members of the Council for the welcome accorded to my delegation. We are indeed honoured to be joining the Council together with Algeria, Guyana, the Republic of Korea and Slovenia. In our maiden statement in this Chamber on 29 January 1970 (see S/PV.1528), my delegation expressed great belief in the essential importance of the Security Council as we paid sincere tribute to its tireless and courageous work towards peace and international security. Just as we hoped for a successful decade in the 1970s, that resilience and courage is needed today. We therefore commit to being constructive in ensuring the Council's unity and effectiveness.

Turning now to our agenda, I would like to thank the Assistant Secretary-General, Mr. Khaled Khiari, and the Secretary-General of the International Maritime Organization, Mr. Arsenio Dominguez, for their important briefings.

The members of the Security Council, in its press statement issued on 1 December 2023 (SC/15513), condemned in the strongest terms recent Houthi attacks against a commercial vessel in the Red Sea and demanded that all such attacks and action cease immediately. The Council also called for the immediate release of the vessel *MV Galaxy Leader* and its crew. Furthermore, the members of the Council underlined the importance of the navigational rights and freedoms of all vessels in the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea in accordance with international law and recalled the importance of enhancing international and regional cooperation to counter threats to peace and security in the region. Sierra Leone is therefore seriously concerned that, despite the Council's press statement, there has been an escalation in maritime attacks that have adversely affected navigation in the Red Sea, gravely threatening the movement of essential commodities such as food and fuel. We also note the impact on the delivery of humanitarian assistance to destinations and people in dire need of such assistance in the region and globally.

The attacks by the Houthis in the Red Sea have had grave consequences on maritime security and the navigation of vessels. We note reports by commercial vessels of missile and drone attacks by the Houthi rebels. This has reportedly led to the disruption of trade routes, forcing shipping firms to take the more costly route around the Cape of Good Hope.

In addition, the attacks on maritime vessels in the Red Sea risk creating further escalation of the already tense and volatile situation in the Middle East, which, in

turn, will be a serious threat to international peace and security. In that regard, we condemn in the strongest terms the continued attacks against commercial vessels in international waters and demand the immediate release of all abducted crew members of the *MV Galaxy Leader*. Abducting crew members of shipping vessels operating in international waters is a serious violation of international law, and we demand the utmost respect for applicable international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Sierra Leone notes the significance of the initiative establishing the multinational task force to deter and counter the Houthi attacks in the Red Sea. In that significant endeavour, we call for due compliance with international law.

In particular, we are more concerned that the increase in maritime attacks in the Red Sea poses a serious risk to peace talks, which, in our view, represent a process that can lead to a comprehensive ceasefire agreement. In that regard, we call on all concerned to take appropriate steps to ensure that the attacks on vessels in the Red Sea do not lead to a breakdown in the Yemeni peace process. We join other Council members in their efforts to support the ongoing peace talks in Yemen, which we hope will lead to durable peace in the country.

Finally, Sierra Leone is deeply concerned about the related regional dimension and possible escalation. We therefore call on regional actors to refrain from provocative acts, which will further escalate an already serious and dire situation in the region.

**Mr. Geng Shuang** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate France on assuming the presidency of the Security Council. You and your colleagues, Mr. President, can count on the full cooperation of the Chinese delegation. I would also like to congratulate Ecuador on the successful completion of its presidency of the Council last month.

I would like to avail myself of this opportunity to welcome the new members, namely, Algeria, Guyana, the Republic of Korea, Sierra Leone and Slovenia. I believe that they will contribute to the better fulfilment of the Council's responsibilities in the maintenance of international peace and security.

I thank Assistant Secretary-General Khiari and International Maritime Organization Secretary-General Dominguez for their respective briefings.

The Red Sea is an important international transport route for goods and energy. Ensuring unimpeded



access to the waterway and the safety of crossing vessels contributes not only to the security and stability of the region but also to global supply chain security and the maintenance of the international trade order. Doing so serves the common interests of the international community.

China expresses its concern over the recent attacks on, and seizures of, commercial vessels in the Red Sea. We call on the relevant party to cease assaulting civilian ships and to respect and protect the freedom of navigation of all countries in the Red Sea. We believe that all parties, especially major countries with influence, need to play a constructive and responsible role in keeping shipping lanes in the Red Sea safe.

Currently, the Yemen issue is at a critical juncture. The tensions in the Red Sea have posed new challenges to the political process in Yemen and brought additional complexity to an already volatile Middle East. We call on all parties concerned to remain calm, exercise restraint, stay committed to dialogue and consultation, promote a political settlement, refrain from taking any actions that may aggravate tensions and do their utmost to maintain the positive momentum in the Yemen political process.

The current tensions in the Red Sea are one of the manifestations of the spillover effects of the conflict in Gaza. Only by achieving an early ceasefire in Gaza and easing the humanitarian crisis on the ground can we avert any further escalation in the Red Sea and prevent other parts of the Middle East from being embroiled in conflicts and wars. China remains committed to working with all parties to make unremitting efforts to promote de-escalation in the Red Sea, a political settlement of the Yemen issue, the cessation of hostilities in Gaza and long-lasting peace and stability in the Middle East.

**The President** (*spoke in French*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of France.

I would like to thank Mr. Khiari and Mr. Dominguez for their briefings.

France condemns the attacks conducted by the Houthis on commercial vessels in the Red Sea. Those attacks infringe fundamental principles of international law, namely, the freedom of navigation on the high seas. Through their armed actions, the Houthis bear an extremely significant responsibility for the escalation of tensions in the region and for undermining international stability. That means that 15 per cent of world trade is directly endangered by the Houthis and

by those who train and support them. We continue to call for the immediate release of the *MV Galaxy Leader* and its crew, which have been illegally detained by the Houthis.

For its part, France recalls that States have the right to take appropriate measures to ensure safety at sea. That is what we did when the frigate *Languedoc* destroyed drones threatening a French ship on 9 December. It is also the Council's collective responsibility to ensure that the peace process in Yemen continues, in line with the Special Envoy's road map, which France fully supports. We call on all Yemeni parties to continue negotiations under the road map.

France will continue to assume its responsibilities in the Bab Al-Mandeb Strait and will continue to contribute to the safety of commercial vessels, in conjunction with its partners. We call on all international and regional players to behave responsibly in order to avoid any further escalation in the region, and ask the Council to stand united in the face of a threat that concerns us all.

I resume my functions as President of the Council.

I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

**Mr. Erdan** (Israel): At the outset, I wish to congratulate the new members of the Security Council on beginning their terms.

The Houthis' attacks on maritime trade are not merely an escalation, or are they a spillover. They did not happen magically by themselves. This reality is a glimpse into the dark future of the region and the entire globe if action is not taken. This is just the beginning of a chaotic Middle East that will drag the rest of the world into chaos.

As we speak, the Middle East is on fire. For years, all moderate countries in the region have faced the growing threat of radical terrorists. Hizbullah, Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad have been attempting to tighten a noose of terror around Israel's borders. Shiite terror groups in Iraq have been firing drones and rockets at United States military bases and have also attacked the United Arab Emirates. The Houthis have carried out numerous missile and drone attacks on critical Saudi Arabian and Emirati infrastructure, including on Aramco oil facilities and the Abu Dhabi International Airport. Three months ago, four Bahraini servicemen were killed in a Houthi attack, and now the Houthis have declared war on both Israel and the United States and proceeded to attack ships in the Red

Sea, threatening the freedom of navigation, maritime security and international commerce. Those terrorists could not care less about international law. They could not care less about the Council; they do not even recognize its existence.

This is definitely not an Israel problem. This is not even a Middle East problem. This is a global problem. Twelve per cent of global commerce passes through the Suez Canal. Nearly 10 per cent of the global oil traverses that passage as well. The Houthis threatening the Red Sea is now forcing ships to go around the Horn of Africa, turning a 16-hour transit into a 24-day journey. And if we want to talk numbers, the complete closure of the Bab Al-Mandeb Strait will cost the global economy over \$6 billion per day.

I hope we can all fully comprehend the absurdity of this situation. The Houthi terrorists, who are armed and funded by a State Member of the United Nations, are flagrantly attacking ships flying any flag — these are British ships, Japanese ships, Singaporean ships, ships flying Bahamian flags and ships flying Panamanian flags. Those are blatant terror attacks against diverse global targets. This is the epitome of an international terror threat.

Today must be far more than a wake-up call — today we must act. The Council has already acknowledged the Houthis as a terror group. Now is the time to enforce sanctions against them and all those who arm and fund them. It is time for the Council to address the radioactive Shiite elephant in the room.

The Ayatollahs' regime is the one thing that ties together all the elements of destruction in the Middle East. It funds, arms, trains and directs the Houthis, Hamas, Hizbullah in Lebanon, other terror groups in Syria and Iraq and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Iran has spent decades spreading cancerous jihadism across the region. Iran seeks to dominate the Middle East and beyond under their Shiite hegemony, and their weapons are armies of terror proxies, causing death and destruction in every country they touch.

The Ayatollahs' strategy is to stand in the shadow while pulling the strings of their terror proxy puppets. Hamas's massacre would not have been possible without Iranian funding, weapons and training. Hizbullah, with its terror army and 150,000 rockets, would not exist were it not for its Iranian overlords. Ukrainian civilians would not be murdered with suicide drones without that Iranian-supplied weaponry. The Houthis — terrorists from one of the world's poorest countries — would definitely not have ballistic missiles and explosive drones without the supply of Iranian arms, and they would not have the capabilities to locate and target ships without Iranian intelligence, supplied in real time. This cannot be ignored by the Council. Just a week ago, Mohammad Reza Naqdi, a general in the Revolutionary Guard, blatantly threatened that the closure of the Mediterranean Sea and the Strait of Gibraltar will be next.

Iran is a global danger. The time has come to expose this to the world and take action. This can be the Council's shining moment, the moment it tackles the real threat to the Middle East. The Ayatollah regime is the number one global sponsor of terror. It is flagrantly violating Security Council resolutions 2231 (2015) and 2216 (2015). Iran is the architect of regional instability, and it is time to take real action and address the destructive role Iran plays.

If we remain idle in the face of the global security threat that is Iran, then the Houthis are just the beginning of a dark future that we will be ushering in, a future in which terror organizations and terror regimes murder, maim and terrorize with impunity, and this will inspire terrorists around the globe. Let us act now.

**The President** (*spoke in French*): There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

*The meeting rose at 4.20 p.m.*