

21 APRIL 2016

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.

**Press Events

In a short while, I will be joined by Forest Whitaker, who as you know is a Sustainable Development Goals Advocate, as well as Thomas Gass, Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. They will be briefing on the UN General Assembly High-Level Thematic Debate on Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals that is taking place today, as we speak.

At 1:15 p.m.: there will be a briefing here by Ambassador Wang Xiaolong, the Special Envoy of G-20 Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China.

**Climate Change

Tomorrow the Secretary-General will be hosting, as you know, a signing ceremony for the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and I just wanted to give you an update on the line-up for the day.

The numbers are not yet final but we expect more than 165 Member States to attend the ceremony, including an estimated 60 Heads of State and Heads of Government. This would set a record for countries signing an international agreement on a single day.

Thirteen countries have indicated that they will also be submitting their instruments of ratification tomorrow. The full list is available online and that list will be updated as it grows, as we hope.

At 8:30 a.m. in the General Assembly Hall, the Secretary-General will announce the start of the opening ceremony, and [will address] the event, following remarks by a youth representative — Getrude Clement, who is a 16-year-old radio reporter from Tanzania and youth representative and climate change advocate for UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund).

Children will be part of the event and there will be a performance by the Julliard brass quintet — after this, the Secretary-General will declare the Paris Agreement officially open for signature, allowing Members States to take turns to sign the agreement. While the

signing continues, those who have signed will head to the Economic and Social Council and Trusteeship Council Chambers to deliver their national remarks.

The Secretary-General is scheduled to hold a joint press conference with President François Hollande at some time before lunch in this room. There will also be press conference by business and civil society representatives. Due to all the activities, we will not be having a noon briefing tomorrow and a list of press conferences and stakeouts will be available on our website later today.

At 1:15 p.m., the Secretary-General and the Global Compact will host a high-level luncheon on climate finance at the Delegates Dining Room. At 3:15 p.m., in Conference Room 1, there will be a high-level event on climate implementation.

The closing ceremony will start at around 6 p.m., featuring remarks by the Secretary-General, as well as the past, current and incoming presidencies of the Conferences of Parties.

A note to correspondents will be sent around with more details, should you want them.

**Development

The Deputy Secretary-General [spoke](#) at the High-Level [Debate](#) on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals on behalf of the Secretary-General who, as you know, is expected back in New York shortly from his trip to the Netherlands.

In his remarks, the Deputy Secretary-General stressed that the development and climate agendas are inseparable and mutually reinforcing.

He added that the breadth and depth of Agenda 2030 call for adopting new approaches and for breaking down silos.

He also stressed that the UN system has already begun to support countries, both strategically and operationally, to implement the Agenda. We are now in Year One of our 15-year journey, he said.

Obviously, you will hear more from Thomas Gass and Forest Whitaker.

**Water

The Secretary-General and World Bank Group President Jim Yong Kim [announced](#) today the appointment of 10 Heads of State and Government, as well as two Special Advisers, to the High-Level Panel on Water.

The Panel, which was launched at the World Economic Forum in Davos last January, aims to mobilize effective action to accelerate the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 6. That Goal, you will recall, focuses on ensuring the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all, at a time of unprecedented challenges.

The Panel members will serve for two years. The Co-chairs of the Panel are Ameenah Gurib, the President of Mauritius, and Enrique Peña Nieto, the President of Mexico. The full list of panellists is available online.

**Yemen

Under the auspices of the United Nations, the Yemen peace negotiations have gone under way in Kuwait, with the aim of reaching an agreement on a clear way to end the violence and devastation in the country.

The talks will seek to develop agreements which will restore security and peace in the country, strengthen State institutions and help speed up economic recovery.

Although serious violations have been seen of the cessation of hostilities, the levels of military violence have significantly diminished, along with the number of civilian deaths. We do expect a press release from the Special Envoy shortly.

**Syria

Speaking of Special Envoys, Staffan de Mistura, the Special Envoy for Syria, spoke to reporters, your colleagues, in Geneva today and said that, according to the recent analysis by his team's humanitarian task force, there has been modest but real progress regarding the humanitarian situation in Syria.

So far, he said, about 220,000 people in the besieged areas have been reached, or about half the people of the besieged areas. He said that 515 people were medically evacuated yesterday simultaneously from Zabadani, Madaya, Kefraya and Foah. This was done through the active participation of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent.

Mr. de Mistura added that his senior aide Khawla Mattar had led a convoy which went to Darayya for the first time since 2012. She reported that there is a need for food and medicine, and the Special Envoy pledged to follow up on her assessment.

He also noted that the World Food Programme (WFP) has in recent days conducted eight successful air drops over Deir Ezzour, which have reached an estimated 65,000 people. Additional details [are] in Mr. de Mistura's transcript.

**Libya

Martin Kobler, the Special Representative for Libya, has called for the safe evacuation of civilians caught up in the fighting in Benghazi.

According to the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), a large number of civilians, including Libyans and migrant workers, are trapped in areas of fighting in Benghazi. They face shortages of electricity, food, medical supplies and other basic necessities.

Also, the Deputy Special Representative Ali Al-Za'tari, who is also the Humanitarian Coordinator, has urged action following reports from the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) that up to 500 people have lost their lives this week when an overcrowded boat carrying hundreds of people capsized on its way to Europe from Libya.

An estimated 24,000 people have departed Libya by sea since the beginning of 2016, about 90 per cent more than in the same period in 2015. Although hundreds have been rescued, many are missing and their fate is unknown.

****Mali**

You will have seen, in a statement we issued yesterday afternoon, the Secretary-General strongly [condemned](#) the violent demonstrations that took place on Monday in North Mali, in Kidal, and regretted the loss of life and injury.

****Ecuador**

Regarding Ecuador, Stephen O'Brien, who as you heard first-hand [was] in Ecuador, wrapped up his visit to the country today.

He said that the UN and partners would be launching the full Flash Appeal for the Ecuadorean relief operation tomorrow, to help some 350,000 people with immediate relief and initial recovery assistance within the next three months.

He also allocated \$7 million from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) to kick-start vital operations in logistics, shelter, water, sanitation and hygiene, and emergency health.

Meanwhile, the World Food Programme is scaling up its operations with food kits, commodity vouchers, and, where markets are functioning, with cash-based transfers.

And UNDP (United Nation Development Programme) is opening a special recovery office in the coastal city of Manta, around 260 km outside of Quito, to immediately initiate reconstruction in the most impacted areas. Debris removal activities will begin in the next few days, offering emergency employment. More details on UNDP's website.

****Fishing**

What else did I want to flag? An interesting item from our friends at the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), who are warning about the impact of lost and abandoned fishing gear on the environment.

At present, it accounts for about one tenth of all marine litter, translating into hundreds of thousands of tons annually.

Growing concern over this problem, coupled with the increasing availability of new technologies to recover this equipment, has led FAO to begin developing international

guidelines on the effective tagging of fishing gear as a way to cut down levels of troublesome sea trash.

If you fish or if you like the oceans, go to the FAO website.

**Honour Roll

And for the honour roll, we thank Côte d'Ivoire for paying its dues in full, becoming the sixty-ninth Member State to do so.

**Questions and Answers

All right, Joe. Go ahead, anyway.

Question: Yes. Yesterday, the King of Morocco delivered a rather toughly worded speech in which he, among other things, criticized the Secretary-General and some of the aides working for him saying that he didn't have a problem with the UN as a whole or the Security Council, but he... but he did say that... he did, however, have a problem, quote, "with the Secretary-General and, more particularly, with some of his aides because of their hostile positions towards my country". Could you comment on behalf of the Secretary-General and tell us whether there have been any specific discussions between the Secretary-General and any representatives of the Moroccan Government concerning the specific aides with which the King was expressing concern?

Spokesman: No, not that I'm aware. Obviously, we've had contacts at various levels between the UN and the Moroccan authorities over the last few weeks. The... I mean, I... you know, I'm not going to get into a direct response to the King's speech. The Secretary-General, I think, has expressed his position on the situation in Western Sahara through his report, and that's it. Mr. Avni? And I'll... yeah.

Question: So what the King actually said, the King of Morocco...

Spokesman: As opposed to what Joe said?

Question: No, no, I'm trying to be... flesh it out a little bit. [laughter] No, I'm trying to flesh it out a little bit. What he actually said was that the Secretary-General admit... himself said that he's not that well versed in the details of the Western Sahara issue, and he says, it is a fact that some of these aides that Joe mentioned have national agendas. They are politically motivated, and they serve other parties' interests without regards to their duty as staff members of the United Nations organization. The point is that it was directed very, very personally at aides, unnamed aides. First of all, can you identify those aides? And secondly, because of the nature of this almost personal attack of, I would say, almost unprecedented, I'm going back to my original question is, do we actually need someone to mediate between the UN and Morocco?

Spokesman: Look, the future of the mission in Western Sahara is in the hands of the Security Council, and the Secretary-General has put his recommendations forward. All those who serve the UN, including all those who advise the Secretary-General, are UN staff

members. They have signed on to the Charter. Their only allegiance is to the United Nations and to serve the Secretary-General. And they give their advice based on that.

Question: So we have clear differences between what you say as the Spokesman for the Secretary-General and what the King of Morocco says. He says that they are not. You say they are. Do we need someone to mediate? It's a dispute that... [inaudible]

Spokesman: Benny, it's an interesting...

Question: It's a dispute that is harming the United Nations.

Spokesman: As I said, Benny, this... the issue of Western Sahara is in the hands of the Security Council. We very much look forward to the Security Council issuing its... having the debate and taking measures going forward on Western Sahara.

Question: Just one more follow-up on this. [inaudible]

Question: One more follow-up on this.

Spokesman: I'll mediate between the two of you. Joe, hold on. [laughter]

Question: You'll mediate? So... [inaudible] the King of Morocco is saying that... the micro... that... sorry. The King of Morocco was saying... the other thing the King of Morocco was saying that... that this event has... you know, this whole situation has been exacerbated because of what the Secretary-General has said. So are we in a situation in which a fairly dormant dispute was lit up by one remark by the Secretary-General?

Spokesman: Look, I think we've gone over and over what the Secretary-General has said and his motivation for it. I mean, I'm not going to relitigate that. We are where we are. The Secretary-General has submitted a comprehensive report on the situation in Western Sahara, on the peacekeeping mission, which is a mission authorized and sent there by the Security Council. We will await... and he's made his recommendations. We will wait for a decision by the Security Council. Mr. Lee... Joe, hold on. No, Joe, I appreciate it. Mr. Lee?

Question: Sure. And then please do go to Joe. I have other things, but I want to ask you on Western Sahara the following: First I just, I want to ask you point-blank is there, in fact, already a country mediating between the Secretary-General and Morocco?

Spokesman: Not that I'm aware of. Again, we are in touch with Security Council members, and this is... the future of the situation in Western Sahara is in the hands of the Security Council.

Question: And I wanted to ask you about the report. The... the... the version of the report that was sent signed off on by Deputy Secretary-General [Jan] Eliasson, Paragraph 37, there's the word "draft" before he signed it; the D is cut off, meaning that Paragraph 37 was changed. And it has to do with medical staff east of the berm. And I just wanted to ask

you, you know, what... what... what are... can you describe changes to the recommendation for new medical staff in MINURSO (United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara) in Paragraph 37?

Spokesman: No. You apparently obtained some copy of the report. Again, I can't attest to the veracity of what you published. The report will be out in all six languages, and I would encourage you to read that.

Question: And what's the... finally, what's the status... I've asked you a couple of times about the fraud inquiry into the use of hotels in Western Sahara by UN staff, given that the documents are almost a year ago...

Spokesman: I have no update on that. I'll see what I can get you. Yes, sir?

Question: Thanks, Stéphane. Getting back to UNGASS (United Nations General Assembly Special Session): There's been a lot of criticism from civil society about what's going on. But I want to ask you about something specific, something that actually Jamaica brought up yesterday about the scheduling of Cannabis. And obviously, this is something that wasn't addressed in the document that was adopted, but countries seem to still feel like their hands are tied because it hasn't been reviewed officially by the WHO (World Health Organization) in the way that would allow it to maybe be rescheduled. Does the Secretary... obviously, you might say, well, let's see what the WHO says, but does the Secretary-General feel that something like that should happen given that it's a... not a dangerous drug but yet it's caused so much problem?

Spokesman: I think the... a lot of these issues were debated in UNGASS. I think it is up to WHO to periodically review these sorts of issues. Masood-ji?

Question: Thank you, sir. Stéphane, on these refugees who were killed yesterday in which the United States... United Nations made a press, is there an investigation going on to determine whether the refugees, in fact, were overloaded... overloaded or was it deliberate... what do you call it... killing of these...

Spokesman: I'm sorry. Which case are you specifically talking about?

Question: Yesterday, yesterday's, yesterday. The 500...

Spokesman: Oh, the people that drowned? Yeah. You know, the focus should be on trying to rescue if there are any... and provide support to any of the survivors. We're not in a position to be able to investigate what happened. Obviously, we would hope that maritime forces in the area would do it, but it is clear that we have seen over and over again, since the beginning of this crisis, refugees and migrants being taken advantage of by people smugglers, who have a tendency to overload boats, which, even if they weren't overloaded, appear to be extremely unsafe.

Question: In the previous one, which was about two years ago, similar incident happened in which 500 migrants were killed. And the boat sank. So, I mean, the... only the question

arises because... is there anything that the United Nations can ask the Member States to do...?

Spokesman: Well, I think, obviously, we... there are various navies; EU [European Union] and others are in the area. We would hope that they would use their resources — and they have — to try to save as many migrants as they can and, obviously, also detain whenever possible people involved in people smuggling. Yes, sir, and then Go.

Question: On Syria, maybe you have seen some statements by Syrian Prime Minister. So I would like to know, in particular, he said in interview to RIA Novosti that the current Syrian Constitution may remain unchanged following preamble on the issue or it may be changed partly or completely. Also, he said that the new Syrian Government must include representatives of all the current cabinet, independent politicians, as well as national opposition. So how can you comment on that?

Spokesman: Well, you know, obviously, the issues of political transition is at the centre of the talks that are currently going on in Geneva. They are being discussed and debated with the Special Envoy through proximity talks and other discussions. It is something that will have to come out of this process. Go?

Question: Thank you, Stéphane. Sorry if anyone already asked that. Is the King of Morocco supposed to come tomorrow to attend the ceremony?

Spokesman: I do not think the King will be here.

Question: No.

Spokesman: No. But my understanding is that the sister of the King will be here to represent the presidency of COP-22 (22nd Conference of Parties). As you know, Morocco will take over the Conference of Parties from France later this year.

Question: So in this case, is she supposed to meet...

Spokesman: There's nothing scheduled. But she will obviously see the Secretary-General as part of the proceedings, especially at the opening.

Question: So not any specific meeting.

Spokesman: No, but I'm sure they will talk, and they will be next to each other a number of moments during the day. Yeah?

Question: Thank you. How many Member States and Head of States will be participating in humanitarian summit, which will be held next month?

Spokesman: Oh, I don't have that number off the top of my head. I think it may be a little early to come out with a number. But obviously, we would hope to see as much...

senior-most representation possible. Mr. Klein... sorry. Joe and then Majeed. Go ahead, Joe.

Question: This goes back to the original questions about the King of Morocco's speech. You had said that this is... whole matter is up to the Security Council, and what he said in his speech specifically was that Morocco does not have a problem with the Security Council, whose members it respects and with whom it is constantly in touch. So what we're dealing with appears to be more of an interpersonal issue between... well, the King of Morocco on behalf of Morocco and the Secretary-General, misunderstandings, the role of the aides, as he pointed out. So just back to both Benny's question and what I was trying to ask is, is there a... is there a plan going forward to try to resolve directly this interpersonal issue that does not involve the Security Council?

Spokesman: This is not so much an interpersonal issue as an issue regarding the future of the UN peacekeeping presence in Western Sahara. And that presence, the nature of that presence, the mandate, is up to the Security Council to decide. They have the Secretary-General's recommendations. They have his report, and they will act on it. Majeed?

Question: Thank you, Stéphane. First, I want to ask about the joint press conference of President Hollande and the UN Secretary-General. What time is it tomorrow?

Spokesman: That is a work in progress, my friend.

Question: Work in progress. Around afternoon or... still?

Spokesman: It will be... I would say between the hours of 11:15 and 1. That's my prediction. The exact time is a work in progress.

Question: Okay. I wanted to also ask about bilateral... any meeting of the Secretary-General with the leaders. Would it involve climate change, the topic of Syria, especially in Geneva? There's a serious problem right now.

Spokesman: Obviously, the focus will be on climate change, but as always, when there are bilateral meetings, other topics do come up.

Question: Can you tell me which one is... will be about Syria...

Spokesman: We'll be... no. I... what I can share with you later is a list of the bilaterals the Secretary-General is having. Then we will issue readouts after those bilaterals have taken place. Masood-ji?

Question: On the issue of the Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jail, especially women and children, the Secretary-General has been calling for the release again and again. And the Israeli Government has not budged at all on this issue. So has the Secretary-General... what does the Secretary-General intend to do next about this issue?

Spokesman: I think, again, this is an issue the Secretary-General has repeatedly raised, both at his level and at the level of the Special Coordinator, and we will continue do so.

Question: And many of these women and children in particular, they're without any court or... what do you call... any...

Spokesman: I understand the situation, and I think I answered to the best of my ability. Stefano and then Matthew.

Question: Yes, thank you, Stéphane. Again, about the situation in the Mediterranean about the refugee and migrants and about international law, it's again the question that you... I ask you a week ago. You answered. My... I keep... I will ask every week. And is about international law is respected. You saw also the Pope going to Lesbos, what he said. Today I asked to the Italian Justice Minister about the concern the UN had about international law. He said that he understand the concern of UN. Then I asked to the Italian Prime Minister, Matteo Renzi, if he thinks international law is respected. He said yes, is respected. And I ask again at the UN, is the international law respected?

Spokesman: I think this is something we continue to keep a close eye on. Mr. Lee?

Question: Sure, thanks a lot. I want to ask about Burundi, Yemen and the audit. In Burundi, there are very troubling reports of, some say, up to 150 civilians detained in Mugamba commune, which is viewed as an opposition neighbourhood, and they are missing. So I'm wondering... I haven't heard anything from the UN on this. It's a very high number. Is it that it didn't take place or...? [inaudible]

Spokesman: I have not seen those reports. [The Spokesman later added: Our human rights office was informed that on 20 April 2016, following a security incident that occurred in Mugamba commune, Bururi province (an exchange of gunfire between unidentified armed men and military elements, during which two people including a military lost their lives), three persons, including a teacher, were arrested by the police and detained in Mugamba police station. No charges were retained against them and they were finally released on 21 April 2016 following an intervention by the Regional police commissioner.]

Question: Okay. I wanted to ask on Yemen, now that the Houthis and GPC (General People's Congress) have arrived, can you say whether this, "peace and national partnership agreement"... there was a lot of dispute about what this meeting is based on, whether it's only based on the most recent Security Council resolution or... or agreements that were reached, including with Mr. [Abd Rabbuh Mansur] Hadi, before that resolution was passed. Was... is this peace and national partnership agreement a basis of the talks in the Kuwait?

Spokesman: Look, I'm not going to get into the details of the way Mr. Ismail [Ould Cheikh Ahmed] is handling his negotiations. I think it's important that the talks did get under way and that we focus on how to help restore security and safety for the people of Yemen. But I'm not going to get into the granularity of the talks from here.

Question: Okay. Speaking of granular, I'm going to again try to do this politely, but I want to ask this question. In the audit, of the OIOS (Office of Internal Oversight Services) audit, one of the longest sections in terms of Ng Lap Seng affiliates concern South-South News. They described five separate engagements with the UN, and each party is saying we didn't really know or we... we're... you know, and the recommendation that you're aware of to... to take a closer look at this relationship. So I wanted to know, yesterday, or... or some... earlier this week, South-South News put out a press release, sent to many people, and they said, "It is disgraceful that a few independent journalists are exhibiting a lack of professionalism and irresponsibility," essentially by questioning this. So my question to you is... you may or may not have seen this. Reuters wrote a story about it.

Spokesman: Yeah.

Question: Okay. You've seen it. Here's my question. Given all this, given that the indictment came out in October, six months ago, I went upstairs yesterday, and I see that South-South News still has a UN office. And apparently, you said it's under review. There seems to be some due process rights. What I want to ask you directly is: How can there be a due process right with an institution that's charged with bribery when a smaller institution, Inner City Press, was physically thrown out of its office with no due process? And my question to you is, given that, yesterday, they tore a sign of the Free UN Coalition for Access (FUNCA) off the door without the consent of the office's still occupant, who's a member of FUNCA, what is the intention? And what would you say to those who say, basically, if you have money, you get due process at the UN, up to six months, and if you don't, you get two hours? What would you say?

Spokesman: I would say that you're wrong, and I think you've been afforded quite a lot of courtesies. Thank you.

Question: Really? Oh, really? Files on the street?

Question: Thank you. Changing the subject to the drug conference, there's been quite a bit of criticism from drug NGOs (non-governmental organizations) and advocacy groups that this UN document adopted by Member States is not in touch with reality, and it risks marginalizing the UN on drug policy. So I wanted to see if there was any reaction.

Spokesman: You know, this is an outcome of Member States. It's not really up for the Secretary-General to comment on it. We hope that the discussions that were had here, including with society, civil society, can be constructive. I think there are a lot of different voices on how to deal with the world drug problem, and we hope they're all heard. Mr. Klein, and then we'll go to our guests.

Question: Actually, this is just a renewal of a question I've asked you a couple of times. You said you were going to try to get back to me on it. And that's to verify that there are no continuing relationships between the Sun Kian Ip Group affiliates, its NGOs that it funds and so forth and any member of the UN Secretariat.

Spokesman: There absolute... there are none that I'm aware of, and I don't know what else to add. Thank you. I'll go get our guests. Thank you.

