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

June 19, 2014

[https://web.archive.org/web/20160906104150/http://www.un.org/press/en/2014/db140619.doc.htm](https://web.archive.org/web/20160906104150/http:/www.un.org/press/en/2014/db140619.doc.htm)

Good afternoon.

\*\* Iraq

I’ll start with an update on Iraq.  The UN Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) reports that the deteriorating situation in Mosul and surrounding areas, including Tal Afar and Diyala, continues to cause more displacement.  UN agencies and their partners are setting up new sites and tents in Erbil, Dohuk and Suleimaniya in Kurdistan to accommodate the growing influx of displaced families.

UNICEF reports that at least half of the people displaced, an estimated 250,000 of them, are children.  Many need water and sanitation support, immunization against polio and measles, and protection services.  The agency has also warned that increasing risks of ethnic violence and the threat to Baghdad can also further… can make the situation worse as the scale of needs and complexity to the crisis grows.

Cargo planes carrying emergency supplies from UNICEF, the World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Health Organization (WHO) arrived in Erbil this week.  More than 35,000 children will benefit from these new supplies, including tents, blankets and schools-in-a-box.  World Food Programme, meanwhile, has started its emergency food distribution to 43,500 of the most vulnerably displaced people.  UNICEF as well as the World Health Organization are also working with the Kurdish health authorities to carry out a mass vaccination campaign to prevent the spread of polio and other diseases among displaced children and host communities.  And more details are available on the agencies’ websites.

\*\* Syria

Meanwhile, from Syria, UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, has opened a field office and warehouse in the southern Syrian city of Sweida and stocked it with aid items for onward delivery to thousands of internally displaced civilians.

A UNHCR convoy on Wednesday crossed the border from Jordan and made its way to nearby Sweida with 25,000 blankets, 10,000 sleeping mats, 2,500 kitchen sets, 2,000 plastic sheets and 5,000 jerry cans from warehouses in Amman.  The aid will be distributed to the neediest among the estimated 550,000 internally displaced people living in the neighbouring governorates of Sweida and Dara’a.

The opening of the office and warehouse in Sweida on Wednesday is part of a policy aimed at expanding UNHCR’s humanitarian operation to support the increasing number of internally displaced people.  There are believed to be more than 6.5 million across the country.  The Sweida office will distribute basic relief items, rehabilitate collective shelters and arrange for the provision of health, education and legal services.  The office will also become a hub for coordinating the transport of aid across the Syrian-Jordanian border, particularly to Dara’a governorate and other hard-to-reach areas.

\*\*Security Council

Meanwhile, as you would have just seen, the Secretary-General’s new Special Envoy for the Sahel, Hiroute Guebre Sellassie, [briefed](https://web.archive.org/web/20160906104150/http:/www.un.org/press/en/2014/sc11445.doc.htm) the Security Council this morning.  And that meeting was open on webcast.  She said that in her short time in office, she had been struck by the deteriorating of the political and security situation in the region, from Mali to Libya to Nigeria.  And she also just spoke to reporters outside of the stakeout and her remarks to the Council are available in my office.

\*\*South Sudan

A quick update from the UN Mission in South Sudan, UNMISS, says that the number of civilians seeking shelter at UN protection of civilians sites across the country has now reached 95,000, with over 30,000 people in Juba, 18,000 in Malakal and around 38,000 in Bentiu.  That’s the largest figure recorded since the beginning of the crisis in mid-December.  The Mission also says that most new sites for internally displaced people are completed or very close to completion.  In Malakal, 7,000 have already moved to the new site.

In Juba, relocations from Tomping will start this week.  And in Bor, the Mission expects to start relocations at the end of the month.  Meanwhile, the UN Mission says that 800 Rwandese soldiers have arrived, mostly in Malakal, in addition to 300 Ghanaians deployed mostly in Bentiu.  It adds two Ethiopian battalions are also expected to arrive in the coming days.

\*\* Pakistan

And from Pakistan, our humanitarian colleagues say that an estimated 34,000 people fled North Waziristan, in Pakistan, yesterday following a relaxation in the curfew.  This brings the total number of people displaced from the area since May to some 100,000.  Further movement is anticipated.  Access remains the greatest challenge in areas of displacement and the authorities are urged to improve humanitarian space.  The UN’s health agencies are supporting the Government’s humanitarian efforts to help the people who have left.

\*\* Ukraine

And a note from the UNESCO, the UN [Educational], Scientific and Cultural Organization:  Irina Bokova, today, its Director-General, denounced the killings of journalists Igor Kornelyuk and Anton Voloshin in Ukraine.  And she urged all parties to respect the civilian status of journalists.  Ms. Bokova called on all parties to respect journalists and let them carry out their important professional activities in safe conditions in keeping with the Geneva Convention and Protocols.  Those killings bring to five the number of journalists who have been killed in Ukraine since January.

\*\*Press Conferences

And as soon as I’m done with you and you’re done with me, we will hear from John Ging, who is, as you know, the Operations Director of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), and he will be briefing on his recent visit to Mali.

And at 10 a.m. tomorrow, a press conference by Yuriy Sergeyev, the Permanent Representative of Ukraine.  And that will be in this room at 10 a.m. and he will speak to you on Ukraine.

\*\*Questions and Answers

Question:  Thank you.  So we’re waiting for the Secretary-General to say something on Syria tomorrow morning at Asia Society, but can you tell us what is the SG doing exactly on Syria now?  Is he working on a new approach?  Does he still believe that Geneva process is still alive?  What’s the status exactly on Syria?

Spokesman:  Well, you know, the Secretary-General, as he said to you in this room, was taking the opportunity for a change at the Head of the Office of the Joint Special Representative to do a lot of consultations with Member States, and he’s encouraged Member States to really think about their positions and how they can put in a place the right policies that will support the political process in Syria.  As you know, he met with Nabil Elaraby, the Secretary General of the League of Arab States… what day are we today, Thursday?  On Wednesday morning, early Wednesday morning, in Geneva, they reviewed the situation in Syria and Iraq.  They talked about the person who will succeed Lakhdar Brahimi.  They will continue those discussions, so that is very much a focus of the Secretary-General’s time.  And I would encourage you to, obviously, attend the speech that he will give tomorrow at the Asia Society.  And I really don’t want to pre-empt what he’s going to say.

Question:  Just a follow-up:  do you mean that the new Special Representative will be a Joint Representative?

Spokesman:  I think, you know, whether it’s on names or on functions, I think that will be clear once the name and the functions are announced.  Evelyn, did you have a question?  Okay, Matthew?

Question:  Sure, thanks.  I wanted to ask to see if the Secretary-General or the Secretariat has any comment on two issues raised by Member States.  One is Libya saying that Mr. Abu Khatallah was picked up by the United States in Libya and brought back.  They’ve protested that and said that they have a sovereign right to try him in their own country.  I wanted to know what’s the Secretariat’s view?  And also, Russia has said that US or anyone else’s military assistance to the [Nuri Kamel al-] Maliki Government should go through the Security Council and that previous actions taken without Security Council approval led to this problem.  So what does the Secretary-General think of those two claims?

Spokesman:  Sure:  on Benghazi, we’ve taken note that he was… the suspect was seized in the raid in Benghazi by US forces.  We’re also aware that the US has provided an explanation to the Security Council that it acted in accordance with Article 51 of the Charter.  And we’ve also taken note of the Libyan position, but at this point, we have no further comment.  On the issue of military… potential military action in Syria… sorry, in Iraq, I think the Secretary-General’s message has been very clear, which is one to encourage the Iraqi authorities to engage in an inclusive political dialogue and in finding an inclusive solution to the current issue.  I’m also aware that we expect an announcement from the US authorities on Iraq.  I think within the next half hour or 40 minutes, so I don’t want to hypothetically answer a question for the time being.  Joe and then Evelyn?

Question:  Yesterday, as you probably know, there was a press briefing sponsored by the Ambassador from Syria with five panellists who described themselves as election observers, all of whom said that the elections for President in Syria were carried out fairly and that the people were enthusiastic in support of the results and so forth.  So my question is:  does the Secretary-General have a different view as to the fairness of the election?  And was the UN approached at any level by the Syrian Government to perhaps send observers or monitors for that election that occurred 3 June?

Spokesman:  I’m not aware of any particular requests by the Syrian authorities to monitor the presidential elections that have taken place.  As for the Secretary-General’s position, it has… it’s unchanged, and he spoke about it directly in the press briefing in Geneva on Wednesday, and I would just refer you to those comments.

Question:  So it’s fair to say that his conclusion would be at total variance with the endorsement and support by this panel?

Spokesman:  I would leave the compare and contrast to those of you on the floor and not to me sitting on the podium; but the Secretary-General, as I said, his position is clear.  Evelyn?  Can you… if you speak, you need the mic.

Question:  When will you have the text of the Secretary-General’s speech to the Asia Society?

Spokesman:  We hope to be able to share it under embargo beforehand.

Question:  Will that be today or tomorrow?

Spokesman:  Before… if it was up to me, the earlier the better, but we are obviously… I’m aware of what you need to cover it, so…

Question:  I apologize for arriving late, Stéphane, but I asked this question yesterday, and I’m going to ask it today and I’m going to ask it again and again.  On Friday, three Israeli teenagers were kidnapped.  The Secretary-General immediately issued a statement condemning the kidnapping, rightfully so.  However, from that day until today, Israel has put all of the population of the West Bank under collective punishment.  As we speak, 341 Palestinians were arrested, 700 houses were broken into, seven houses were demolished, one young man — 19 years old — was killed, and nothing has been said from the Secretary-General.  Is that right?  Why he doesn’t say something?

Spokesman:  I think the Secretary-General has spoken on this… on the issue of the kidnappings, but as always, he would call on the authorities to respect international humanitarian law and international law in their efforts to find these three young men.

Question:  So all these measures taken by Israel, including invading Birzeit University yesterday, isn’t worth a statement?

Spokesman:  I think, listen, I think we’re… you’ve asked a question, I think I’ve answered you.  That’s where we stand.

Correspondent:  Thank you.

Spokesman:  Yes, Matthew?

Question:  I have some other questions, but I wanted to ask about this… it may seem minor to you, but in the briefing that was done yesterday by the Syrian Ambassador, [Bashar] Ja’afari, there were some complaints, this has happened before, this is why I’m asking you, there were some complaints about the webcast of it, that it actually was not viewable.  So I wanted to know, have you looked into this?  Do you have any comment on it?  I believe that they’ve made some complaint about it since it’s happened before.

Spokesman:  It’s not minor at all.  We’re very much aware that there was a cut in the live coverage.  There was an issue relating to the way video goes from this room and other rooms into the MAM system and into whatever other systems that are used.  You’re well aware that we’ve had issues before.  It impacted live events yesterdays, not only this press briefing for the Syrian Ambassador, but also a live GA [General Assembly] event, so this was not the only event that was impacted.  Everything that was live was impacted.  The archive video is now up on the web for all of the events.  The Under-Secretary-General for Public Information has been in contact with the Permanent Representative of Syria, has offered his apologies and has shared the explanation with him that I’ve just shared with you.

Question:  Can I ask you… I wanted to ask you about… I tried to ask Mr. [Ivan] Šimonović, or I did ask him, but he didn’t answer.  The report, I know that in this room, you’ve been asked about the what was seen as a jet bombing of the administrative building in Luhansk in eastern… south-eastern Ukraine.  And it was said that this was going to be addressed in the 17 June report by Mr. Šimonović, but there’s only one paragraph on it, and it basically makes no finding at all.  It just says:  some say it was a jet, some say it was a MANPAD [man-portable air defence].  So I asked him, and he seemed to say that the team has no expertise in armaments, and so I wanted… I mean I don’t know if that’s accurate, but if so — how could a UN human rights team in a war zone not have the expertise to just say, we can’t reach any conclusion on that?  Is that…

Spokesman:  Well, I think they have… first off, he said it.  I’m not going to second-guess Mr. Šimonović.  They’re focusing on human rights violations.  If they can’t come to a conclusion, they won’t come to a conclusion.  I think it speaks to their quality, in fact, that they will only state what they are confident they can state.

Question:  I mean, does the Secretary-General believe that if a UN system team goes to investigate things, that they should have armaments expertise?

Spokesman:  Well I think they’re staffed in the best way they can be staffed.  Yes?  And then we’ll go to Edie.  Yes, Karahman?

Question:  Thank you, Stéphane.  Since there is an off-the-record briefing today and the SG is speaking at Asia Society, can we expect that a name on Syria be announced… a Special Envoy within the next few days, do you think?

Spokesman:  Expectations are dangerous.  [Laughter]  Edie?