

21 MAY 2014

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

Good afternoon.

\*\* Mali

I will start off with a [statement](#) on the situation in Mali, in Kidal.

The Secretary-General is deeply concerned by the rapidly deteriorating situation in Kidal, in Mali. He calls for the immediate cessation of fighting and the establishment of a ceasefire.

The Secretary-General particularly emphasises his concern for the security of civilian populations, and recalls that the protection of civilians is an obligation for all parties. He condemns the killing of civilians and calls on the perpetrators to be held accountable.

The Secretary-General reiterates the Security Council's call for the urgent resumption of the cantonment process and of sincere peace talks between the signatories and adherents to the Ouagadougou Preliminary Agreement.

And I should add that, as you will recall, over the last few days, the Deputy Secretary-General has made all these points to President Keita of Mali. And he also raised these points with Annick Girardin, the French Secretary of State for Development and the Francophonie, and today to the Executive Secretary-General of the European Union Foreign Action Service Pierre Vimont, who also shared the same concerns.

\*\*Secretary-General's Travel

The Secretary-General [addressed](#) the fourth Summit of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia, in Shanghai, hosted by President Xi Jinping. He took note of Asia's rise, calling the continent a home of economic dynamism, innovation and potential.

But the Secretary-General said that it is also the scene of some of the most worrying tensions in the world today, pointing to the situation in Syria and the growth of territorial disputes across the areas represented by the organization's Member States, among others. He called for the region's rifts and historical wounds to be healed through cooperation, not conflict, through common interests, not unilateral action.

The Secretary-General held talks separately with the Presidents of Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Iran, as well as with Yang Jiechi, the State Councillor of China. And the Secretary-General's remarks to the summit as well as readouts of all of those meetings are available online and in my office.

**\*\* Ukraine**

Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights Ivan Šimonović is currently briefing the Security Council in closed consultations this morning. Mr. Šimonović, as you would recall, was in Ukraine from 14 to 19 May, and is expected to share his observations of the human rights situation there and cover some of the points raised in the second report of the UN human rights monitoring mission.

And the assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Oscar Fernández-Taranco, is also briefing on recent political developments, particularly in the context of the forthcoming presidential elections scheduled for 25 May. And as I mentioned, we expect Mr. Šimonović to come speak to you at the stakeout and as soon as I see him, I will flag that for you.

**\*\* Syria**

On Syria, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, condemned the flagrant disregard for international human rights and humanitarian law — both by the Government and by some armed groups — that has led to tremendous suffering for civilians in Aleppo Governorate in Syria.

She said that the people of Aleppo have been living in terrifying conditions, with intensified shelling and aerial attacks over the past six months, including through the rampant use of barrel bombs. Adding to this,

the essential infrastructures of these communities, including their water systems, are being repeatedly damaged. Ms. Pillay warned that international humanitarian law prohibits attacking, destroying, removing or rendering useless objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population. Her full statement is available on OHCHR (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights) website.

#### **\*\*South Sudan**

Turning to South Sudan, the United Nations Mission in the country (UNMISS) remains concerned about incidents, including assault, detention and harassment of its staff, that have recently occurred and exposed its personnel to serious security risks.

The Mission deplores the behaviour of alleged members of the security forces, who assaulted and illegally detained two of its staff members in separate incidents in Juba in recent days. These acts are illegal and in clear violation of the Status of Forces Agreement, which regulates relations between UNMISS and the Government of South Sudan. This is despite public reassurances given by President Salva Kiir after his meeting with the Secretary-General earlier this month concerning the Government's commitment to cooperate with the UN Mission in South Sudan.

The Mission has asked the Government of South Sudan to immediately investigate these violations and bring the perpetrators to justice. It also demands that all parties ensure unhindered freedom of movement to the United Nations, and safety for its staff and humanitarian workers.

#### **\*\*South Sudan — Cholera**

Also an update on the cholera situation in South Sudan, our humanitarian colleagues say that the number of cholera cases has continued to rise in Juba. As of yesterday, a cumulative 266 cases were reported including 13 deaths. Sixty-seven per cent of those have been treated at the Juba Teaching Hospital Cholera Treatment Centre. And cholera cases have been reported from six locations in Juba County. Disease treatment and control, including raising awareness of cholera prevention through house-to-house sensitization, radio broadcasts and other public activities are continuing.

UNMISS engineers and humanitarian partners are working hard to improve hygiene, water and sanitation inside the UN bases and are clearing drainage systems. This is in addition to monitoring water quality, water treatment and provision of clean drinking water at Juba Teaching Hospital. Decongestion of the overcrowded UN bases by either relocating civilians to new sites or extending existing ones, especially in Bentiu, Bor and Malakal, remains a top priority.

The Mission says that among its other priorities has been to relocate civilians and decongest all sites, by either extending existing sites or building new ones, with the same level of protection and enhanced basic services, on land made available by the Government, such as in Juba, Bor, Bentiu and Malakal.

Cholera vaccination is ongoing in Bentiu, in Unity State, with 13,000 individuals in the protection of civilians sites vaccinated against cholera on 19 to 21 May. In Jonglei State, cholera preparedness and response measures are also in place, including a cholera treatment centre.

#### \*\* Libya

And from Libya, the head of the Support Mission in that country, Tarek Mitri, met yesterday with Interim Prime Minister Abdullah al-Thini, along with ambassadors of European Union States and the [ United States] Chargé d’Affaires. Participants underlined the importance of using political dialogue to address the differences instead of resorting to violence. They emphasized respect for the sovereignty and national unity of Libya.

#### \*\*Balkan Floods

Also update on the floods this morning in the Balkans. This morning, as we speak, the Deputy Secretary-General is making a round of calls to leaders of the impacted countries. Namely, Prime Minister Aleksander Vučić of Serbia, Bakir Izetbegović, the chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and President Ivo Josipović of Croatia.

Mr. Eliasson is expected to express his deepest condolences to the flood victims and members of their families. He will also discuss the UN’s varying support for each country and express the organization’s solidarity with the Governments and the people in the region. We also expect the President of Serbia to be in New York next week where he will meet the Secretary-General.

And in terms of what we are doing on the ground, the UN disaster assessment and coordination team is working to support the Serbian Government in coordinating the response. There are six members and they are embedded within the response team, working with the European Union to coordinate aid offered by the international community, including helicopters, water pumping units, search and rescue teams and boats. Around 16 countries are involved in the response. The UN has delivered two flights with humanitarian supplies to Belgrade, sent from Brindisi. The value of that shipment is around \$500,000.

And in Bosnia, we have delivered one flight from Brindisi to Tuzla, also with all sorts of equipment, including water purification units, and the value of that aid in that plane is \$280,000.

\*\*United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees

We also have in my office a note to correspondents and an infographic from the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) on their observation of the sharp increase in the number of Palestine refugees killed and injured during law enforcement operations carried out by the Israeli security forces in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Notably, refugees have been severely affected by the increase in the use of force, evidenced by the large numbers of fatalities and injuries that have occurred in and around densely populated refugee camps. As I mentioned, the note is in my office.

\*\* Iran

Also the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and Iran according to the press release on the IAEA, the IAEA and Iran agreed on five additional practical measures to their Framework for cooperation. These measures are to be implemented by Iran by 25 August of this year. They include exchange of information with the Agency, including on allegations related to the conduct of large-scale high explosives experimentation in Iran. Among the new measures, Iran also agreed to arrange a technical visit to a centrifuge research and development centre. More is available on the IAEA website.

\*\*Press Conferences

Tomorrow, 11:30 a.m., a press conference on the International Year of Biological Diversity. Speakers will include the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Palau to the United Nations and Vice-Chair of the Global Island Partnership Steering Committee Caleb Otto, Denis G. Antoine, Permanent Representative of Grenada, and a member of the Global Island Partnership Steering Committee and David Ainsworth, Information Officer for the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Also, at 1 p.m., the press conference on the High-level Donor Conference to Support Transnational Crime Units under the West Africa Coast Initiative, otherwise known as WACI. Speakers will include Yury Fedotov, the Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). We also expect Said Djinnit to be part of that press conference, but we are trying to bring him to you on a separate press conference to be focused more on Nigeria.

At 2 p.m. tomorrow, there will be a press conference in this room on the closing of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

That's it. You may talk or ask questions. Yes, sir?

\*\*Questions and Answers

Question: Thank you, Stéphane. Few clarifications, please on these biblical floods in Balkans, in Bosnia, as well. Regarding those calls of the Deputy Secretary-General, Mr. Eliasson, can we have readings of...?

Spokesman: You will have readouts. They're happening, either they just happened or happening as we speak, so I was just trying to give you a little teaser of what was going to be said.

Question: Good. Number two, today, we had in Bosnia, Chief of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) Mr. Rasmussen, yesterday it was Kristalina Georgieva from EU (European Union) in Serbia. Does the UN plan to send any high official down there in Bosnia to assess the... or to talk somebody or anywhere else? Number two.

Spokesman: I know the Secretary-General's Representative to Serbia, Peter Due, has been actively informed involved in trying... in helping the response. Let me check about what's going on in Bosnia. Our focus right now is on the needs assessment, as I said, and on helping coordinate the assistance. Obviously, the European Union has also a lot of facilities and assistance down there and we're working with them.

Question: And just the third one, short one. The Bosnian diplomat said the UN said they contacted the Cabinet of the Secretary-General on 18... on Sunday regarding the situation, can you confirm that contact? What was discussed with whom or so?

Spokesman: I don't have any information, but I can see what I can get for you. Yes, Matthew?

Question: Sure, I wanted to ask you about Sri Lanka. I saw the readout of the Secretary-General's meeting with President Rajapaksa and Sri Lankan media, or actually not media, the President's office in Sri Lanka has quoted Ban Ki-moon as saying "I appreciate your leadership to implement the LLRC (Learnt and Reconciliation Commission)". The President's office quoted Ban as saying, while also expressing his appreciation of the President's commitment to the democratic process. So, I wanted to know, are these quotes accurate? And... and particularly, how do they relate to the report I asked you about on Monday by Yasmin Sooka, previously on the panel of experts showing that the President... quoting Mr. Nambiar as saying that President Rajapaksa said let's go all the way in 2009 i.e. kill... surrendering Tamil Tiger leaders.

Spokesman: You know, as for who speaks for the Secretary-General, the Secretary-General speaks for himself, I speak for him and other senior UN officials. So, in terms of what the Secretary-General said and the points that he made, I would follow the readout. I'm not going to start to confirm what others are quoting the Secretary... what other readouts may be quoting the Secretary-General as saying.

Question: Is he aware of that report given that it was written by... by a member of his own panel of experts and it concerns his Senior Adviser...?

Spokesman: As I said to you, as soon as I have something on that report, I will let you know. Yes, Mr. Klein?

Question: Yes first of all, is the UNRWA statement, or note to correspondents, will that also be available online?

Spokesman: It's online and...

Correspondent: You said it was just in your office, but I just...

Spokesman: We can check though, I'm sure UNRWA has put it online.

Question: Okay, secondly, the most substantive question. What is the Secretary-General position and what, if anything, is he doing in terms of getting Boko Haram — I always get the mispronunciation — Boko Haram to be named officially as a terrorist entity for UN purposes?

Spokesman: I think that's an issue that is up to the Member States. I think we have strongly condemned repeatedly the terrorist actions of this group and the violence they have unleashed on civilians and especially some of the most vulnerable civilians in the region.

Question: But won't... won't it be helpful if the... I've seen the statements that the Secretary-General's office has put out condemning the violence and so forth, but character... characterizing it, perhaps in those statements specifically in his view as Islamic terrorist organisation, in his view, won't that be useful in terms of...?

Spokesman: You know, I think, again, that nomenclature is up to... that decision is up to the Member States. Yes, Matthew?

Question: You know, I wanted to ask you about Libya. The... there have been continued advances by General Khalifa Haftar, and most recently the [Permanent Representative] here at... at the UN, Mr. Dabbashi has said this is not a coup, it's a nationalistic move. So, I wanted to know, is... what does Mitri say? He's there, it seems like he called for restraint but in fact, guns are still blazing. How does he... has he ever met with Mr. Haftar? Does he view this as... as... as the Ambassador here at the UN does as not a coup or is it a coup?

Spokesman: I think what we have seen is violence. And we have seen where civilians have been targeted. We've seen armed violence against the Government institutions which is not helpful to say the least. Mr. Mitri's message and the UN's message is a call for political dialogue and to avoid violence in order to settle one's political differences. As to who he's met or who he hasn't met, we can ask the mission.

Question: And I noticed that [inaudible], when I asked on Monday, you know, there... this UNSMIL (United Nations Support Mission in Libya) statement came out, but usually these things like would quote, like if it's on the Congo it will quote Martin Kobler, there was no direct quote. There was no mention of Mr. Mitri in there. Is there something...?

Spokesman: No, I mean, I wouldn't read too much into that. Sir?

Question: Our distinguished colleague Joe Lauria reported in *The Wall Street Journal* on the probe on the investigation of the death in 1961 of Dag Hammarskjöld, former Secretary-General. I just wonder where does it stand that probe if any, here at the UN and where does it... where it's headed?

Spokesman: It was a very good article by your colleague.

Correspondent: Actually, it was, yes.

Spokesman: Yes, it was. It stands that it's up to the General Assembly and they will take this matter up and decide what the next steps are.

Question: What is the position of Secretary-General?

Spokesman: Well, we would hope that the General Assembly does take up the matter and discusses it and decides on a move forward. Mr. Lee?

Question: Sure. I want to ask about Darfur and also about the DRC ( Democratic Republic of the Congo). In Darfur, the Radio Dabanga is reporting that residents of the Kalma camp have... have given kind of an ultimatum to UNAMID (African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur) to begin protecting them or they will block these irregular patrols. One thing that they said is that UNAMID policeman two weeks ago ran at the first shooting by militia men and so this seems to tie in to this report that was just done by OIOS (Office of Internal Oversight Services) to the Fifth Committee about failure to protect civilians. Can [the Department of Peacekeeping Operations] confirm that [UNAMID] policemen... the article says that UNAMID has apologized to the Kalma camp residents but is it true? And what's the response?

Spokesman: We'll check.

Question: And also, there are reports in... in... in eastern DRC that the FDLR (Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda), rather than being neutralized is, in fact, increased attacks in Lubero and North Kivu. There's a news service there reporting on in specific...

Spokesman: If I have an update on DRC I will share it with you. Yes, Mr. Klein. Sorry, you go ahead. Sorry.

Question: Yeah, about... about this meeting today between Secretary-General and Hassan Rouhani, I want to ask if the Secretary-General discuss certain steps to continue the process in Syria and if Iran would be part of this process or not, thank you.

Spokesman: I think the — obviously, the situation in Syria was a big part of the discussion. The President and Secretary-General exchanged views on how to set the country on a path of peace through political solution. And they also discussed the issue of humanitarian access and humanitarian assistance to ensure that reaches as many displaced people internally and those who have remained in their communities who are outside the reach of the UN's humanitarian arm. Yes, Joe?

Question: Yes, I have asked this question several times, but I'm hoping I can get a date certain this time. And this regards the Secretariat's implementation of the General Assembly's resolution in which it said that the referendum in Crimea and the annexation of Crimea would be regarded as invalid. The reason I'm asking is because now there are claims, potential claims of Maritime Rights going out to 200 miles from Crimea, which sort of builds on the validity or invalidity of the annexation, so when is... I know the Secretariat's has been studying this, but when is it going to make final determination for map purposes, documents purposes...

Spokesman: You know, the issue of... The short answer is I don't really have an update for you, but I would try to add a few words to my non-update which is that the issue of maritime claims is being dealt with through the vast and important Law of the Sea mechanism. Yes?

Question: But, that kind of pre-supposes the validity to the Assertion of Rights by Russia given its annexation of Crimea, and that goes to the issue of Customary International Law, which the UN can influence, so I... I... can you find out for us what is being done in the Secretariat to implement that resolution?

Spokesman: I will. Erol and then Matthew.

Question: Stéphane, when the Secretary-General met Russian President [Vladimir] Putin just hours before as we understood, did he in particular beside the reading that we have, readout that we had, did he, in particular, talk regarding the withdrawals of the Russian troops behind the borders as a move to release the tensions?

Spokesman: The readout is what we have. Obviously, a pullback from the border would be an important de-escalation step. Sangwon?

Question: Can you give an update on the situation in Mali? There are reports now that the Tuareg rebels have gained control and they've killed soldiers and there have been various reports...

Spokesman: We are starting to get operational updates, the situation on the ground is extremely fluid, intense, so I don't have... beyond the statement that I've given you and just the knowledge that the situation in Kidal seems to be evolving almost minute by minute right now, so we're obviously following that very closely. If we can bring you an update from the information we have, we will. The overarching message from the UN continues to call for ceasefire, return to cantonment and for all parties to follow and abide by Ouagadougou Accord.

Question: I have a separate question. The Secretary-General, in his meetings in China with Chinese officials, has he raised the issue of China deploying the oil rig and how that relates in response to the Convention of Law of the Sea and as a depositary what is his stance?

Spokesman: The issue of the tensions in those maritime areas has been brought up in a number of the Secretary-General's bilateral. I think he made an allusion to it clearly in his speech to the Summit in which he called all participants to resolve those differences through dialogue and through mutual understanding and avoid any unilateral steps. Matthew?

Question: Sure, I'm sorry to ask this again, but I wanted to ask about Burundi again, in the sense that the opposition parties there have affirmed and re-affirmed that they sent to a letter to Secretary-General about this leaked cable of the arming of the youth... youth wing of the CNDD (National Council for the Defence of Democracy) Party. And so, I asked and... and Vannina said the NGO (non-governmental organization) letter wasn't received and she'll check on the letter of the Opposition Party that was the seventh. I asked you on the sixteenth... like, is there a... who should I ask? I mean, it seems like if the UN... if the opposition parties in the country are alleging you know, racial...

Spokesman: I will check again all the possible recipients of the letter.

Question: And I guess, what I wanted to know is, because there was a... there was a speech or press conference held by the SRSG (Special Representative of the Secretary-General) in Burundi, essentially apologizing to the Government for the leak of the cable, but not in any way... I mean, I've asked here a number of times, like people there seem to believe it's true. The human rights defender has named the camp... a camp where he says there are being trained in the DRC. Has MONUSCO (United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo) even gone to that camp? Is there any coordination between...?

Spokesman: If I have something new on Burundi, I will share with you, but I don't at this point. Thank you.