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HIGHLIGHTS OF THE PRESS CONFERENCE BY SECRETARY-GENERAL BAN KI-MOON

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

August 9, 2010

Q: Mr. Secretary-General, on behalf of the United Nations Correspondents’ Association, I’d like to welcome you, sir, and thank you for this opportunity to pose questions. Concerning the inquiry, which you will be meeting with the members tomorrow, there are a lot of questions about the credibility of this inquiry, especially in the aftermath of some statements by Israeli officials that the inquiry members will not be allowed to interview any Israeli military member.

Now, I would like to ask you, sir, to put these to rest these doubts, by stating if there is such a previous agreement that this panel will not be allowed to interview the Israeli military. [Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin] Netanyahu said yesterday that he is very happy with the panel and that they took part themselves, the Prime Minister of Israel, in putting the mandate of this panel. So, for the sake of transparency, which is required by the Presidential Statement, I’m asking you here, sir, to shed light on the mandate, which shouldn’t be a secret, of this inquiry, and whether they are allowed to ask any, or interview any, Israeli military members.

SG: The Panel has a robust mandate. It needs to examine and identify the facts, circumstances and the context of the incident, as well as to recommend ways to avoid future incidents. Those are very important mandates. The Panel will decide what steps it may need to take, in cooperation with the national authorities, as their work evolves. I have full confidence in the Panel members, led by the Chair and Vice-Chair. As you know, I have again issued [an announcement on] the two additional members of the Panel yesterday, each from Israel and Turkey.

The Panel will begin its work from tomorrow, 10 August. I will have an opportunity, for the first time, to meet all of them in group. We will discuss their future work. I expect that they will submit their first progress report by mid-September, before the General Assembly begins. That’s our target. And then they will continue their work. I hope the Panel will fulfil their responsibilities, under the leadership of the Chair and Vice-Chair, and in respecting the Security Council Presidential Statement.

Q: If I may follow up, sir: The question of the mandate, and whether they can act freely and to interview Israeli military, goes to the heart of the transparency and the credibility of this panel. And you didn’t really, with all due respect, sir, answer my question: whether you had a previous understanding or agreement with the Israeli Government that these members will not be able to interview Israeli military. The point you mentioned about this panel’s main job is to review the two inquiries’ results, in Israel and Turkey, to prevent future incident of happening like this. You always told us, sir, that justice and peace go hand in hand. And without accountability, how do you expect, for the killing of nine people, how do you expect peace to endure and the panel to carry [out] its work. But really, I need to ask, sir, whether there is such an agreement that they will not be able to interview military members of the Israeli, or there isn’t.

Q: No, there was no such agreement behind the scenes. First of all, you should know that this is an unprecedented Panel of Inquiry established under my initiative, for the purpose of ensuring accountability, which is very important. This will be important, not only in finding out the facts and circumstances, but for the future, not to see such kind of incident, tragic incident, happen. As has already been announced, their main work will be to review and examine the report of the domestic investigations, and liaise with the domestic authorities. And whatever is needed beyond that, they will have to discuss among themselves, in close coordination with the national Government authorities, that they can take their own future steps. That’s what I can tell you. Now, my role is to establish this Panel. This will be carried out by them. And they will report to me -- their independent facts and circumstances and context of the incident.

Q: Are you sharing this with the Security Council? Because the mandate came from the Security Council…

SG: Yes, yes, I have written to the President of the Security Council.

Q: No, the report, the final report…

SG: After receiving the report, then I will have to discuss this matter. In fact, I have spoken with the President of the Security Council and I have communicated, through my official letter to the President of the Security Council, on the development of this Panel.

Q: My question is on Somalia, Mr. Secretary-General. Today, your Special Representative, Mr. [Augustine] Mahiga, announced that the United Nations would be returning to Somalia, its mission, within the next sixty days. Can you tell us a little bit more about that? Can you expand? Who’s going back, how many staff do you expect to be going back? What sorts of positions, and when do you expect a full mission to be there? And will it be in Mogadishu?

SG: As you will remember, when I made a comprehensive report to the Security Council, I think, more than a year ago, our strategy was a three-step strategy. First of all, to help the Transitional Federal Government’s capacity, by providing funds and training to Somali national forces and police forces, as well as strengthening the capacity of the African peacekeeping mission, AMISOM [African Union Mission in Somalia]. That was the first stage, which we are now doing. AMISOM is now reaching its full capacity of 8,000 authorized [personnel], mandated by the Security Council. The second phase will have a light presence in Mogadishu and in other parts of Somalia.

Before Mr. Mahiga went to Nairobi to assume his post, I had discussions internally, and we are now in the process of very seriously considering how to implement our second-phase strategy. That is what he said during his press conference. At this time, he will take all necessary measures [for] staffing and to ensure safety. He has to very closely coordinate with our Department of Safety and Security (DSS). So, while we ensure that safety and security will be there, we will also take necessary preparations, including staffing and all other facilities. But at this time, I’m not able to give you any detailed information, as you have requested. But, in due course, it will be announced.

Q: On climate change, about a year ago at this time, you were often talking about “seal the deal” and how the United Nations had a key role to play in bringing the world together on issues like this. It didn’t happen in Copenhagen, and its looks like from the talks in Bonn that it may not happen this year. Have you revised your thoughts about what the UN role is in trying to reach an agreement, given the amount of domestic opposition that all these various Governments are facing?

SG: There is no point of revising the United Nations position. The United Nations takes climate change as one of its highest priority issues. That is why I am establishing the High-Level Panel on Global Sustainability because we really want to address climate change and development and all other environment-related issues in a broader and more comprehensive manner.

Now, climate change, I think, has been making progress, even though we have not reached such a point where we will have a globally agreed, comprehensive deal. That was our target, but we are moving toward that direction. Now, what do we expect in Cancún, Mexico, this year? We need to be practical and realistic. It may be that the case that we may not able to have that comprehensive binding agreement in Cancún. But we have been making tangible progress in various areas like financing, adaptation, technology and capacity-building, and also in the reforestation area, known as REDD [United Nations Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries]. We have made quite tangible progress in these five areas; and on the basis of these sectoral areas, we will try to build so that we will be able to move ahead in a more comprehensive way.

The recent UNFCCC [United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change] meeting has made some progress. And I have been continuously discussing this matter with President [Felipe] Calderon of Mexico, Prime Minister [Jens] Stoltenberg of Norway, and Prime Minister [Lars Lokke] Rasmussen of Denmark, who is still acting as COP-15 [Fifteenth Conference of Parties] President, and other world leaders. These efforts will continue. We have a new leader at UNFCCC, and she has also been very actively consulting and meeting with people to create a politically conducive atmosphere. First and foremost, we must bridge the gap of trust between developed and developing countries.

This is what we are doing. I think that providing financial and technological support to developing countries by developed countries will be the key to bridging that gap of trust. That’s what we are doing, and by October of this year, I hope the High-Level Advisory Group on Climate Change Financing, led by Prime Minister Stoltenberg and Prime Minister Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia, will come out with their own formula and recommendations on how to provide long-term financial support in the amount of $100 billion [by] 2020. Before that, developed countries should be able to provide $30 billion as fast-track financial support [by] 2012. This is what we are now working very, very hard on.

Q: A follow-up on that. A lot of developing countries are very discouraged that the $30 billion has not materialized. They’re sort of looking at this thinking, “Well, if we’re not going to get to the first step, how can we get to the larger one?” How do you respond to that?

SG: You should know that in Copenhagen, Japan and the European Union, respectively, had pledged $10 billion each, and the United States President also has pledged an amount, which is still not up to $10 billion. But we need to fill the gap of what has not been pledged. I have written a letter to all OECD [Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development] Member States’ leaders to address this fast track financial support issue so that we can create a politically conducive and favourable atmosphere by bridging the gap of trust, particularly on the part of developing States. This is what we are working very seriously and very hard on. We are making progress.

Q: Mr. Secretary-General, going back to the flotilla inquiry: there was some surprise and criticism in Colombia when you selected President [Alvaro] Uribe as Vice-Chairman of the Panel, because of, obviously, the controversies during his tenure: the attack on the guerrilla camp in Ecuador, the relationship with President [Hugo] Chávez, their disputes, and also some internal issues, like the killing of civilians by the military. Have you considered the possibility that his appointment would harm the credibility of the Panel and cause other problems with this issue that is delicate by its own matter?

SG: First of all, in having President Alvaro Uribe, I should remind you that Colombia’s bilateral relationships with Venezuela or Ecuador or some other countries has not much to do with the specific case of the flotilla Panel. Now, we have also taken note of some such concerns. While he had been addressing all the drug cartels issues, there had been some such issues. But, I believe, having known him as leader of Colombia, in my capacity as Secretary-General, for such a long time, I have full confidence that he will be a good addition and he will make a good contribution to this Panel. That is what I made my own decision on.

Q: My question is on disarmament. You are the first Secretary-General in the history of this Organization to attend the peace ceremony in Hiroshima, together with other representatives, of course. There is clearly a renewed interest in reducing and eventually eliminating nuclear weapons. What do you think this interest is due to, at this moment in history? Secondly, you indicated that you will convene a conference on 24 September on disarmament. As you know the history of disarmament conferences [is that they] have not been very effective. Would you give thought to convening a meeting or summit of the Security Council to give the necessary priority to this question?

SG: Thank you for asking that question. I regard it as a very pertinent and important question at this time, particularly as I was the first UN Secretary-General, after 65 years, to attend that ceremony. As I said, it was one of my most profoundly moving experiences, personally as well as Secretary-General. I have been visiting many countries. I have been meeting various different types of groups and attending many different events, but that was one of the most moving experiences for me.

Now, the international community has seen recently positive movement politically. Some of the most powerful countries, like the United States – President [Barack] Obama has made a landmark, very historic, speech on nuclear disarmament in Prague, in April of last year. And he convened — again unprecedented and historic — Security Council summit meeting on disarmament, with all 15 Security [Council] members participating at the level of Head of State and Government. That was, again, historic. And there was the Washington Nuclear Security Summit meeting for the first time, and they agreed to have a second summit meeting, to continue their discussion in Seoul, [Republic of] Korea, in 2012. That is again very historic.

As you may know, I have taken nuclear disarmament as one of the top priorities. In January this year, I reported to the General Assembly that this is one of my seven top priorities of the United Nations 2010 agenda. I’m very glad that I’m standing in the middle of this very positive international atmosphere. And my participation seemed to have encouraged other nuclear-weapon States to participate, again for the first time. The US Ambassador to Tokyo, Ambassador [John] Roos, has participated for the first time as a United States representative, which generated a lot of attention and interest in the international community. There were 74 countries that were represented at the ambassadorial level. That was for the first time, again unprecedented.

We have to seize this momentum. That’s what I’m trying to do. But this 24 September high-level meeting is, again, unprecedented. As you said, this is not limited to only CD [Conference on Disarmament] members; this is open to all Member States of the United Nations, to help the work of the Conference on Disarmament, at the ministerial-and-above level. I think this is the first time to have such a high-level meeting on disarmament at the United Nations. Let us see, and let us make some more political push.

Q: Mr. Secretary-General, what is your response to the portrayal of your administration as being weak on fighting internal fraud and corruption, as portrayed now both in the [Inga-Britt] Ahlenius memo and the grievance now filed by the former Chairman of the Procurement Task Force? Are you satisfied with the performance that the acting Investigations Director is doing at this point? And lastly, what do you think that more investigation of the UN’s investigative capacity will produce, given that there have already been a number of studies in that area?

SG: If anybody or if any Member States within the UN system, or if any colleague of me within the UN Secretariat, accuses me on the issue of accountability or ethics, then that’s something I regard as unfair, first of all. It was I who have taken this accountability and highest standard of ethics by the UN Secretariat, [which] has been held from Day One. And I have made much progress; again; unprecedented progress. It was I who have established an Ethics Office in the UN system; can you believe it? I have applied it to all funds and programmes, despite much reluctance by UN agencies. I am now in the process of applying to all United Nations specialised agencies – they have all different Member States, all different rules and regulations in terms of ethics – that’s what I have done now, through CEB [Chief Executives Board] meetings. It has been quite difficult, but I have [made] quite persistent efforts. I have given 100 percent independence in the operations and in the work of OIOS [Office of Internal Oversight Services]. Then, if anybody questions my integrity or my commitment to accountability and ethics from the beginning, it is quite difficult for me to accept [this]. As Chief Administrative Office in accordance with the relevant Charter, then I am responsible for all this management, appointing senior advisers. That’s what I am doing.

Q: I would like to ask you three specific criticisms that she makes, Ms. Ahlenius, in her report: One, that you refused to carry out a risk assessment in your office; two, that you neglected to forward cases to the authorities; and three, your management style was such that moving people around different positions weakened institutional memory, and in general, you care more about the “red carpet” than you do about the health of the Organization. Can you please answer these specific questions – there are many more, but just these three specific questions?

SG: I suggest that we need to have some other separate session for this. I am willing to do that. But I would like to pay more attention on broader [issues] and the bigger picture. I do not expect that all the Member States or all the staff of the Secretariat will like my style or my policies. But I am a very reasonable, very practical man of common sense. I do not take extreme, unreasonable policies. I always do the right things, proper things. That’s what I can tell you, what I can assure you. If you will see me doing anything in an improper way, in an unreasonable way, in an extreme way, then please advise me. And that’s what I have been…

Q: The blocking of [Robert] Appleton’s appointment was clearly an incursion on the operational independence of the Office of the Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), which was fought for hugely in the early 1990s. There was a huge battle to establish the independence of that office. You have clearly curtailed the independence of that office, and now we see that you might have promised those D2 posts, under the new person in charge of OIOS, to South Africa. Again, that would be another curtailing of the independence of that office. So how do you answer the charge that you’re curtailing the independence of the Office of the Internal Oversight Services?

SG: This, again, you are only seeing from only one side. That’s appointment of officers; that’s something that is under my jurisdiction as Chief Administrative Officer.

Q: In the OIOS case, that’s not true.

SG: And then that particular position has been vacant since 2006. Then how can you find an answer when that position, which is regarded as being very important, has been vacant under Ms. Ahlenius’s term for more than two years. And there had been, again, 76 more vacancies that still had not been filled during her term. How you can explain [this]? But those 76 were completely under her authority.

Q: But Ms. Ahlenius said that you blocked her for appointments coming into the post.

SG: No; no.

Q: She said she asked you 9 times to appoint Mr. Appleton.

SG: Please don’t take this as a personal issue. This is an official issue. This is an organizational issue. I’m not doing all [this] on my personal issues. This appointment above the rank of D2, Directors, should go through what is known as a Senior Review Board (SRB), without exception. And then in the course of such controversial periods, she recommended another D2 with three names, in accordance with the rules and regulations of the SRB; that went to the SRB. And I appointed [that person] immediately on her recommendation. But now we are talking about only one D2 position, which has been taking almost longer than one year, but only because of the lack of proper procedures which is required by the regulations of the United Nations. Please don’t take this as personal. This issue first went to SRB, not through me. Then, whoever is not coming through SRB - how do I know who is recommended? This issue only came later, charging that I did not have any authority on that. That was regarded as a challenge to the Secretary-General. Then she left without filling that position.

Q: But, sir, can you answer the point: have you promised the D2 post to a South African now in order to get your nominee, the Canadian, Ms. [Carman] Lapointe?

SG: That is another matter. He was one of the candidates for this OIOS USG [Under-Secretary-General] post. That is totally a different issue.

Q: Did you promise the D2 post, under Ms. Lapointe, to a South African? And isn’t that a further curtailment of the independence of the OIOS?

SG: No, I don’t think that he has been properly cleared through this process. That did not happen. The selection committee -- even before they came to me, he was one of the finalists, the South African whom you are talking about. If he [had been] willing to take the job, then I was okay [for him] to fill that post.

There are certain cases when someone was applying for a certain post, and where she or he was not successful for that post, and because of the excellent quality of the candidate – we really wanted to keep certain candidates in our system – we offered a lower rank. And there are such cases. If you want, I can give you an answer. That’s my authority.

[The Spokesperson later added the following clarification: The Secretary-General wants to make it absolutely clear that the recruitment process for the Director of the Investigations Division will start only after the new Under-Secretary-General of the Office of Internal Oversight Services has taken up her post. This selection will be conducted strictly in accordance with the established rules and procedures. The assertion that a South African was offered the job is completely unfounded.]

Q: Mr. Secretary-General, please, I’d like for the last question to go back to the issue of the panel of Gaza, to clarify one matter, and I have another question on Lebanon. If you can clarify to us how this new panel that will meet tomorrow: they will wait until the Israelis and the Turks finish their investigation, and then they start their own review, and issue their own report, or are they going to work in parallel?

And my question on Lebanon: sir, concerning the tribunal, what is your comment to all the leaks that are coming out of the tribunal about Mr. [Rafik] Hariri, that there are charges against members of Hezbollah? Doesn’t this minimize the credibility of the tribunal itself, considering that all of the leaks are coming to Israeli media and Israeli press? Thank you.

SG: The tribunal on this assassination of Mr. Hariri is something which this prosecutor is now doing; therefore I should not make any comment. I’m not aware of any process on how this investigation is going on. That is not really within my jurisdiction; it is not [within] my power.

Q: But what about the panel, sir? Can the panel wait until the Israelis finish their investigation to issue a report?

SG: That has nothing to do with that. That has their own mandate; they have their own work schedules. So this has nothing to do with it. This is a totally separate issue.

Thank you very much. Please don’t take this as a personal issue. I really ask you. I’m the Secretary-General of the United Nations dealing with so many global issues. Let us look at the broader picture – the bigger picture. You may raise small issues, but for me that is just one part. Please remember, I’m not dealing with all these personal issues. I do not take any personal feelings from this.

Q: Mr. Secretary-General, the Iranian ambassador wrote a letter to you last week about the warnings, and other warnings being issued, to Iran about an attack, an imminent attack, on Iranian nuclear installations. Have you been able to talk to any American officials, or other officials, calling for calm on this issue, which has now becoming – after yesterday, Mr. [Fidel] Castro was talking about it…

SG: I’m not aware of any such issues. The only thing I am dealing with is - the Iranian nuclear issue is a source of great concern for the international community, which should be addressed as soon as possible through dialogue. And as the Iranians have expressed their willingness to come back through dialogue, some time in September, I only hope that they will engage in dialogue with the E3 + 3, and fully cooperate with the IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency], and also comply fully with the relevant Security Council resolutions. That is the only way to resolve this issue. Thank you.