

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

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The following is a near-verbatim transcript of today's noon briefing by Martin Nesirky, Spokesperson for the Secretary-General.

Good afternoon, and welcome to the briefing.

**\*\*Noon Guests**

Today we are joined by video link, as you can see, by a number of guests. Let me tell you who they are: Bruno Maiga, who is the Minister of Culture for Mali; Lassana Cissé, the National Director for Mali Cultural Heritage; Aurélien Agbénonci, the UN Resident Coordinator in Mali, who is there on behalf of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, MINUSMA; Juma Shabani, who is the representative of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in Mali; Lazare Eloundou, Chief of the Africa Section of World Heritage; and Richard Zink, Chief of the European Union delegation in Mali.

And our guests are there in the capital, Bamako, and they're going to discuss with you the results of an assessment mission to World Heritage sites damaged during the course of the conflict in Mali.

I'm joined here in New York by my colleague, Ricardo de Guimarães of UNESCO, and he will moderate for us, as most of this will be in French. Interpreting is provided. Questions asked in English here will be translated by Ricardo into French for the colleagues who are on the other end of the line in Bamako.

So please, let us open the floor to our colleagues in Mali.

[Press conference on the results of an assessment mission to World Heritage sites damaged in conflict issued separately.]

So I just have a few more items to tell you about. And of course, I am happy to take some questions.

**\*\*Syria Appeal**

As you will have seen, in Geneva today, the United Nations launched an appeal for Syria, asking for \$4.4 billion for the whole of this year. UN appeals for Syria have already received about \$1.24 billion in funding so far, so that leaves \$3.1 billion in unmet requirements until the end of the year.

Valerie Amos, the Emergency Relief Coordinator, said that an estimated 6.8 million people now need urgent help, and that is one in three of the Syrian population.

The High Commissioner for Refugees, Antonio Guterres, said that the situation in the region has worsened dramatically, with over 1.6 million Syrians now sheltering in the neighbouring countries and North Africa.

We have a press release with more details on that.

#### **\*\*UNDOF**

The Security Council will hold consultations at 3 p.m. this afternoon to discuss the UN Disengagement Observer Force in Golan, UNDOF.

In a press statement read this morning, the members of the Security Council strongly condemned intense fighting in the Area of Separation, including the attack yesterday, which led to injuries suffered by two peacekeepers from the Disengagement Observer Force. Council members urged full respect for the 1974 disengagement agreement.

You'll recall that we issued a statement yesterday afternoon on the fighting and on Austria's decision to withdraw its troops from the Force. In that statement, the Secretary-General called on all parties to ensure that the announced Austrian withdrawal takes place in an orderly manner. The Secretary-General is approaching Member States in an effort to identify urgently new contributors or additional contributions to UNDOF. And that full statement is available online.

#### **\*\* Syria**

In a press statement this morning, the members of the Security Council also expressed their grave concern about the humanitarian impact of the recent heavy fighting in Al-Qusayr, in Syria.

They called upon the Syrian Government to allow immediate, safe and unhindered humanitarian access to reach civilians in Al-Qusayr. They called on all parties in Syria to do their utmost to protect civilians and avoid civilian casualties, recalling the primary responsibility of the Syrian Government in this regard.

**\*\*Secretary-General in Denver**

The Secretary-General is in Colorado today. About now, he is in Boulder, visiting the National Center for Atmospheric Research. While he is there, he will speak about climate change and about his commitment to mobilizing political will at the highest levels to address this global challenge.

Later today, the Secretary-General will address the Denver Forum. And this afternoon, he will address the graduate commencement ceremony at the University of Denver and receive an honorary degree. As usual, we will share these remarks with you, and they will also be available online.

The Secretary-General will be back in New York tomorrow.

**\*\* Myanmar**

The UN refugee agency said today that up to 140,000 people remain displaced one year after inter-communal violence erupted in Myanmar's Rakhine State.

The agency said that it stands ready to provide the Government with technical support to register all internally displaced people and to promote reconciliation for safe and sustainable voluntary returns. It has been working with the authorities and partners to provide water, sanitation and health-care services to the uprooted.

The agency said that active steps must be taken to stem the flow of people out of Rakhine. Since last June, more than 27,000 people — believed mostly to be from there — have embarked on dangerous boat journeys in search of safety and stability in other countries.

The agency has appealed to Governments in the region to keep their doors open to people in need of international protection. It is also asking authorities in Myanmar to urgently address the root causes of this outflow of people.

And there is more information available on the refugee agency's website.

## **\*\*Nutrition**

The World Food Programme (WFP) said today that it has launched a new partnership with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to improve nutrition among pregnant and breastfeeding women.

The goal of the new initiative is to reduce the number of low birth weight babies and stunted children who, as a result, grow up blighted by health problems and experience a detrimental impact on their learning and economic potential.

Under this partnership, the World Food Programme and the United Nations Population Fund are planning to roll out pilot programmes in Burkina Faso, Sierra Leone and Zambia. Women taking part in those programmes will be provided with nutritional food supplements, including vital micronutrients, such as iron, folic acid and calcium, as appropriate.

And we have more details available in a press release that is online, and this is also something that will be the feature at a "Nutrition for Growth" summit which will take place in London tomorrow.

## **\*\*Press Conference on Monday**

At 11 a.m. on Monday, there will be a press conference to mark World Water Day. And that press conference will take place in the new briefing room here at United Nations Headquarters, and that will also be the venue for the noon briefing for the first time.

So, questions, please? Yes, please, Ivan?

## **\*\*Questions and Answers**

Question: President [Vladimir] Putin today said that Russia is ready to send Russian peacekeepers instead of Austrians to Golan Heights. Do you have anything to say about that? And any details on how many people that you are talking about? Anything you can say?

Spokesperson: Well, we appreciate the consideration that the Russian Federation has given to provide troops on the Golan . However, the Disengagement Agreement and its Protocol, which is between Syria and Israel, do not allow for the participation of permanent members of the Security Council in UNDOF. More questions, please? Yes, Masood? I will come to you in a second, Nizar. Yes, Masood?

Question: Yes, sir. Today, there is a new report that you're probably aware of it, that there is a clash between India and Pakistan troop at the Kashmiri border, one soldier is getting killed. Just want to mention the backdrop, a similar incident happened in February... January-February of this year. And, at that point in time, you had said, and some your other spokesman, had said, that we are still awaiting the report of UNMOGIP [United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan] as to exactly what happened. Now, I would like to know, has that report ever been received by UNMOGIP on this situation in between India and Pakistan? And does the Secretary-General plan to do something about this, I mean, the Kashmir problem and the whole thing that is going on, because there is a UN Security Council resolution on this?

Spokesperson: Well, first of all, we are obviously aware of the latest reports. Secondly, I will check with my colleagues from Peacekeeping Operations on the reporting coming from UNMOGIP. I don't have anything for you on that.

Question: So, but are you saying they don't have anything on that? This is...

Spokesperson: That may be the case that you perceive it in that way. It is also a very long-running saga, as you well know. If I have anything for you, I will let you know, but I don't at the moment.

Question: So, so, so, the Secretary-General doesn't intend to pursue this at all?

Spokesperson: It sounds like you are doing my job for me. Don't put words into my mouth. I have said to you that I don't have anything for you on that at the moment. Nizar, yes?

Question: Yeah, if the Russian troops are not acceptable because of the mandate and the original agreement between Syria and Israel, do you have other... are the Fijians coming forward, for example, about that? Are, what about the Filipinos, because the Foreign Minister was quoted as saying that his troops are being used as human shields for the rebels?

Spokesperson: Well, with regard to the Philippines and their contingents, we are not aware of any change in the status, which is that they are there. With regard to the search for other troop contributors, as I have already said, the Secretary-General and others with, obviously, within Peacekeeping Operations, are urgently looking for troop-contributing countries to come forward. And that is something that is going on, indeed, pretty much as we speak, there is a meeting taking place with the troop-contributing countries. And as you also know, the Security Council is meeting to discuss the Disengagement Observe Force this afternoon at 3 p.m.

Question: A follow-up on that. Since European Union has deter... that they will be lifting the ban on weapons, on supplying weapons to the opposition, also since the Austrians and the Croatians pulled out because of similar reasons, will there be any exclusion of areas that cannot contribute, as well, not just the Russians? For example, the Europeans, they have their reservations that they won't participate. Are there any other groups that they will be excluded?

Spokesperson: Look, as we have said, these discussions are going on. The Secretary-General is very grateful to those countries that continue to provide troops and military observers. And, as I have also said, the mission is staying, UNDOF is staying, and the discussions on the search for other troop-contributing countries is something that is actively under way, indeed, as I am speaking to you here. Yes, Matthew?

Question: I have a similar question, but I want to be sure to ask this about Mali. There is a new Human Rights Watch report specifying recent abuses in, but, including by the Malian army and it names towns Sourango, Tenenkou, I am, I am assuming that the UN has seen it and I am wondering, what is, what is the, DPKO [Department of Peacekeeping Operations], or MINUSMA, what's their response to the study and how is it going to impact the UN providing support or working in conjunction with these units of the Malian army?

Spokesperson: I am sure my colleagues have indeed seen that report. And we have said all along that it is absolutely vital that the troops, and indeed, also contributing troops to MINUSMA, adhere to the highest possible standards. And that any violations would be taken extremely seriously. So, that's as a general proposition. And of course, we need to look at the Human Rights Watch report in more detail. I am sure my colleagues are doing that.

Question: And, and just, it's, related to that, is, if a country, like, such as Chad, is... is on the list of Children and Armed Conflict, of recruiting child soldiers, does that mean it would be precluded from serving in such, in such a mission? Or would only some units be, be, be precluded? What would be the impact of being on the UN's childhood soldier recruitment list...?

Spokesperson: I will need to check with my colleagues in Peacekeeping Operations on that. But, I think again, as a general proposition, the rules are quite clear. So I am looking for other questions now. Yes, Jonathan?

Question: Thank you, Martin. I'm reading on the UN News Centre some reporting on the news release that came from Mr. Richard Falk, in which he will be giving a report, delivering a report, in Geneva on Monday about alleged Israeli abuses in the Palestinian territories. But, I see here there is a mention in, in, in his news report about "irresponsible and dishonest smear campaigns to discredit" him and the documented realities that he has been chronicling. And apparently, in the speech, report, that he is going to give on Monday, he is going to accuse Secretary-General Ban of being complicit with some of the smear campaign. Have you heard anything about this? Can you comment on this?

Spokesperson: Short answer is no and no.

Question: No, no...?

Spokesperson: No, I have not heard about it and no, I am not going to comment on it, Jonathan. Yes?

Question: I want to ask about Syria and also I have something on the Great Lakes. Just on, just factually on UNDOF, I wanted to know what, it was said that the Fijians were going to replace the Croatians. Is there some way to know whether, where that stands? Maybe, maybe, I've missed an announcement here, that's possible.

Spokesperson: Well, you evidently weren't listening to what I said to Nizar.

Question: I'm, I mean, that's, that's, then that's fine. Then, I'll just move on to this one. I asked on Monday — I don't think I missed this answer, but maybe I did — whether it's, uh, Under-Secretary-General [Hervé] Ladsous, as was said at the Human Rights Council in Geneva earlier that day on Monday, has, in fact, looked into the evidence provided to him by Syria of what they say is Qatari involvement in the kidnapping of UN peacekeepers in Golan. Has there been any inquiry, as they said publicly there would be or should be?

Spokesperson: As I have said to you in answer to the question when you have asked it before, I would check with my colleagues from Peacekeeping Operations. If and when I have an answer on that, I will certainly let you know.



[The Spokesperson later clarified that the United Nations has no evidence of any involvement by Member States or State actors in the abduction or detention of United Nations personnel in Syria. To our knowledge, the peacekeepers were detained by individual groups operating in Syria.]

Correspondent: I wanted to ask DPKO...

Spokesperson: Thanks very much, have a good afternoon. Thank you.

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