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Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General

The following is a near-verbatim transcript of today's noon briefing by Stéphane Dujarric, Spokesman for the Secretary-General.

**Climate Change

The Secretary-General earlier today [opened](#) the Climate Action 2016 summit in Washington, D.C. Speaking to a diverse group of representatives from Governments, businesses, the civil society, academia and philanthropy, the Secretary-General said that, to rise to the challenges of climate change, we need strong partnerships at all levels. He added that no sector of society and no nation can succeed alone. He commended the commitment from large emerging economies, high- and middle-income countries, and nations at all stages of development, including the United States and China, to secure a low-carbon future that can limit global temperature rise and underpin sustainable development.

He said the Summit — which comes two weeks after 175 countries signed the Paris Climate Agreement — is about solutions, innovation and imagination, and collaboration and partnerships between the public and private sectors. The Secretary-General then held a press conference with Dr. Jim Kim, the President of the World Bank; Ms. Ségolène Royal, President of COP21 [twenty-first Conference of Parties]; and Mr. Stephen Catlin, Executive Deputy Chairman of the XL Group. That transcript should be out soon. This afternoon he is scheduled to visit the Brookland Middle School in Anacostia in Washington, D.C., along with the Mayor of Washington.

**Central African Republic

I have a quick update on the Central African Republic. As we mentioned to you last week, a team of investigators from the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), officers are on the ground in Kemo prefecture. The OIOS team, which has been on location since the third week of April, continues their ongoing investigations into victims of sexual exploitation and abuse by UN and non-UN troops in that location. OIOS is working with Burundian and Gabonese national investigation officers, as well as partners from UNICEF [United Nations Children's Fund] and UNFPA [United Nations Population Fund]. Together they are interviewing alleged victims, along with other identified and relevant witnesses.

**Yemen

Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, the Special Envoy for Yemen, spoke to your colleagues in Kuwait today to discuss the progress of the ongoing peace talks among the Yemeni

parties. He noted that the parties have formed three working groups on the political transition, security issues, and issues related to prisoners and detainees. Those working groups convened their first meetings this morning. The Special Envoy said that there have been a number of breaches to the cessation of hostilities that took place yesterday, which he said was worrying. He said that he is carefully following up on the issues with the concerned parties and reiterates that those breaches must not affect the ongoing peace talks.

On the issues of the humanitarian situation, Mr. Ould Cheikh Ahmed said that the cessation of hostilities has enabled humanitarian agencies to conduct their duties freely and to deliver aid more effectively. In the governorate of Taiz, for example, drinking water was distributed and a number of health working groups were established to follow up on medical cases and provide medical services.

**Security Council

The Security Council held a [meeting](#) this morning on the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. They were briefed by the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Valentin Inzko, who briefed the Council on the implementation of the Peace Agreement.

**World Humanitarian Summit

Ahead of the World Humanitarian Summit, the Humanitarian Coordinators in the Middle East and North Africa today issued a statement, urging global leaders to attend the Summit, listen to the voices of the region and take bold decisions that will effect change. Leaders must assume their responsibilities to find political solutions to end bloodshed, and prevent further suffering, they added. The Humanitarian Coordinators for Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Syria and Yemen, said that “a staggering 55 million people” in the region need humanitarian assistance to ensure their basic survival, stressing that we all have a shared responsibility to end this tragedy and preserve people’s basic dignity. That statement is available online.

**United Nations Children’s Fund

Our colleagues at UNICEF are calling on the European Governments to give children better protection under the revised EU asylum procedures. The new asylum rules drafted by the European Commission are to be debated in the coming days among the EU [European Union] 28 member States. UNICEF is calling on the European countries to implement timely decisions to avoid exposing children to risk, to assure swift information sharing among Member States, and to harmonize the application of the “best interests” principle for every unaccompanied and separated child. Just to remind you that Europe is in the midst of its biggest refugee and migration crisis since the Second World War. More than 400,000 children who applied for asylum in Europe between January and November 2015 are currently in a legal limbo.

**Hygiene

Today is World Hand Hygiene Day and in its message for the day, the World Health Organization (WHO) urges all health-care workers to increase safety through improving hand hygiene and reducing health-care-associated infections. WHO says that an estimated 8 million lives can be saved worldwide every year in hospitals alone by halting surgical site infections and other health-care-associated infections. More information is available on WHO's website.

**Appointment

Today is also the day we're announcing the [appointment](#) of Modibo Touré of Mali as the new Special Representative for Guinea-Bissau and Head of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS). Mr. Touré replaces Miguel Trovoada of São Tomé and Príncipe, who completed his assignment at the end of April. The Secretary-General is grateful for Mr. Trovoada's leadership and for the accomplishments of the Mission during his tenure in Guinea-Bissau. Mr. Touré, for those of you who may have known, served as Special Adviser to the Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region from 2013 to 2015. If you are interested, there's a biographical note in my office.

**Press Conferences

Press briefing tomorrow at 5:15 p.m. here by the Permanent Observer Mission of the State of Palestine to the UN on the protection of the Palestinian people. If you are available between 1:15 p.m. and 2:15 p.m. today, I encourage you to head down to the book store to meet Janine di Giovanni, who will be presenting her book *The Morning They Came for Us: Dispatches from Syria*.

**Honour Roll

Today, we are happy to thank two countries, Micronesia and Qatar, who both paid their regular budget dues in full, bringing the total to 82. And if you are interested, because I think it is an interesting fact, Micronesia paid its regular budget contribution of \$29,932 and Qatar paid \$6,679,571. Thanks to both. Yes, sir?

**Questions and Answers

Question: Thanks, Steph. MSF [Médecins Sans Frontières] has announced that they're pulling out of the World Humanitarian Summit, called it a fig leaf. What is the UN's reaction?

Spokesman: Look, obviously, we've seen the statement. I'd say it's disappointing, because I think the summit was going to deal with a lot of issues that are vital to MSF and which MSF traditionally presents a strong and influential voice, whether that's preventing and ending conflict, accountability on the implementation of obligations under international humanitarian law, protection of civilians, protection of health workers and health facilities and unimpeded humanitarian access. That being said, as of today, we anticipate about 6,000 participants, including Member States, NGOs [non-governmental organizations], community leaders, private sector companies; 130 side events are being organized. We obviously are continuing full speed ahead on the Summit, which, I think, if you look at the

humanitarian situation in the world today, I think, is clearly needed. Mr. Abbadi, then Matthew.

Question: Thank you, Stéphane. The head of Da'esh... Islamic State [in Iraq and the Levant] (ISIL), in the Sahara is calling for an attack on the offices of MINURSO [United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara]. Two questions: What preventive measures is the UN taking to prevent such an attack? Two, does the Secretary-General now recognize that the lack of resolution of the conflict of the Sahara threatens international peace and security in the region?

Spokesman: Well, I think the Secretary-General in his report underscored the risks of the growth of extremism in the region. The safety of UN personnel, whether they be civilian or unarmed military observers, because, as you know, the Mission is staffed with unarmed military observers, is within the responsibilities of the parties with the... who have de facto authorities throughout the territory. Mr. Lee?

Question: I wanted to ask you about the DRC [Democratic Republic of the Congo]. Obviously, it's a very large UN peacekeeping mission, and the run-up to the elections, the... for example, opposition candidate Moise Katumbi's house was surrounded by police. There have been violence directed and... and... and halting of peaceful demonstration in various cities, Lubumbashi, Kinshasa. So, I haven't heard that much from the Mission. What is the UN's role in the election? What do they think about the authorities... the... the Government has accused Katumbi of having US mercenaries. So, things are kind of heating up. What is the UN intending to do?

Spokesman: I think the Secretary-General and others in the Mission had expressed their concern at the situation... the current situation in the DRC. The Government has a clear responsibility to allow for peaceful demonstration, especially in a run-up to an election where people need to be able to express themselves freely, either through peaceful protest or through the media. And that continues to be our position. It's a message that will continue to be conveyed to the Government.

Question: Does the... I mean, does the UN, with this number of peacekeepers it has there, have any role in... in ensuring that peaceful protesters aren't... aren't roughed up? And I guess... I'm asking this, because there's an analysis that says the UN doesn't want to be thrown out and doesn't want... it so much doesn't want to be thrown out that it's essentially gone relatively quiet in... in... in...

Spokesman: I don't agree with that analysis. MONUSCO [United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo] has a specific mandate, and they will follow that mandate. Abdelhamid?

Question: Thank you, Stéphane. I have two questions. First, if you have any update on the question I posed to you a few days ago about the Palestinian, 23-year-old woman, Maram Ismail, who was killed at Qalandia checkpoint with her 16-year-old brother, if there is any update from the office...?

Spokesman: I don't have an update. I don't have an update.

Question: The second question, on 23 April, Omar Nazzal, a prominent Palestinian journalist, was traveling to Jordan. He's a member of the international journalists union. He was picked up by... at the crossing point with Jordan, and he was detained with no question asked. Now, without any indictment, he's still in jail. Is Mr. [Nickolay] Mladenov aware of that? And if he's aware of other 19 journalists who are serving...

Spokesman: I can ask his office. I do not know about this particular case. Evelyn?

Question: Yes, the guns seemed to have been fall silent... have fallen silent today in Aleppo, but the Syrian Government, according to some reports, is tossing barrel bombs in the countryside around the city. Do you have any information?

Spokesman: No, we're... we're obviously con... we just spoke to our colleagues in the Special Adviser's office. We're... they're continuing to monitor the situation through the Joint Operations Centre, and we're trying to see how things go in Aleppo, but I have no verdict to express on the situation on the ground.

Question: Follow-up on that? Today, I mean, it was all over the media that the... there's a major offensive by Al-Nusra and many of those groups which are party to the cessation of hostilities against Khan Tuman area, which is very close to Aleppo, as you may know. And the offensive is still going on.

Spokesman: As I said, we're monitoring the situation on the ground. Obviously, our underlying position, which is a call for complete cessation of hostilities, is not changed. But, in terms of the situation today, we're monitoring it. Masood, and then Luke.

Question: Stéphane, thank you. Can you tell me, does the United Nations have any update... any information about the Afghan peace talks? They are stalled at this point in time, but Pakistani Foreign Minister... rather, foreign adviser said that he has hope that these talks will go forward because there is no spring offensive so far announced by the Taliban...

Spokesman: Unfortunately, I have no particular information or update to share with you on the talks, but we can ask our colleagues in UNAMA [United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan] if we have something for tomorrow. Luke?

Question: Thanks. I heard your readout on the European commission resettlement scheme. There's a provision in that that allows a country to opt out by basically paying a quarter million euros per head to not have to resettle a refugee. This is making headlines, sort of a new approach. What does the SG [Secretary-General] have to say about this?

Spokesman: I think the EU has to come up with a comprehensive plan. How they... and the Secretary-General's message has always been that there is a need for global solidarity in terms of taking in refugees and ensuring that there is a legal pathway for migrants. Our focus is on ensuring that the rights of refugees are upheld as to the 1951 Convention and that the human rights and dignity of migrants are also upheld. Obviously, within the EU, they will have to be... there are political decisions to be made and mechanics that will have

to go through, but I... so whatever they decide is what they decide, but for us, as long as people's... what is critical is that people's rights be maintained and respected.

Question: He's not concerned that perhaps spending your way out of solidarity doesn't undermine it...?

Spokesman: There needs to be global solidarity. The EU is moving in that direction. They need to come up with a comprehensive plan that's along their political mechanism that's accessible... acceptable to all of their members. Michelle and then Olga. Sorry.

Question: Thanks, Steph. Syrian President [Bashar al-]Assad has said today that he wouldn't accept anything less than outright military victory against the rebels in Aleppo and across the country. That wouldn't seem to bode well for the planned peace talks that [Staffan] de Mistura's supposed to convene again this month. What's the response?

Spokesman: I think for... you know, I... again, it's asymmetrical warfare when you're reading things off your machine, which I haven't seen myself. What is clear is the Secretary-General's position is that there is no military solution to this conflict. There is only a political one, and we need to get the cessation of hostilities back to life in order to see humanitarian assistance increase yet again and to create the right atmosphere for the next round of political talks. Olga?

Question: Thanks, Stéphane. Also about Syria, but about Palmyra, the question of the restoration of this historic city still open. So, I'd like to ask you again, is there any intention on behalf of the UN or UNESCO [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization] to establish a fund or provide any financial help to Syria or...?

Spokesman: You know, the... UNESCO sent a couple of experts there, I think, last... in the last 10 days or so. I think they've gone back to Paris. They're, I'm sure, preparing a report. And UNESCO will, of course, see what can be done to restore what is a shared global heritage. As to the mechanics of how and when that will happen, we can ask UNESCO. Mr. Lee?

Question: Sure. Yesterday, the comptroller in the... said that the UN is continuing to work on whistle-blower protections, and she cited the US law that would require a cut of funding if whistle-blowers aren't protected. So, I wanted to ask you, today the Government Accountability Project has... has highlighted the case of Miranda Brown, who was fired from the Office of High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR) as part of the Anders Kompass case. She's asked to be reinstated. And they have a very long analysis, but they say one line I want to ask you to respond directly to. They say: "In a setting such as the UN where public access to information does not exist and where virtually all operations are governed only by the opaque internal legal process of the institution itself, whistle-blowers have an absolutely crucial function." Can you say, number one, do you... are you aware of the Miranda Brown case? And what do you think of her firing at the time? Two, what's the work on whistle-blower protections that the comptroller was referring to? And do you disagree that there is, in fact, not a FOIA [Freedom of Information Act] at the UN to receive information and that the internal process...

Spokesman: I think the... on Miranda Brown, I have nothing to add to what we've already said on that case. Obviously, the... you know, whistle-blower protect... the work of whistle-blowers is very important. I know there are efforts to improve the current policies. When we have something to announce, I'm sure we will. And I think the UN is... there's a lot of information that is freely available. Now, I know there is no equivalent of the FOIA, and again, I think to... I answered that the other day, which is that it's in the hands of the Member States.

Question: Just one follow-up on the opaque process. There was a decision by the UN Dispute Tribunal, 3 May, in the case of Hassanin vs. the Secretary-General of the United Nations, in which basically the... the... the... the judge in the case...?

Spokesman: I mean, I saw what you posted online. I don't think... I don't think it's an opaque process.

Correspondent: They're saying... e-mails were withheld. They're saying discovery wasn't granted.

Spokesman: First of all, the case is ongoing, so I'm not going to comment on it. And the rulings of the Tribunal are made public.

Question: But, was it possible to fire a union leader?

Spokesman: I'm not going to get into the case, because it's ongoing. Masood, then Mr. Abbadi.

Question: Thank you, sir. Stéphane, there... as of March of this year, there were about 6,700 Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jail besides what they have in Gaza. Do you have any figure at all that you can confirm that, yes, there were 6,700 Palestinians in Israeli jail?

Spokesman: Not at the tip... not at my fingertips.

Question: So, we have to go by the statistics which are given to us at random?

Spokesman: I'll see if UNSCO [Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process] has any figures, but I do not have any figures with me.

Question: Would you be having any statistics...?

Spokesman: As I said, I will see if UNSCO has any figures, but I do not have any figures with me. Mr. Abbadi?

Question: Thank you, Stéphane. In the course of 2015, and again, this year, the Secretary-General has been travelling extensively all over the world, more than any

Secretary-General in the history of this organization, as far as I know. What... what is the total cost of these trips? Can you give us the figure now or later?

Spokesman: The cost is covered by the budget. If I can share... if I can give you more information, I will. Mr. Abdelhamid?

Question: My question if you can update us on Yemen, where do the talks now stand, at what level now?

Spokesman: I think I did update you on Yemen. I mean, at least I listen to myself. I said that the Special Envoy briefed... I'm sorry. I'm sorry, Abdelhamid. I think I did ex... I did brief you extensively. The three working groups under way... the talks are ongoing. Matthew?

Question: Sure. This may go back to this idea... I mean... just to follow up on Mr. Abbadi's question, you said that all costs of travel are covered by the UN budget. Can you say... this issue has come up before... of the last five trips undertaken by the Secretary-General, has there been travel paid for, not out of the UN budget, but by Member States or others? And can you, now or later today, list those?

Spokesman: I can try to come up with those... with that later. Yes, sir, and then we'll go.

Question: On this inspection and mechanism of Yemen, joint inspection mechanism, how does the delivery is happening after it started work functioning? Yesterday, Mr. [Stephen] O'Brien spoke that it started...

Spokesman: Yeah, it started two days ago.

Question: And another... today, Mr. Ould Cheikh Ahmed focused on Taiz in his press conference and he spoke that delivery of water and some help, but how about the rest of Yemen, Marib, Shabwa, Hajjah...?

Spokesman: We're trying to get a bit more of an update for you from the ground, and hopefully, we'll have more extensive stuff for you tomorrow. And on the verification mechanism, it just started. So, I don't really know what more I...

Question: Are they delivering to Hodeidah, for example?

Spokesman: They're... the whole point of the mechanism is to be able to deliver to ports that are not controlled by the Government. Okay? Thank you.