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

October 5, 2015

Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon

http://www.un.org/press/en/2015/db151005.doc.htm

[Noon Briefings](http://www.un.org/press/en/type-document/noon-briefing)

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

As you know, as soon as were done here, the President of the Security Council for the month of October will join us — the Permanent Representative of Spain.

\*\*Central African Republic

A couple of updates: the UN Mission in the Central African Republic, MINUSCA, says that the security situation in Bangui is improving but remains tense.  Over the weekend, shops began to open and regular traffic was observed in the streets. Both the Mission and Sangaris forces are actively patrolling the city.

The Mission also reports that the Joint Task Force has cleared all roads and barricades in the capital, including the last one at PK12.  MINUSCA peacekeepers, in cooperation with Sangaris, are also putting in place measures to prevent movement of ex-Seleka fighters in Kaga Bandoro and Dekoa from moving south.

And following a Government's request, the Mission is using its Urgent Temporary Measures mandate to maintain order at Camp de Roux prison in the capital.

Separately, on Friday evening, the Mission reports that armed men fired shots at peacekeepers guarding its headquarters in Bangui.  Peacekeepers returned fire forcing the individuals to flee.  No reports of casualties.

\*\*South Sudan

From South Sudan, aid agencies are concerned about fighting in Unity State which has escalated over the past days, with clashes reported around Koch and Leer.

The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) says both have experienced intense conflict since April and there are grave concerns regarding the humanitarian condition of people trapped by the fighting.

Aid agencies have relocated staff from Leer and humanitarian premises have apparently been looted.

Humanitarian access is currently a major challenge in these areas and all assistance is on hold, in light of the insecurity.

During the week of 18-25 September, the World Food Programme (WFP), UNICEF (United Nations Children’s Fund) and partners delivered food, nutrition and shelter assistance to 13,000 people in Koch town and more than 6,700 people in Buaw town.

\*\*Syria

On Syria, the Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), today strongly condemned the destruction of the Arch of Triumph in Palmyra — an iconic 2,000-year-old civil monument of the city that is inscribed on UNESCO’s World Heritage List.

She said that this new destruction shows how terrified by history and culture the extremists are.  Palmyra symbolizes everything that extremists abhor:  cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue, the encounter of different peoples in this centre of trading between Europe and Asia.

She said that UNESCO will make every effort, at its level and in close cooperation with the International Criminal Court, to ensure that the perpetrators of these acts of destruction are brought to justice.

\*\*Middle East

Concerning the situation in Jerusalem and the occupied West Bank, obviously the Secretary‑General remains very concerned by the ongoing situation.  As you will have seen, over the weekend, he condemned in the strongest terms the attacks that took place on Saturday in the Old City of Jerusalem, including the killing of two members of an Israeli family and injuries to Israelis and Palestinians in subsequent incidents in various neighbourhoods in Jerusalem.  Recalling the recent deadly attack on another Israeli family in the occupied West Bank, and in light of the wave of extremism and violence sweeping the region, the Secretary‑General is deeply concerned that these latest incidents signal a dangerous slide towards escalation.

He is deeply troubled by statements from Palestinian militant groups, including Hamas, praising such attacks, and he urges all leaders to condemn violence and incitement, maintain calm and to do everything they can to avoid further escalation.

The Secretary‑General firmly believes that a just and lasting solution to the conflict can be achieved only through pursuing a negotiated two-state solution.  The UN, of course, stands ready to work with all parties to create the conditions on the ground, in the region and internationally to make meaningful negotiations possible.

\*\*Afghanistan

You will also have seen over the weekend that we also strongly condemned the airstrikes in Kunduz, that resulted in the death and injury of medical workers and patients at a Médecins Sans Frontières hospital.  The Secretary‑General recalled that hospitals and medical personnel are explicitly protected under international humanitarian law.  He called for a thorough and impartial investigation into the attack in order to ensure accountability.

MSF has been operating the only hospital in Kunduz under extremely difficult conditions.  The Secretary‑General commends the courageous and dedicated staff of the organization and extends his deepest sympathies to the families of those killed and injured in this attack.

And there was also a statement on this issue from the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

\*\*Nigeria

And on Nigeria, we also issued a statement over the weekend condemning the attacks on the outskirts of Abuja, multiple suicide attacks by suspected Boko Haram elements.

\*\*Habitat

Today the Secretary‑General spoke at a high-level discussion on World Habitat Day.

He said that this is a time of new challenge and opportunity, following the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals, the Secretary‑General said, reflect an international consensus that sustainable urbanization can play a transformational role.

\*\*Deputy Secretary-General

The Deputy Secretary‑General, Jan Eliasson, will travel to Riyadh tomorrow to participate in meetings with the Royal Family and senior members of the Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

On 9 October, he will travel to Abu Dhabi, where he will meet with senior members of the Government of the UAE (United Arab Emirates).

On 11 October, Mr. Eliasson will travel to Tehran to attend the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the UN and meet with senior members of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran and other senior officials.

On 13, he will go to Istanbul, to represent the Secretary‑General at the Global Forum on Migration, and take that opportunity also to meet with senior Turkish leaders.

On 14 October, Mr. Eliasson will travel to Geneva for the Global Consultation on the 2016 Humanitarian Summit.  He will also have meetings with Member States and senior UN officials in Geneva.

We expect the Deputy Secretary‑General to be back in New York after that.

\*\*Mexico

Another visit to announce:  the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, is in Mexico for three days, where he will meet President Enrique Peña Nieto, as well as other members of the Government.

He will also hold discussions with the President of the National Commission for Human Rights, members of civil society, victims of human rights violations, the UN country team and members of the international community.  More information on the website of the UN High Commissioner.

\*\*UN High Commissioner for Refugees

UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) says today that the global refugee crisis is so great that the UN Refugee Agency and others are struggling to respond to and meet all the humanitarian needs they face.

Addressing the agency’s Executive Committee, António Guterres said that there are now more than 60 million refugees, asylum-seekers and internally displaced persons in the world, and that that number is rising.

He recalled that when he became High Commissioner 10 years ago, there were 38 million refugees and that number was actually falling at the time.

In the last five years, Mr. Guterres said, 15 new conflicts have broken out or started to flare up again, without any of the old ones getting resolved.  This statement is on their website.

\*\*Oman

I also wanted to flag that on Friday afternoon, the Foreign Minister of Oman, Mr. Yousef Bin Al-Alawi Bin Abdulla, met with the Secretary General and the two exchanged letters to acknowledge the voluntary contribution of $4.5 million by Oman to preserve the United Nations audio-visual archives.

We are very thankful for the gift as the clock was ticking to save these historical audio-visual documents which by 2028 would either have been too damaged to use or the equipment would not have been available anymore.

This generous gift from Oman will allow DPI (Department of Public Information) to begin digitising precious and rarely seen footage.  In all, some 6,000 hours of film, 22,000 hours of analogue videos and 18,000 hours of audio archives will need to be converted to a digital format.

\*\*Appointment

An important one today:  the Secretary‑General, following consultations with Chairs of Regional Groups, informed the General Assembly of his intention to appoint Heidi Mendoza of the Philippines as the new Under-Secretary‑General for Internal Oversight Services for a five-year non-renewable term.

Ms. Mendoza is currently Commissioner of the Commission of Audit of the Philippines — a post she has held since 2011 — serving notably as Chairperson of Audit Committee on Public Sector Auditing Standards Board and External Auditor for the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), World Health Organization (WHO) and International Labour Organization (ILO).

A certified public accountant, Ms. Mendoza has over 20 years of service in government, particularly in the field of audit, investigation, fraud examination, anti-corruption and integrity advocacy.

\*\*Noon Briefing Guest

As I mentioned, we will have the Ambassador of Spain after this at 12.30.

Tomorrow I will be joined by Jean-Paul Laborde, the Executive Director of the Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED).  He will brief you on the report on the implementation of [Security Council] resolution 2178 by States affected by foreign terrorist fighters.

\*\*Questions and Answers

Edie?

Question:  Thank you, Steph.  Two questions:  First, on Kunduz, I know the Secretary‑General called for a thorough and impartial investigation.  MSF is demanding an independent investigation.  Does the Secretary‑General support the call for an independent investigation?  And could you… on the Deputy Secretary‑General's travels, particularly to Riyadh and Abu Dhabi, could you give us some idea of the issues that he's going to be discussing there, and also in Iran?

Spokesman:  On… you know, I think on… in Riyadh, he will be discussing notably the humanitarian situation in Yemen, the regional situation in the Middle East, Syria, and other issues.  I think in all these stops, he will focus on the current issues in the region and notably the humanitarian impact of the conflicts we're seeing in the area.  On Kunduz, I think the Secretary‑General called for an investigation.  I think we'll… it's still early days.  I think we have… we're waiting to see what comes out of the official U.S. and NATO and possibly Afghan investigations, and if we move a little further, I will let you know.

Mr. Avni, then Mr. Lee?

Question:  In their phone conversation last night, did [Mahmoud] Abbas ask Ban for international protection for the West Bank?  Did that come up?  And did he consequently talk with [Benjamin] Netanyahu, Ban?

Spokesman:  The Secretary‑General… he did speak to President Abbas.  He's scheduled to speak to Prime Minister Netanyahu, hopefully at some point today.  I think the Prime Minister was traveling.  I think his message to both leaders is to express his concern over the latest round of violence, which, obviously, follows the weeks of tensions we've seen in and around Jerusalem.  And he noted… I think his message to leaders is they both have a responsibility to prevent the situation from escalating further.

Question:  Did Abbas ask for international protection?

Spokesman:  I won't say… I can only say what the Secretary‑General expressed.  Lee and then Abdel Hamid?  Sorry.

Question:  Sure.  I wanted… kind of expected you to have something on this.  On South Sudan, where the UN obviously has this big mission, President Salva Kiir has signed an exec… an order, he says, immediately… basically abolishing current state lines, which are referred to in peace agreement, Unity State and others.  And basically, the rebels have said this violates the agreement completely, and fighting has started again in the states… Upper Nile and Unity State.  So what…

Spokesman:  We've… I think I mentioned the fighting that was taking place there.  We've obviously seen the decree signed by the President.  We're taking a look at how that impacts the agreement that was signed by all the parties.  But we do call on all of them to respect and fully implement the peace agreement they signed to peacefully resolve the situation in South Sudan.

Question:  Since the agreement allowed the opposition to name governors of two states that no longer exist, can you understand why they think it violates the agreement?

Spokesman:  That's why I'm saying we're taking a look at the implications for it.  Abdel Hamid?

Question:  Thank you, Stéphane.  About ten days ago, when I raised the issue about Palestinian killed and not noticed, you said that is not fair.  And, today, there are two Palestinians who were killed, including a 13-year-old boy, 13.  Okay?  And when I raised the issue about the woman who was murdered because Israeli soldier asked her to take her *niqaab*, she said no, because for her it's really just duty, not to take it.  She was killed in front of everybody, and she was left… left to bleed… she was bleeding until she died.  So, again, I mean, the Secretary‑General condemned in the strongest term the murdering of Israelis, which is fair enough, that he should be on the same distance with all parties.  So when the Palestinians are killed, I don't see the same language.  I don't see the speed in issuing a statement…

[cross talk]

Spokesman:  Abdel Hamid, I can assure you… I understand…

Question:  And again, every time I raise the issue…

[cross talk]

Spokesman:  I understand.  My understanding is that a statement is in the works.  We, obviously, clearly condemn the killings that we have seen, the killings of Palestinians we have seen, notably of a minor, and the other Palestinians that were killed in clashes in the West Bank.  I think the Secretary‑General would once again reiterate on all sides to do whatever they can to de‑escalate the violence and to ensure that civilians are protected.  But there is a statement in the works on that issue.  Yes, sir?

Question:  Thank you.  Stéphane, Russia started air operation inside Syria, and also, on Saturday, the Russian jet violated the Turkish airspace and Turkey and NATO warned Russia.  What's Secretary‑General doing on that?

Spokesman:  I think we've already spoken on our position on these air raids.  We have said that this is a good… this is… this time is at any other time where the international community should focus on finding a political situation to the current crisis in Syria and that whatever actions are taken against Da’esh and others be done with in conformity with international law and international humanitarian law.  I think what we're seeing now is a lot of different countries and different coalitions operating in the skies in… above Syria.  I think it creates a situation that is fraught with danger and very delicate, as we've seen on the issue of the violation of the airspace with Turkey.  We've seen that, in fact, the Turk… the Russians have provided an explanation to this, but I think this should really refocus people's attention on finding a humanitarian… a political solution.  Somini?

Question:  Just to clarify, does the Secretary‑General… is he willing to wait until the conclusion of a U.S. investigation into Kunduz before an impartial investigation can begin?

Spokesman:  I think what we are looking for is a credible and transparent investigation.  That's what we have to say today.  If that changes, we will change it.  Mr. Lee?

Question:  Sure.  Couple of Great Lakes questions, one on Burundi.  I would assume that you have seen, over the weekend, there was renewed killings in the streets, including as confirmed by the police.  So people are saying, basically, wondering and have asked where is the… what happened to the UN process of this imminent envoy, or what is the UN's response to what seems to be a deterioration and crackdown?

Spokesman:  Obviously, the violence that we've seen over the weekend threatened to obviously make worse an already fragile and tense security situation in Burundi.  We would once again reiterate our call to all Burundian parties to express their political differences through dialogue.  As far as an envoy or adviser is concerned, I think the Secretary‑General is obviously still considering various options.  But the UN remains committed to supporting the people of Burundi in this transition process.

Question:  Okay.  And I want… I mean, it is what it is, but I wanted to ask you, on the DRC (Democratic Republic of the Congo), I've seen this memo where… where Mr. [Martin] Kobler, who I guess is leaving soon, wrote to Mr. [Peter] Drennan and Mr. [Hervé] Ladsous for… in continued risk pay in various parts of the country, not just in the Kivus but Ituri, Bonn, Ogwili, Tanganyika and I just wanted to know… I was surprised by it, because it's inconsistent with a lot of public reporting by MONUSCO (United Nations Operation Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo) on conflicts being reduced.  Is there some way that either DPKO (Department of Peacekeeping Operations) or MONUSCO can explain this risk pay in areas they've said are now pacified, and is there a comprehensive DPKO list of where risk pay is paid in the places where it has its missions?

Spokesman:  I don't have… obviously, just because an area may be pacified doesn't mean it's not still at high risk for UN staff.  But obviously, you've seen a document that may have been shared with you but not shared with me so…

Question:  Can we get a comment?

Spokesman:  I… since I haven't seen it, I can't.  Mr. Avni?

Question:  On Kunduz, is there a principle that is in the works here that… principles, in this case, the US, the coalition gets first dibs at investigating?  Is that how it works?

Spokesman:  No, I'm not sure it's a principle.  It's just a statement on the situation.  Mr. Klein?

Question:  Yes.  Over the weekend, there were reports that Syrian opposition leaders have expressed grave reservations about the utility of Mr. [Staffan] de Mistura's four‑track approach to a political solution and some indication that they may actually reject it.  And, also, last week, the President of the Syrian Opposition Coalition, whatever the current title is, rejected the notion that, even for one day, Mr. [Bashar al] Assad could play any role in the transition.  In light of this, what is the Secretary‑General's reaction and also Mr. de Mistura's, if you know?  Are they just simply going after something that's going to be…

[cross talk]

Spokesman:  Well, I think… we don't have the luxury not to keep going after a political settlement.  I think it's only normal and not too surprising the different parties in a conflict would express these kinds of opinions.  The Office of the Special Envoy remains in touch with all the Syrian parties, including members of the opposition and it is continuing its work. Evelyn and then…

Question:  Thank you, Steph.  Do you have up-to-date numbers of how many people and diplomats came to this…?

Spokesman:  You know, I… almost.  I try to get them.  I know they're here.  I will squeeze them out.

Question:  Thank you.

Spokesman:  Igor… Oleg. Sorry.

Question:  Thank you, Stéphane.  Can you provide us brief updates on the activities of Staffan de Mistura, while he was here?  Who was he meeting, what he was doing?

Spokesman:  Mr. de Mistura sat in on a number of the Secretary‑General's bilaterals that concern the situation in Syria.  He had his own meetings with various foreign ministers and others and having the meetings that… you know, taking advantage of having so many foreign leaders and foreign ministers here to meet with them to push his agenda for political process forward.  Mr. Lee?

Question:  Sure.  I wanted to ask you again about this UNHCR process, and because you'd referred a number of times to a document… I think I found it.  I think it may be A-66-380-Add 1, in which the Secretary‑General himself told the GA (General Assembly) what process he would be using for selecting candidates.  So this is what I wanted to ask.  Over the weekend, the Swedish Prime Minister, Mr. [Stefan] Löfven, has come out publicly in favour of Helle Thorning-Schmidt.  And the document you referred me to, if it's the right one, says that there will be a pool… there will be interview pools and that they will be named, bearing in mind their background, geographic origin, and gender.  So I wanted to know, if it's the case that Mr. Jan Eliasson is the head of the selection panel and there's now a clear Nordic choice, what was the reference in this 2002 document that choosing interviewers based on geographical origin?  And who… for this reason, I'm asking…

[cross talk]

Spokesman:  First of all, I'm not confirming that Mr. Eliasson has… his involvement in the process.  Second, it's just to ensure that there's geographical balance.  Senior officials in this Organization and any official in this Organization serve the Organization and not their countries.

Question:  Can we know what the balance are, the region, the contents?

Spokesman:  No.  Go.  Then we'll go to our next victim.

Question:  Thank you, Stéphane.  Let me ask you a very basic question.  What's the UN position regarding the Russian bombing in Syria?  Do you criticize that or welcome that?

Spokesman:  I think we've… you know, we talked about this last week.  We obviously have taken note of the Russian operations, which we understand are being done at the request of the Syrian Government.  It's very important that any air operation of this type against Da’esh and other terrorist groups be done within the confines of international law and international humanitarian law, that everything be done to protect civilians but that the focus of all the parties should really be on the political process.

Yes, Carla?  And then I really will stop.

Question:  Do you have any information on the Iranian foreign minister's meeting with the Secretary‑General?

Spokesman:  No, it just concluded as I was walking in here.  So as soon as I get something, I will share it with you.

You know I can't say no.  Yes, Linda?

Question:  Thank you, Steph.  Just a quick question regarding refugees.  We know that there have been a lot of pledges and I think actually payments to try to meet the dire need of dealing with 60 million refugees.  Do you know if the… what's been given lately, specifically towards Syria?

Spokesman:  No, we'll get an update.  There were some very serious pledges done by the Japanese and by the Europeans, the G7, during this time.  But I will let you know what has translated into concrete cash.

Thank you.  Let's see if the ambassador's here.