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

June 18, 2014

[https://web.archive.org/web/20160906104125/http://www.un.org/press/en/2014/db140618.doc.htm](https://web.archive.org/web/20160906104125/http%3A/www.un.org/press/en/2014/db140618.doc.htm)

Good afternoon, everyone.

\*\*Secretary-General’s Travels

The Secretary-General is on his way back from Geneva and will be at UN Headquarters this afternoon.

Before he left Geneva, he spoke at an International Labour Organization (ILO) event on youth employment, and he said that an epidemic of youth unemployment is a great test of our time.  Half of the world’s young people in the labour force are either working poor or unemployed.  He said that working with and for women and young people is one of the top five priorities of his second term as Secretary-General.

The Secretary-General noted that the United Nations system is implementing a system-wide action plan on youth.  And he called on Governments to invest more in youth employment initiatives and promote decent work.  His [speech](https://web.archive.org/web/20160906104125/http%3A/www.un.org/press/en/2014/sgsm15955.doc.htm) is available online.

While in Geneva, the Secretary-General met with Nabil Elaraby, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States.  They discussed all dimensions of the Syrian issue, including the current priorities, which include humanitarian access and bringing the fighting to a halt.  They discussed the current search for a successor of Lakhdar Brahimi and agreed to continue these consultations.  They also exchanged views on the current state of the Middle East peace process, as well as on the crises in Iraq, Libya and Somalia.

\*\* Iraq

The Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Iraq, Nickolay Mladenov, is in Jeddah today, where he is representing the Secretary-General at the forty-first session of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation Council of Foreign Ministers.  He delivered a message on the Secretary-General’s behalf on the alarming deterioration of the security situation in Iraq.

In that message, the Secretary-General says that the situation increases sectarian tensions in the region and it is imperative that acts of reprisal be avoided.

The Secretary-General called on Iraq’s leaders to come together and agree on a set of inclusive political initiatives as well as a national security plan to address the terrorist threat of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, or ISIL.  He stressed that the plan must be based on the observance of human rights standards and international humanitarian law.  We have the full remarks in our office.

After the meeting, Mr. Mladenov will return to Baghdad where he remains in close contact with all political leaders, including Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki and Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani of the Kurdistan Regional Government.

He continues to call for unity and national dialogue among all political and religious leaders.  He has repeatedly underscored the importance of an accelerated government formation process and the need for all communities to engage in the fight against terrorism.  He has also offered the good offices of the UN in helping to facilitate dialogue among the parties.

In Iraq’s Anbar Province, the security and humanitarian situation is reportedly deteriorating in Al Qa’im, including further displacement.  Syrian refugees settled in Al Qa’im are requesting the help of the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) to help their return to Syria.

In Ninewa Province, a humanitarian assessment found out that an estimated 9,620 families have been displaced, mainly to areas under Peshmerga control.  UN assessments in Dohuk and Erbil reported that shelter continues to be the most pressing concern.  UN agencies, including the UN Refugee Agency, the World Food Programme and UNICEF, continue to increase assistance to help displaced families in affected areas.

\*\* Ukraine

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights came out with its latest report on Ukraine today.  The report describes the breakdown of law and order in the areas held by armed groups in the east of the country, as well as a number of worrying trends emerging in Crimea.

During the reporting period, the human rights situation in the eastern regions of Donetsk and Luhansk has continued to deteriorate, the report states, with the number of armed people and weapons having increased in both regions.  The report says that abductions, detentions, acts of ill-treatment and torture, and killings by armed groups are affecting the broader population of the two eastern regions, which are now marked by an atmosphere of intimidation and fear.

High Commissioner Navi Pillay also urged the Government of Ukraine to exercise restraint, ensure that security operations are in line with international standards at all times, and take great care to protect civilians when engaging with armed groups.

The report adds that the situation of all residents of Crimea has deteriorated with regard to their rights to freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly, association, religion or belief.  The full report is available on the website of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, which is [www.ohchr.org](https://web.archive.org/web/20160906104125/http%3A/www.un.org/SECF06/DPI_Common3/PRESS2FL/For%20Editing/Box/www.ohchr.org).

\*\*Security Council

The Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Hervé Ladsous, [briefed](https://web.archive.org/web/20160906104125/http%3A/www.un.org/press/en/2014/sc11443.doc.htm) the Security Council this morning on the situation in Mali.

He noted the general insecurity in northern Mali and said that the Government and armed groups had made little progress towards a real, substantive dialogue.  He added that this lack of progress had led to the sharp deterioration of the security situation in Kidal, where armed groups had now assumed effective military and, to an extent, administrative control of the town.

Mr. Ladsous said that the cornerstone of lasting stability in Mali was a successful political process.  He added that it was for the Malian parties to abide by their commitment and agree to the launch of the peace talks at once.

The Council is now holding consultations on Mali.  And this afternoon, it will hold consultations on the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF).

\*\* Sri Lanka

Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs Oscar Fernandez-Taranco will begin a four-day mission to Sri Lanka on Thursday, where he will meet with senior officials of the Government, representatives of political parties and civil society groups.

In his meetings, he will discuss the country’s post-war achievements, remaining challenges and areas for constructive collaboration in support of a lasting political solution for long-term socioeconomic development.

\*\* Pakistan

The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) says that military offensives in North Waziristan in Pakistan’s Federally Administered Tribal Areas have led to more than 62,000 people being displaced since late May.  Authorities report that they expect more people to leave the area and have established a camp and a reception area.

There has been no formal request for humanitarian assistance from the Government, but health agencies are providing emergency health kits and other technical support through the Ministry of Health.

As of 18 June, 928 families have crossed from Pakistan into Afghanistan, including 818 Pakistani families and 110 undocumented Afghan families.  So far, the majority are being hosted by relatives and the community, but humanitarian agencies in Afghanistan, including the UN refugee agency and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, will undertake a mission to Khost in the coming days to get a better picture of immediate humanitarian needs.

\*\*Ebola

The death toll from an outbreak of Ebola in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone has hit 337 since February, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).  WHO said that 47 new cases and 14 deaths had been reported in the region in the last week alone.

Guinea remains the worst affected country, with 264 Ebola-related deaths, but the toll in Sierra Leone and Liberia has recently spiked, hitting 49 and 24 respectively.

The World Health Organization and its partners continue to provide the necessary technical expertise to the Ministries of Health to stop community and health facility transmission of the virus.  Based on current information, no travel or trade restrictions to Guinea, Liberia or Sierra Leone are recommended at this point.

\*\*Noon Briefing Guest Tomorrow

Tomorrow, we’ll have, as a guest of the Noon Briefing, John Ging, the Operations Director of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).  He will be here to brief on Mali.  That’s it from me.  Any questions?  Okay, George?

\*\*Questions and Answers

Question:  Two questions regarding personnel — you mentioned Mr. Brahimi just in passing; is there any thought of appointing a successor; and two, as of when does Prince Zeid take over for Judge Pillay?

Deputy Spokesman:  Regarding the question on Mr. Brahimi, as you will have noticed, the Secretary-General just discussed the matter of a successor to Lakhdar Brahimi with Nabil Elaraby, the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, this morning in Geneva, and he’ll continue with his discussions.  We don’t have anyone to name just yet.  Regarding Prince Zeid, as you know, the General Assembly accepted the proposal by the Secretary-General concerning his candidacy, and the Secretary-General has appointed him.  He will take office, I believe in… what?

Correspondent:  September…

Deputy Spokesman:  On the first, yes, on 1 September.  Until then, Navi Pillay remains as the High Commissioner for Human Rights.  Yes?

Question:  Sure, in Afghanistan, the candidate run-off… run-off candidate, Abdullah Abdullah, has alleged fraud by the Independent Election Commission, and said he has suspended cooperation with it.  And I’ve seen UN quote saying that, you know, the UN somehow regrets that.  What’s the response to his allegation of fraud?  And if he feels it’s fraudulent, why should he cooperate with it?

Deputy Spokesman:  Yes, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) says that the announcement by Dr. Abdullah Abdullah on the suspension of his cooperation in the electoral process is regrettable.  At the same time, the Mission will continue to work with both campaigns and commissions, consulting on a way forward.  The UN Mission believes that due process should continue.  The Mission needs to learn more about Dr. Abdullah’s idea for the creation of a commission under UN supervision.  It remains ready to assist with any way forward which supports due process.  The United Nations urges the candidates and their supporters to act responsibly and avoid any statements or actions that could disrupt due process and political solutions.  Yes?

Question:  Farhan, noting the Secretary-General’s meeting with Mr. Elaraby, has the Secretary-General made any decision on whether a replacement for Lakhdar Brahimi will represent both the Arab League and the United Nations again or just the United Nations?

Deputy Spokesman:  Well, as you’re aware, this was one of the topics that has been under discussion for some time.  And as we’ve said in the readout of the meeting with Mr. Elaraby, the Secretary-General and the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States have agreed to continue these consultations, so that’s where we stand on that.

Correspondent:  [inaudible]

Deputy Spokesman:  I’m glad you’re happy.  [laughter]  Yes?

Question:  Yes, Farhan, the Secretary-General issued a statement after the kidnappings of the three Israeli teenagers, last Friday.  But since that day, there are over 200 Palestinians were arrested, including two elected officials — Mr. [Aziz] Dweik is the Speaker of the Palestine Legislative Council.  One Palestinian was shot and killed in the Jalazone refugee camp.  This collective punishment isn’t worth a statement from the Secretary-General, as well?

Deputy Spokesman:  Well, in the statement that we put out over the weekend concerning the abduction, we did say that the Secretary-General urges all to exercise restraint and lend their urgent support for the release and safe return of three youths.  So we stand by both things:  we want all sides to exercise restraint, and we do want them to lend their urgent support so that these three young people can be returned.  Yes?

Question:  How can anyone really find out if these three were really abducted or not?  They may have disappeared somewhere, went on holiday, they don’t want maybe some people to see them.  Did anyone verify that they were actually abducted?

Deputy Spokesman:  Well, let me clarify on that:  it’s not the United Nations who establishes or verifies where there’s been an abduction and who’s behind it.  Israel and the Palestinian Authority are working together in a concerted effort to find the missing students; and as part of that, they’re investigating and gathering evidence.  Now, what’s certain is that the three students are missing, and that they’ve been missing since Thursday.  Both Israel and the Palestinian Authority are working on the assumption, based on intelligence that they have, that their disappearance is due to abduction.  It’s on that basis that the Secretary-General’s condemnation on Saturday was issued.

Question:  Sorry, follow-up on that:  should the Israelis provide some information to prove that they were abducted?  They may have used them as pretext for the abduction of hundreds of Palestinians.

Deputy Spokesman:  We are working, like I said, with the Israelis and the Palestinian Authority.  We get our information from them, and we believe that they’ll continue to share information as this proceeds.

Question:  Did the Palestinian Authority confirm abduction in any way?

Deputy Spokesman:  This is as much as I have to say while their examination into this proceeds.  We’ll see whether they provide further information as we proceed with this.  Yes?

Question:  Hi, Farhan, on Iraq — do you have any update on the staff that were evacuated from Baghdad?  I know you said 58 the other day.  Any update on that?

Deputy Spokesman:  Yes, there have been more staff being temporarily relocated, including to Erbil.  At this stage, we’re not going to be able to provide numbers, because it’s a fairly fluid situation with people moving from one area to the other; but hopefully once some of this phase of relocations has been completed, we can give some more numbers.  But yes, the relocation activities have been continuing over the past couple of days.  Yes?

Question:  One update on Baghdad:  how many staff do you plan to keep inside Baghdad?

Deputy Spokesman:  We’ll continue to have the Special Representative, Mr. Mladenov, and his critical staff remain in Baghdad.  We’ll try to provide numbers once this current process of moving people around has happened.  But like I said, as a precautionary measure, we are moving some people around.  At the end of it, yes, there will be staff in Baghdad, but there will also be some staff relocated temporarily to Erbil and some other places.  Yes?

Question:  I noticed the Deputy Secretary-General had on his schedule that he met with Permanent Observer [Riyad] Mansour of the State of Palestine this morning, and I’m wondering are we going to get a readout of that, as you may clarify this?  And also, he met with Mr. [Joaquim] Chissano, the AU [African Union] Envoy for Western Sahara, yesterday, and I’m wondering would there be a readout on that?

Deputy Spokesman:  I don’t believe we’re expecting readouts on either of those at this stage.  If that changes, I’ll let you know.  Yes?

Question:  Farhan, is there an update on whether the SRSG [Special Representative of the Secretary-General] in Iraq thinks Baghdad will be attacked, is safe, is whatever?

Deputy Spokesman:  Well, the Secretary-General’s Special Representative, Mr. Mladenov, has been working with the leaders, and he’s been working out of Baghdad, and he will actually return to Baghdad following this meeting that he’s been participating in Jeddah.  So he is continuing with his work from there.  Of course, we do have our security concerns, and Mr. Mladenov has also made his concerns about the country well known to all of the leadership.  He has made it clear that this is now the time for all parties in Iraq to unite to deal with the threat that they face from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant.

Question:  Farhan, maybe you’ve been asked this question before.  The Secretary-General met with Mr. Elaraby today.  Have they made any decision on the new appointment of the… Secretary-General… new envoy for…

Deputy Spokesman:  Yes, Masoodji, you’re right, I was in fact asked this just a few seconds ago.  We have a readout of that, which mentions that the consultations on that issue continue.

Question:  Another question, on Afghanistan, one of the candidates… probably you’ve been ask this question again, also?

Deputy Spokesman:  You know, it may help if you show up on time because this is another thing.  I will share this with you afterwards, so I don’t have to read the whole thing several times.  Yes, please?  Yes, Mr. Abaddi?

Question:  Thank you, Farhan.  The Secretary-General spoke at the ILO conference on youth employment.  Where does he place employment on the scale of UN priorities?

Deputy Spokesman:  And, again… gosh, I should probably start this briefing a few minutes later.  At the start of the briefing, I had mentioned that he actually said that working with and for women and young people is one of the top five priorities of his second term as Secretary-General.  That’s part of the remarks we’ve put out, so you can see the whole remarks online and in our office.  Yes, Oleg?

Question:  Thank you, again.  On the mission in Ukraine, the human rights mission, does it have a time frame or it’s going to stay there for as long as it can, because we heard that there was a request from the Ukrainian authorities to renew its mandate for three months.  So when does the mandate end?

Deputy Spokesman:  Well, we’ll see.  For right now, they have a mandate, and they’re going about their work, and we’ll see whether in discussions with the Ukrainian authorities, whether it will be renewed or not.  But beyond that, of course, it’s continuing on the ground, and it will continue to provide reports, basically on a monthly basis.

Question:  Until when?

Deputy Spokesman:  I believe their initial mandate was a six-month period, but I think it’s going to be… it may be for longer than that depending upon discussions.  [He later added that, regarding the mandate of the human rights monitors in Ukraine, at this stage, the team’s mandate runs until September.  There has been no discussion on renewal yet.]  Yes, Matthew?

Question:  Sure, I wanted ask you about Mali and also UNDP [United Nations Development Programme].  On Mali, the Foreign Minister, at the stakeout earlier this morning, I asked him about that incident of the Mali… MINUSMA [United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali] peacekeepers being photographed with Azawad flag, and he said ask, you know, ask the UN.  So I’m back, I’m going to ask you, what was the finding of the Mission or of DPKO [Department of Peacekeeping Operations] on how this took place?  Which country’s contingent it was with?  And what’s their response to the concerns raised, including in protests in Bamako?

Deputy Spokesman:  On that, what I can say is that the UN Mission in Mali, MINUSMA, confirms that seven Burkinabe peacekeepers have been sent back to their country on issues relating to the picture with the Azawad flag.  Regarding the pictures, at the time of their publication, the Mission, MINUSMA, clearly said that it disapproved of any picture which gave the impression that the Mission was supporting the Azawad movement.  MINUSMA continues to stand by the principle of the territorial integrity and national sovereignty of Mali.

Question:  Also, can I ask you on UNDP, I wanted to ask you this question because I know that I’ve asked a couple of times whether this letter from three system-wide unions about the cutbacks at UNDP, whether the Secretary-General was received, and I know that there was a meeting between Susana Malcorra and the UNDP union.  So they said to me, “Obviously, our letter was received.”  So I wanted to ask you again, when was the letter received?  And why wasn’t it confirmed until after the meeting with Malcorra?

Deputy Spokesman:  This morning, I did get a confirmation — yes, the letters were received, and Ms. Malcorra did in fact meet with these officials.  I’m trying to get any details, if I can get that, but I can confirm both the meeting and the letters.  Yes, Mr. Abaddi?

Question:  Yes, yesterday in long interview with the radio and TV station, Mr. Brahimi said that the current crisis in Iraq and terrorism in Iraq, they were brought up by the occupation in 2003.  Does the Secretary-General share those views?

Deputy Spokesman:  Mr. Brahimi is now, of course, speaking as a private citizen, not in any capacity as a UN official, and he’s free to make… to express his opinions.  The United Nations actions and its views on the involvement in Iraq are a matter of public record over the past dozen or so years.  Yes?

Question:  I wanted to… I know that yesterday I had asked you about the two journalists killed in Ukraine, and you had said let’s see if UNESCO [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization] speaks.  Now that the Security Council did put out a [press statement](https://web.archive.org/web/20160906104125/http%3A/www.un.org/press/en/2014/sc11442.doc.htm), I’m wondering… I’m just looking around to see if there is a UNESCO… is there any Secretariat or other statement on the shelling death of these two journalists?

Deputy Spokesman:  No, but you’ll have seen, of course, the Security Council’s statement, and that is the major statement by the UN system on this.  Have a good afternoon, everyone.