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

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[https://web.archive.org/web/20161022150422/http://www.un.org/press/en/2014/db140617.doc.htm](https://web.archive.org/web/20161022150422/http:/www.un.org/press/en/2014/db140617.doc.htm)

The following is a near-verbatim transcript of today’s noon briefing by Farhan Haq, Deputy Spokesman for the Secretary-General.

Good afternoon.  In just a few minutes, once we’re done with this portion of the briefing, I will be joined by Kyung-wha Kang, the Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, and she will brief on Myanmar.  And that should be in just a few minutes.

\*\*Secretary-General’s Travel

The Secretary-General is in Geneva today.  After [taking part](https://web.archive.org/web/20161022150422/http:/www.un.org/press/en/2014/sgsm15952.doc.htm) in a special session of the Board of the UN Conference on Trade and Development in celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of that body, known as UNCTAD, he held a press conference at the Palais des Nations.

In his remarks, he expressed his deep concern at the deteriorating security situation in Iraq, including the reports of mass summary execution by Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).  He said there was a real risk of further sectarian violence on a massive scale, within Iraq and beyond its borders.  The Secretary-General also called for inclusive dialogue and said it was a key of good governance and leadership in any country.

The Secretary-General condemned the growing violence in Ukraine, including the downing of a Ukrainian military airplane.  The Secretary-General also decried acts such as the attack on the Russian embassy in Kyiv, which only increase tension.  I would like to add that he condemns that attack and urges the Ukrainian authorities to abide by their international commitments to ensure the inviolability of all diplomatic missions and personnel.

He also highlighted the situation in South Sudan and the Central African Republic, saying that both demanded our attention but were at risk of falling from the radar.

And right now, the Secretary-general is in Lausanne at the headquarters of the International Olympic Committee.  He will be back in New York tomorrow.

\*\* Iraq

The Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Iraq, Nickolay Mladenov, continues to encourage Iraq’s political leaders to swiftly come together and agree on a national security plan to address the terrorist threat.  He said that agreement on a set of inclusive political and social initiatives must be supported by all communities in the country.  He added that the newly elected Council of Representatives must meet and ensure the continuity of the political process.  And the United Nations stands ready to facilitate this.

The UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) reports that thousands of families have reportedly fled violence in the north-western town of Tal Afar.  Many displaced families are currently homeless and require urgent assistance, including access to food, water and shelter.  UNICEF is conducting assessments to ensure the immediate provision of water, sanitation and health care.

The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reports that the number of displaced people arriving in the Kurdish region of Iraq continues to increase, with some 3,000 families arriving overnight.  In total, 325,000 displaced people, out of the 500,000 displaced from Mosul, have arrived in the Kurdistan Region since 6 June.

UN agencies continue to scale up assistance to respond to the growing number of displaced people.  UNICEF and its partners are carrying out emergency immunization campaigns against measles and polio to address low immunity levels among displaced families.  UNICEF is also calling for safe humanitarian corridors, where local authorities and the UN can work to facilitate more access to people in need in Mosul and other areas, especially along the border.

The World Health Organization (WHO) is concerned about the health-care situation.  It has warned that damage to the health infrastructure and health facilities in the affected areas could lead to a bigger health-care crisis and severely hamper people’s access to lifesaving treatment.

Also, the Director of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Irina Bokova, has expressed the fear that Iraq’s cultural heritage will be looted and destroyed due to the violence there.  She called on all Iraqis to stand united for the protection of their country’s cultural heritage.  And she urged all parties to the conflict to refrain from any form of destruction of cultural property, including religious sites.  The press release is available in our office.

\*\* Syria

The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria presented its report to the Human Rights Council today, saying that violence has escalated to an unprecedented level in the country.  The Chairman of the Commission, Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, said that perpetrators of crimes have no fear or thought of consequence and that impunity had made its home inside Syria.

He said that through the inaction of the international community and specifically the Security Council, a space has been created for the worst of humanity to express itself.  The report collects detailed narratives of a massive number of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Mr. Pinheiro said that Government forces in Syria had been making slow but significant gains, a result of indiscriminate attacks and prolonged sieges.  Meanwhile, non-State armed groups have been losing ground.  The report describes abusive treatment of civilian populations, corrupt management of resources under their control and growing numbers of foreign fighters.

Mr. Pinheiro said to the Council that we are now closer than ever to a regional war in the Middle East.  He added that Syria is on its way to becoming a failed State and that the international community was complicit in this, through its acts and its omissions.  His full statement is available in our office.

\*\*Security Council

At the Security Council earlier this morning, Fatou Bensouda, the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, [said](https://web.archive.org/web/20161022150422/http:/www.un.org/press/en/2014/sc11441.doc.htm) that the time had come to take a critical look at efforts vis-à-vis Darfur.  She also called on the Security Council to take decisive action when it comes to the Government of Sudan’s defiance of the Council’s resolutions.

Before meeting on Sudan and South Sudan, the Security Council [adopted](https://web.archive.org/web/20161022150422/http:/www.un.org/press/en/2014/sc11440.doc.htm) two resolutions, one on Al-Qaida and Taliban sanctions and the other one extending the mandates of the Ombudsperson and Monitoring Team assisting the Al-Qaida sanctions committee.

\*\* Afghanistan

The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) strongly condemned today the continued targeted killings of Afghan election workers in the wake of the second round of the country’s presidential election last Saturday.

Victims include two employees of the Independent Election Commission (IEC) in the southern province of Helmand on Monday.  Eight Independent Election Commission workers — along with another two civilians, including a child — were also killed by a remote-controlled improvised explosive device planted on a road in the northern province of Samangan on Saturday.  The Taliban claimed responsibility for this attack.

On Election Day, a total of 53 civilians were also killed and another 161 injured, including 20 children and at least 10 women.  The Mission reiterates that attacks directed against civilians are serious violations of international humanitarian law which parties to the armed conflict — including all anti-Government elements — must uphold.  The full statement of the Mission is available online and in our office.

\*\*Secretary-General Appointments

We have two senior appointments by the Secretary-General to announce today.

Following approval by the General Assembly, the Secretary-General has formally [appointed](https://web.archive.org/web/20161022150422/http:/www.un.org/press/en/2014/sga1476.doc.htm) Prince Zeid Ra’ad Zeid Al-Hussein of Jordan as the next High Commissioner for Human Rights.  Prince Zeid will succeed Navi Pillay of South Africa, to whom the Secretary-General is deeply grateful for her tireless efforts and dedication in championing the centrality of human rights in the pursuit of sustainable peace and development.  Prince Zeid’s nomination comes at the end of an extensive selection process which included consultations with Member States and human rights non-governmental organizations.  He brings to the position an extensive career in multilateral diplomacy.

The Secretary-General has also [appointed](https://web.archive.org/web/20161022150422/http:/www.un.org/press/en/2014/sga1477.doc.htm) Lieutenant General Yohannes Gebremeskel Tesfamariam of Ethiopia as the Force Commander for the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS).  Lieutenant General Tesfamariam succeeds Major General Delali Johnson Sakyi of Ghana who completed his assignment on 9 June.  The Secretary-General is grateful for Major-General Sakyi’s dedication and leadership in UNMISS.  Most recently, Lieutenant General Tesfamariam served as the Head of Mission and Force Commander of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA).  We have more on both appointments in our office.

\*\*Press Conference

And like I said, in just a few minutes once we’re done with this part of the briefing, Kyung-wha Kang, the Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, will brief you on Myanmar.  And tomorrow at 11 a.m., there will be a briefing here by Ambassador Bashar al-Ja’afari of Syria and a group of US observers, who monitored the Syrian presidential election.  That’s it from me.  Yes?

\*\*Questions and Answers

Question:  Farhan, has there been any further redeployment of UN staff from Iraq?

Deputy Spokesman:  Yes, I believe some further staff have been moved today.  I actually don’t have the numbers yet.  We’re waiting to see what the final numbers are, but yes, there have been further movements.  There [are], of course, staff remaining in Baghdad, including the Special Representative, Nickolay Mladenov.  We just read what his remarks for the day were.  At the same time, Mr. Mladenov will travel to a regional summit of Arab foreign ministers, so he’ll be away for a few days, but he is… he continues to be based out of Baghdad.

Question:  Do you have any of those UN staffers who were deployed… went to Amman, Jordan, have they been… gotten to… you said they were going to Erbil?

Deputy Spokesman:  Yes, we’re trying to see whether they’ll get the ability to be transferred onward to Erbil.  I’m still checking on that, but if we have an update, I’ll share that with you.  Yes, Iftikhar?

Question:  On Iraq, continuing on Iraq, has the Secretary-General spoken to Mr. [Nouri Kamal al-] Maliki to urge him to carry out reforms, political reforms so as to end this crisis?

Deputy Spokesman:  Well, the Secretary-General has not spoken with Prime Minister al-Maliki in the last couple of days, but he did make a very strong call for reforms.  And of course, one of the things I would like to draw your attention to is the transcript of the press conference that he held earlier today in Geneva.  And he made very clear, as he says:  “I encourage all Iraqi leaders — political, military, religious and community — to ensure that their followers avoid acts of reprisal and come together in an inclusive spirit to address the serious threat to their country.”  And so, I would refer you over to his comments.  Matthew?

Question:  Sure, thanks.  In the Security Council this morning, the Prosecutor… ICC Prosecutor Bensouda, referring to the whistleblower Aicha Elbasri and complaints that came forward about peacekeeping and UNAMID [African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur], essentially covering up reports, called for a thorough, independent and public inquiry, and at least a number of Council members called and specifically said that the Secretary-General should carry out such an investigation.  I wanted to know what… will the Secretary-General carry out such an investigation, and if not, why not?

Deputy Spokesman:  We’re aware of Fatou Bensouda’s comments made at the Security Council and her idea that there was a need for a thorough and independent and public inquiry, so we will look into that and see where to proceed from there.  As for the overall concerns expressed by Aicha Elbasri, the United Nations and its Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) has tried to follow up on a number of the complaints she has raised in past months, as we’ve been reporting to you.

Question:  Wait, when have you been reporting that to us?

Deputy Spokesman:  We’ve mentioned the strategic review.  I think I read that out in March, quite a while ago, but there was a… the Department of Peacekeeping Operations had launched a strategic review, which was endorsed by the Security Council, to assess UNAMID’s performance and environment in which new conflict dynamics have emerged and old ones remain unaddressed.  And the review provides for a period of 12 months to address the challenges and to achieve adequate impact on the ground.  At the end of this period of 12 months, the effectiveness of the Mission will be re-evaluated, and depending on the results, adjustments will be made to the mandate and to the Mission’s authorized strength.

Question:  Right, but, I mean, in terms of an investigation of how the specific attacks that took place and were not reported to the Security Council, that’s included in this overall systemic review called for by Council?

Deputy Spokesman:  Well, like I said, about Ms. Bensouda’s call that was just made right now for a thorough, independent and public inquiry, we’re aware of what she said, and we’ll look into that.  Yes, Benny?

Question:  Following on the late Saturday condemnation by the Secretary-General of the abduction of three Israelis, has there been any attempt by the UN office in Jerusalem, East Jerusalem to help Israelis find the abductees and mediate between two sides?

Deputy Spokesman:  Well, we stand ready to help as needed and as requested.  If we have a request from the Israeli authorities for their help in this matter, of course we’re ready to provide that help as needed.

Question:  Follow-up on that, how has the United Nations established that they have been abducted and whether they were abducted by adversary elements?

Deputy Spokesman:  We have no information to confirm an abduction.

Question:  But you condemned abduction when you don’t know whether there is abduction or not?

Deputy Spokesman:  No, look back at the statement.  If any parties can be helpful for the safe return of these boys, of these three youths, that would be appreciated.  But in terms of that, we have no confirmation that we can independently make about an abduction.

Question:  But there… are you ruling out any… probably criminal activity within the Occupied Territories?

Deputy Spokesman:  We would have to see.  I don’t want to prejudge the information that may come out.  We do not, like I said, we don’t have any information, specific information about the nature of what’s happened.  We are simply hoping for their safe return.

Question:  But you condemned the abduction?

Deputy Spokesman:  I would just refer you to the language of the statement.  Yes, Sangwon?

Question:  Back on Iraq, I’ve seen the Secretary-General’s comments in Geneva, but what is Special Representative Mladenov’s assessment of the general state of affairs in Iraq?  I mean, is the country currently at a risk of breaking up?  Can you elaborate further on the security situation regarding Baghdad and beyond the northern regions, if you have any other updates?

Deputy Spokesman:  Well, I provided an update at the top of this briefing, and I could… we can share that with you later.  The basic point about the Special Representative, Mr. Mladenov, is that he did, in a statement today, encourage Iraq’s political leaders to come together and agree on a national security plan to address the terrorist threat.  And he said that an agreement on a set of inclusive political and social initiatives must be supported by all communities in the country.  So he is working to that end, and he has been meeting with a number of leaders across the spectrum.

Question:  Right, so in follow-up, I mean, he’s talking about what Iraqi leaders should do to contain the situation or solve it, but what’s his assessment of the situation right now?  I mean, where is it going?  And also, how would this politically inclusive dialogue, you know, does he still maintain that the all-inclusive dialogue will lead to resolution, or rather, you know, be able to deal with ISIS and ISIL?

Deputy Spokesman:  Well, he’s repeatedly called for inclusive dialogue as a means of helping foster national unity.  Ultimately, he believes that a unified response is needed to deal with this threat posed by groups like the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant.  And as for his assessment of the situation, he shared his assessment last week with the Security Council, and I’d just refer you to that and to his recent press remarks.

Question:  And he hasn’t provided any updates to Secretary-General that you can share with since Thursday, when he briefed the Council?

Deputy Spokesman:  Of course, the Secretary-General continues to be apprised of the matter by Mr. Mladenov, and he will continue to brief the Security Council as they require.  Yes?

Question:  Yes, I have a question about the Secretary-General.  What’s his general stance as far as possible US air strikes in Iraq are concerned?  Does he have a principled stance?

Deputy Spokesman:  I wouldn’t have any comment about something that remains hypothetical at this stage.  The Secretary-General did call on the international community to come together in dealing with this threat, and he maintains that stance.  Yes, Iftikhar?

Question:  Farhan, has the Pakistan Government been in touch with the United Nations about this anti-Taliban operation in North Waziristan, because there are some humanitarian aspects of the operation, too?

Deputy Spokesman:  We don’t have anything really to say about this from a humanitarian standpoint other than that, of course, if people are displaced as a result of these actions, we would monitor their conditions, and we would try to assist them as the situation develops.  Beyond that, I don’t have anything to say about the operation at this stage.  Yes, Benny?

Question:  Wait, Farhan, I didn’t get it what you told Nizar.  Are you saying that you don’t have any confirmation that there was an abduction?

Deputy Spokesman:  We don’t have specific information on this.

Question:  So why do we have a UN office in there?  I mean, you don’t talk to the Israelis, to the Palestinians.  We have a big UN office out there.  You don’t even know there was an abduction?

Deputy Spokesman:  We’re talking with the sides.  Obviously, we are not investigators on the ground.  We don’t have any specific first-hand information to confirm what’s taken place.  Our views are contained in the statement that we issued over the weekend.  And beyond that, we’re urging all sides to do what they can to secure the safe return of these three youths.

Question:  So I don’t understand why the Secretary-General is saying he is against this abduction of two minors indeed.  I mean how does he know that there are two minors?  How does he know anything?

Deputy Spokesman:  We know what the details are of the case.  What Nizar was asking about was whether we could confirm something.  We’re not investigators.  We have not… we don’t have an investigative team on the ground, and we cannot confirm it in any sort of first-hand way.  We’re dependent on the authorities on the ground.

Question:  Yet… sorry, follow-up on that, yet of course you can confirm that there’s collective punishment to the Palestinian population as a result of this?  And this is a crime, as I believe, by all standards.

Deputy Spokesman:  As the Secretary-General said in his statement over the weekend, he called both for joint efforts, for efforts by all to retrieve the three youths and for restraint, and he continues to call for both things.

Question:  Would he issue a statement condemning collective punishment?

Deputy Spokesman:  The statement that we’ve issued is the one that we have.  Yes?

Question:  Sure, I wanted to ask you — a journalist was… has been killed by shelling near Luhansk in eastern Ukraine, and the OSCE [Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe] has called for an investigation by Kyiv.  His name is Igor Kornelyuk.  And I’m wondering, does the UN, given, you know, statements made generically in other circumstances about journalists, what’s their response to the killing of a journalist by essentially a Government strike?

Deputy Spokesman:  Of course we’re opposed to the killing of all journalists.  We’d have to check whether anything specific to say on this is coming out from the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).  One more question and then we’ll go to Kyung-wha Kang.  Yes, you?

Question:  Thank you.  Farhan, is the Secretary-General planning to encourage Security Council to initiate any action on Iraq?

Deputy Spokesman:  On what?

Question:  On Iraq?

Deputy Spokesman:  Of course, the Security Council is seized of the matter.  It’s up to them to determine what sort of action they intend to take, but I would just refer you to the statements that the Secretary-General has been making about the situation in Iraq and what he’s called on the international community to do.

Question:  The UNDP [United Nations Development Programme] letter?  UNDP?

Deputy Spokesman:  I don’t have anything on that.

Correspondent:  They met yesterday, so clearly the letter’s received.

Deputy Spokesman:  Okay, one more question as she’s walking over.

Question:  On Sudan, the main point is the manipulation of UN data is in favour of the Sudanese Government, and secondly that the Sudanese Government barrel bombs and has committed every offense you can think of, like, many years ago.  Is this issue going to be condemned again?  And anybody going to criticize the Government or is it just a plague on all your houses?

Deputy Spokesman:  We have always… we have consistently condemned the use of barrel bombs, and we will… if we can confirm those, we would do so again.  Ultimately the use of barrel bombs by any party in any war is something to be condemned, and there should be no impunity for that.  And with that, let us go to our guest.