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

June 20, 2014

[https://web.archive.org/web/20160906104211/http://www.un.org/press/en/2014/db140620.doc.htm](https://web.archive.org/web/20160906104211/http%3A/www.un.org/press/en/2014/db140620.doc.htm)

Good afternoon.

\*\*Secretary-General at Asia Society

The Secretary-General [presented](https://web.archive.org/web/20160906104211/http%3A/www.un.org/press/en/2014/sgsm15965.doc.htm) his six main priorities for the way forward in Syria, in a speech at the Asia Society this morning.  He urged action to halt the fighting, at a time when the death toll may be well over 150,000 and half the country’s population of more than 22 million is displaced.

The six priorities he detailed are:  to end the violence; for the international community to do its utmost to protect people and their human rights; to start a serious political process for a new Syria; to have accountability for serious crimes; and to finish the destruction of chemical weapons in Syria; and also to address the regional dimensions of the conflict, including the extremist threat.

The Secretary-General said that it is essential to stem the flow of arms pouring into the country.  He urged the Security Council to impose an arms embargo.  If divisions in the Council continue to prevent such a step, he urged countries to do it individually.  He added that he will soon name a new Special Envoy.  The Secretary-General said that the person will have a mandate to pursue a political solution — but will not be able to wave a magic wand.  Much of the painstaking effort and cooperation will be needed.  His speech is in our office and obviously online and on the webcast.

\*\* Iraq

From Iraq, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq, Jacqueline Badcock, had expressed deep concern for hundreds of thousands of people affected by the conflict in Iraq.  She added that many people have fled Mosul, Diyala and Salah ad-Din with few or no resources of their own to sustain themselves in displacement very long.  Emergency funds are being released to help aid organizations rapidly increase assistance.

The UN refugee agency has warned that with fighting currently under way in different parts of Iraq, the displacement crisis could escalate further.  UNHCR (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) is working with other UN agencies and NGO (non-governmental organization) partners in Iraq to revise its funding requirement.  It is expected to issue a new appeal to now cover the needs of a million displaced in Iraqi in 2014.  The 1 million includes close to half-a-million people displaced by the violence in Anbar earlier this year and another half a million displaced in northern Iraq in recent days.

The UN refugee agency also remains concerned about the safety of Syrian refugees at the Al Qaem camp in Anbar Province following military clashes around one camp area, causing panic among the refugees.  UNHCR says it is closely monitoring the situation.

Also from Iraq, the World Health Organization (WHO) has reported that the health system in the Kurdistan region has been severely strained due to the new influx of refugees.  Local health authorities are working with aid organizations to meet the needs of some 550,000 displaced people in the region, including 300,000 newly displaced Iraqis and another 250,000 Syrian refugees.  Regular supplies of medicines and vaccines usually received from the central Government of Iraq in Baghdad have been halted because of insecurity and road blocks.

WHO continues to increase assistance in Erbil and Dohuk, and has reached tens of thousands of people with health and trauma kits, as well as treatments.  It is working with the health authorities to identify more sustainable ways to ensure medical supplies are available.  WHO is also concerned about the increased risk of communicable disease outbreaks during summer because of the heat, and the lack of drinking water and sanitation.  A disease early warning alert and response system is been setup in Kurdistan and Mosul.

\*\* Middle East

From the Middle East, the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Robert Serry, issued a statement saying he is deeply concerned by reports that Israeli security operations in the West Bank since the abduction of three Israeli students have resulted in over 300 Palestinians being arrested, many injured, and three Palestinians killed, including one minor this morning.  The United Nations understands that these security operations and tightened restrictions on movement throughout and in and out of the West Bank are part of all possible efforts by Israel to bring the three youths home safely.  The United Nations continues to call for their immediate release.

At the same time, we call for restraint and expect Israel to carry out the related security operations in compliance with international law and respect for the lives, dignity and livelihoods of Palestinians.  It should, thus, seek to minimize the impact of security operations on individuals who have committed no offense and investigate allegations of excessive use of force, including the killing of civilians.  The Special Coordinator is concerned that without restraint from all sides in these dramatic circumstances, it will become even more difficult to address an already critical security situation on the ground.

\*\* Lebanon

And from Lebanon, the UN Special Coordinator in that country, Derek Plumbly, strongly condemned today’s suicide bombing at an Internal Security Forces checkpoint in Dahr el-Baidar.  He telephoned the Director of the Internal Security Forces, Major General Ibrahim Basbous, to express his sympathy following the death of a member of the Security Forces, as well as casualties which occurred in the incident.  He also telephoned the head of General Security, Major General Abbas Ibrahim.

\*\* Syria

Yesterday, we issued a [statement](https://web.archive.org/web/20160906104211/http%3A/www.un.org/press/en/2014/sgsm15962.doc.htm) on Syria where the Secretary-General condemns in the strongest terms the continued heavy shelling, aerial attacks and use of barrel bombs by the Syrian Government.  And that full statement is available in my office.

\*\* Yemen

Jamal Benomar, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Yemen, briefed the Security Council in closed consultations this morning and is currently at the stakeout right now.  Also from Yemen, the Humanitarian Coordinator for that country, Johannes Van Der Klaauw, has called on all parties of the conflict in Amran Governorate to ensure that aid organizations have full access to all civilians in need of assistance.  Up to 40,000 people have been displaced by conflict in Amran since October 2013, about half of whom fled their homes last month.  This is in addition to over 42,000 people displaced by earlier rounds of conflict in the area.

\*\*Refugees

For the first time since World War II, the number of refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced people worldwide has exceeded 50 million people.  That’s according to a report by the UN refugee agency released today to mark World Refugee Day.  UNHCR's annual *Global Trends* report shows that 51.2 million people were forcibly displaced by the end of 2013 — 6 million more than in 2012.  This massive increase was due mainly by the war in Syria, but also major new displacements were also seen in Africa — notably in Central African Republic and South Sudan.

In a [message](https://web.archive.org/web/20160906104211/http%3A/www.un.org/press/en/2014/sgsm15964.doc.htm) marking the day, the Secretary-General said that these rising numbers are a stark reminder of the international community’s inability to overcome its divisions to prevent and end conflicts.  He added that UNHCR and its partners continue to provide lifesaving assistance but that a humanitarian response alone is not enough.  Political solutions are urgently needed.

The Secretary-General also called on Member States and partners in civil society to do their utmost to support the nations and communities that have welcomed the forcibly displaced into their midst.  He noted that most of the world’s refugees — in fact 86 per cent of them — live in the developing world, in countries that have shown generosity that is often well beyond their means.

\*\*Secretary-General’s Travels

Just want to flag some travels by the Secretary-General:  The Secretary-General will travel to Windhoek, Namibia, on Monday, 23 June, before going to Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, to attend the African Union Summit, and from there he will go to Nairobi for the closing session of the United Nations Environment Assembly.  While in Namibia, the Secretary-General will meet with President [Hifikepunye] Pohamba and other Government officials.  He will also participate in the commissioning of the United Nations House in Windhoek, which is home to 12 UN agencies.

On Wednesday, he will leave Namibia for Malabo for the twenty-third Ordinary Session of the African Union.  And the Secretary-General is scheduled to address the Summit on 26 June and hold bilateral meetings with Heads of States and other high officials.

On 27 June, the Secretary-General will leave for Nairobi to attend the closing session of the first UN Environment Assembly.  This Assembly is the UN Environment Programme’s governing body and the highest level global platform for environmental policymaking.  While in Kenya, he will also hold bilateral meetings with Government officials, including President Uhuru Kenyatta.  And we expect the Secretary-General back in New York the following Sunday on the twenty-ninth.

\*\*Press Conferences

And as soon as we’re done here, 12.30 p.m., Ambassador [Vitaly] Churkin, President of the Security Council, will brief you.

And on Monday, the final PrepCom meeting of the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States will take place from 23 to 27 June at UN Headquarters, in Room 3.  And as part of that, Monday at 11 a.m., Wu Hongbo, the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, and Ambassador Ali’ioaiga [Feturi Elisaia], Secretary-General of the Conference and Permanent Representative of Samoa, will be here to brief you.

And then, following that briefing, Ambassador Antonio de Aguiar Patriota, Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission and Permanent Representative of Brazil, along with Judy Cheng-Hopkins, Assistant Secretary-General for [Peacebuilding Support], will be here as guests of the Noon Briefing.  And they will talk to you about Peacebuilding Commission’s first annual session.  That’s it.  Iftikhar, please?

\*\*Questions and Answers

Question:  Thank you, Stéphane.  Does the Secretary-General have any comments on the steps announced by President [Barack] Obama in connection with the deteriorating situation in Iraq?

Spokesman:  Well, I think, you know, the Secretary-General addressed that fairly clearly in the speech he just delivered at the Asia Society, so I would encourage you to take a look at the webcast.  And we’ll put out the as delivered version of the speech and Q&A shortly, but he addressed the issue of potential strikes against targets in Iraq.  So, I would refer you to his speech.

Correspondent:  Is it specifically…

Spokesman:  It’s specifically… yes, it’s… yes?

Question:  On Wednesday, at the press conference called by the Syrian Mission, the webcast went down.  And this is not the first time this happened in regards to Syria.  This happened on 7 June, and Inner City Press actually reported that that was done on the orders of UN employee Michele DuBach.  And when Ja’afari was speaking… Bashar Ja’afari, the Syrian Ambassador, was speaking later that evening, he suggested that there was some kind of pattern of mistreatment of the Syrian Mission.  Is that the case?

Spokesman:  Absolutely not.  I think I addressed this yesterday following a question asked by your colleague from Inner City Press, in fact, whose timing is always perfect.

Correspondent:  I’m with Press TV.  I’m not…

Spokesman:  No, no, I’m not… just making reference to our arrival here.  And what I said yesterday is that there was a technical problem affecting… impacting all live events, the webcasting of all live events.  So, not only this… the press briefing you’re referring to was impacted, but other live events, including one by the General Assembly.  We apologized for that.  It was a technical issue.  The Under-Secretary-General for Communications had a discussion with the Permanent Representative of Syria and gave him the explanation and apologized.  But, all of the events, whether it’s the press briefing or the webcast… the [General Assembly] event, are all fully online.  Yes, go ahead?

Question:  Thank you.  This is a follow-up on Iraq.  Forty Indian… sorry, 40 Indian workers were abducted in Mosul, 16 of them have been evacuated, but is the UN or United Nations officials in the region helping the Indian Government to locate them or trying to figure out how to go about the crisis?

Spokesman:  Well, obviously, we’ve… we’re condemning all the abductions that we have seen of civilians, of foreign contractors and others.  You know, I’m not aware of our involvement… in particular, involvement in helping secure the release of these Indian workers, but if I get information, I’ll share it with you.  Yes, ma’am?  And then we’ll go to you, Matthew.

Question:  Hi Stéphane, on the elections in Afghanistan, we’ve been hearing that [Hamid] Karzai has called for the UN to intervene.  Do you have any reaction to that at all?

Spokesman:  We’ve seen the comments made by Dr. Abdullah earlier this week about a potential UN role, as well as Mr. Karzai has said.  You know, at the request of the parties, the UN stands ready to help facilitate an Afghan-led process in which both parties will cooperate.  But, obviously, we’d need to hear a little bit more about what exactly they are asking us to do.

Question:  But, have they approached you directly yet or what is the next step?

Spokesman:  We have not, as far as I’m aware, so that’s why we’re asking for a little bit more information on what they are asking for.  Matthew?

Question:  This is something that I’ve been wanting to ask about the Secretary-General’s speech, and maybe you can speak to it, where he calls for a, you know, “I urge the Security Council to impose an arms embargo.”  And he also says that the neighbours should, you know, impose a firm prohibition on arms flows.  So two questions — one, the Syrian Coalition of Ahmed al-Jarba has put out a statement praising the speech and saying that:  “There should be serious weapons and training for moderate opposition forces.”  And I wanted to know, just to be clear, the Secretary-General is not in favour of that, thinks this is a bad call?

Spokesman:  I think the Secretary-General could not have been clearer when he’s speaking about an arms embargo and speaking for the halt of flow of arms into Syria.

Question:  And in terms of the borders, I just wanted to know, I didn’t see it in his speech, but the… it seems like at least a large part of the Iraqi border may be controlled by ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham) or ISIL (Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant).  So, in terms of realism, and what’s the… I guess the comment on… does this mean now absent Government control, it’s just an open flow of weapons?  I mean, I’m not saying… I’m not wondering whether he’s calling on ISIS to not allow weapons through.  I’m just wondering what can be done and is there an acknowledgement by the UN that nothing can be done in terms of weapons?

Spokesman:  Well, I think, you know, Member States, groups that have an influence all have a responsibility to stop the flow of arms.  Yes?  One more, sure, then Iftikhar?

Question:  I wanted to ask you… I guess I’m going to… I’ll do this one on Darfur.  There’s two questions in one location.  There seems to be an Irish aid group that says its workers have gone missing and have been taking in Darfur.  And I wanted to know if UNAMID (African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur) or you know about this?  And also, there’s a call by civilians in East Jebel Marra saying that they’ve been bombed so much that there’s now unexploded ordnances all over the place, and they’ve put out a public call through Radio Dabanga for these to be dealt with by UNAMID.  What’s UNAMID’s response?

Spokesman:  I’ll… we’ll check with UNAMID on both accounts.  Iftikhar?

Question:  Yes, Stéphane, you give some figures of the displaced people from Pakistan in military operations in North Waziristan.  Do you have an update on that?  And, specifically, in what way the United Nations is helping these people?

Spokesman:  I think I discussed that yesterday.  I don’t have an update for what I’ve said yesterday from our colleagues at UNHCR, but if I have one, I’ll share it with you.

Question:  Did you comment on the Ukraine on just, I may have missed the beginning, on this announcement by President [Petro] Poroshenko of the 14-point plan?  Is there a UN statement on that?

Spokesman:  I did not.  Bear with me two seconds.  We’ll come back to you.  Yes, please go ahead.  No, no, go ahead.

Correspondent:  Two unrelated questions, actually one is a comment on my colleague from Press TV’s question…

Spokesman:  I am always happy to hear from you, but I don’t want to hear a comment — I want to hear a question.  So, if you have a question, you can ask me, but I don’t want to hear a comment about somebody else’s question.

Question:  Okay, this is also a question.  Actually this had to do with the… my first question:  the vote in the Security Council on one of the resolutions, again the… I normally watch from the Chamber, that way nothing can be deleted, but I had decided that day to watch it from… on the webcast, and when it came to the Russian and Chinese veto, the webcast actually froze, and it was impossible to tell what was going on, so I couldn’t file anything on time.  I had to wait till the end to find out what the vote was.  And the question is:  does that seem to be a pattern with what was observed?

Spokesman:  You know, I think the only… if people were trying to read a political pattern into technical troubles, they are heading down the wrong road.  It is a… you all know how complex the system is that’s been put in place in this building since the renovation.  It has not worked perfectly.  We keep trying to upgrade it and make it better, but please do not try to interpret any political issue into what is and has been a technical problem.

Question:  My second question, which is totally unrelated, but I think it’s very important:  the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, which is very I find to be very reliable, published in 2008 a report of 84 or 85,000 Indian farmers committing suicide because they weren’t able to pay their debt because possibly crop failure or whatever.  And I thought this, well, I had heard nothing about it, the issue raised here, in subsequent years.  And recently somebody had mentioned that Indian farmers were committing suicide because they couldn’t pay the debt.  And I checked, Ellen Barry on 22 February has a very devastating article on massive numbers of Indian farmers committing suicide.

Spokesman:  We can ask [the Department of Economic and Social Affairs] if they have any updated numbers on this.  Okay, Iftikhar and then Matthew?

Question:  Stéphane, you must’ve seen today’s reports about efforts being made to replace Prime Minister [Nouri] al-Maliki of Iraq.  How does the Secretary-General feel about the performance of this Prime Minister?

Spokesman:  I think, again, I would refer you to the speech and to the Q&A.  The Secretary-General… in fact, you’ll… we’ll give you the Q&A shortly.  The Secretary-General talked about his own conversations with the Prime Minister and what he thought of the current political situation.  So, if you can just bear with us for another few, less than an hour, hopefully, we’ll have that Q&A ready for you.  Mr. Lee?

Question:  I have a question on Sri Lanka, but one follow-up to that in the question form.  Do you… I mean, in the past, the speeches of Ja’afari were blocked by a decision or miscommunication within [the Department of Public Information] that had nothing to do with MAMS.  Is that correct?

Spokesman:  You know, I don’t know what exactly which ones you’re referring to, but if you’re referring to General Assembly, informal General Assembly meetings, the agreement had always been with the [President of the General Assembly’s] office at the time that the Secretary-General’s statement would be open, the [President of the General Assembly’s] statement would be open, and then the video would be cut.  What had unfortunately happened is that by the time the message was relayed, the first speaker had started to speak.  But that was always the agreement with the [President of the General Assembly’s] office.

Question:  Okay, and the Sri Lanka question is this:  that there was this incident of religious violence — Buddhist against Muslim in the South — and I know that Navi Pillay had spoken on it.  Since then, a moderate monk has been beaten and his photographs have been shown widely through the country.  The media has been blocked from going to the site that this took place.  And I’m wondering whether with Mr. [Oscar Fernandez-]Taranco there, what is the UN say about this?  Is he conferring on this?  Is he going to speak when he comes back?  What’s the… it doesn’t… seems like things are sort of spiralling down that road, and I wonder with a senior UN official in the country, what can you say about it?

Spokesman:  Well, I think we’ll see what Mr. Taranco, the outcome of Mr. Taranco’s visit, but obviously all these cases of violence that we have seen are of great concern to us.  On the Ukraine, the Secretary-General welcomes President [Petro] Poroshenko’s expression of political will to peacefully resolve the crisis in Ukraine.  He takes note of the announcement of the President’s 14-point peace plan, which reportedly provides for dialogue, cessation of hostilities and other measures aimed at de-escalation.  A plan with such measures would be encouraging.  Of utmost importance would be the implementation of such measures, as well as those outlined in the 17 April Geneva agreement, in order to lead to a lasting and peaceful solution.

Question:  The shelling of Sloviansk — any comments on that?

Spokesman:  You know, I think we have a blanket call for cessation of all violence that we have seen in the past and continue to see in Ukraine.  I’ll leave you in the hands of Ambassador Churkin, who I’m sure will be happy to be here.  Have a great weekend.