

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. Welcome to the briefing.

****South Sudan**

The UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) has welcomed the appointment of a new Cabinet in the country. The Mission says it stands ready to work closely with the new Cabinet, once sworn in, to advance South Sudan's reform agenda, including combating corruption, transforming the security sector and providing essential services to the people.

The Mission also says it looks forward to working with the new Cabinet on protecting civilians and strengthening core State institutions, as well as political milestones related to constitutional review and the holding of free and fair national elections. In this regard, the Mission is urging the new Cabinet to do its utmost to forge national unity and solidarity and respect the rights of all South Sudanese citizens.

****Secretary-General's Appointment**

The Secretary-General has appointed Speciosa Wandira-Kasibwe of Uganda as his Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa. Ms. Wandira-Kasibwe is Senior Adviser to the President of Uganda on Population and Health. As Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa, Ms. Wandira-Kasibwe will help advance the AIDS response in Africa by advocating for the active engagement and involvement of all sectors of society. In this role, she will replace Asha-Rose Migiro of Tanzania. We have more on this appointment in my office.

**** Iraq**

The UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) said today that more than 1,000 Iraqis were killed and more than 2,300 were wounded in acts of terrorism and violence in July. The Mission, in releasing its monthly casualty figures, said most of those killed or wounded were civilians.

The Acting Special Representative of the Mission, Gyorgy Busztin, said that more than 4,000 Iraqis have been killed since the start of the year, adding that the Mission hasn't seen such numbers in more than five years. He reiterated his urgent call on all Iraq's political

leaders to take immediate and decisive action to stop the bloodshed. Baghdad was the worst-affected governorate in July, with 957 civilian casualties. We have a press release with more details.

**** Central African Republic**

The Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights Ivan Šimonović said today at the end of a four-day visit to the Central African Republic that State institutions throughout the country remain close to collapse. He urged the international community not to abandon the country.

Mr. Šimonović also said that, while the situation in Bangui has slightly improved, the State simply does not exist outside of the capital and there is no rule of law. He also expressed his concern about the high rate of sexual violence in the country. During his visit, the Assistant Secretary-General met the Transitional Authorities, including the Prime Minister of the Transitional Government and several Ministers. He also held discussions with religious leaders and members of civil society organizations and of the international community.

**** Security Council**

Argentina has replaced the United States this month in the rotating Presidency of the Security Council. The Council is expected to hold consultations on its programme of work for August tomorrow. And then, tomorrow at 12:30 p.m., Ambassador María Cristina Perceval of Argentina, President of the Security Council in August, will brief you in this room on the programme of work for the month.

**** Press Conference**

I would like to remind you that at 1:30 p.m. today, the Working Group on the Use of Mercenaries will hold a press conference here on the use of private military and security companies in UN peace and humanitarian operations in the field.

**** MINUSMA — Nigeria**

I was asked recently about the withdrawal of Nigerian troops from the UN Mission in Mali, MINUSMA, and here is what I can confirm at this point:

The Department of Peacekeeping Operations has been informed of Nigeria's plan to withdraw its infantry battalion from the peacekeeping mission in Mali. However, Nigeria will maintain a presence within the Mission, including through its military hospital and police unit. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations wishes to extend its appreciation to Nigeria for its contribution to UN peacekeeping and to the Mission, MINUSMA. The Department is in close contact with a number of troop contributors to provide MINUSMA with the troops and assets it needs.

****Unmanned Aerial Vehicles**

Also, in response to questions, the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations can confirm that it has reached the final stage of the procurement process in relation to the trial use of unmanned aerial vehicles, UAVs, by its Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO).

The selected vendor is the Italian company SELEX ES. The UAV is known as the “FALCO” and is designed to be a medium-altitude, medium-endurance surveillance platform capable of carrying a range of payloads, including several types of high-resolution sensors. Of course, its payload does not include weapons. The deployment of the UAV is planned in the coming weeks.

As we have said many times in the past, the use of unarmed UAVs will allow our peacekeepers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to monitor the movements of armed groups and protect civilian population more efficiently, particularly in the country's eastern region.

And that’s what I have for you at this point. And I’m happy to take any questions that you may have. Yes, Edie?

****Questions and Answers**

Question: You said yesterday in the announcement on the chemical weapons inspection team that it would be going as soon as possible. Can you give us any indication of that timeframe? Does it mean this week? Does it mean next week? Any indication at all?

Spokesperson: Well, I think you could understand that we would not want to get too specific at this point. The team will depart for Syria as soon as practical and is preparing to depart within days. That’s what I can tell you at this point. Yes, Masood?

Question: In recent days, [inaudible] many envoys of international bodies, like Catherine Ashton and African Union envoys, have met with Mr. Mohamed Morsy and [inaudible] asking the Egyptian military to release him. But, the United Nations... on the part of the United Nations, nobody has gone there, like, I mean, for instance, Navi Pillay or something like that. Doesn't the Secretary-General think that he should be sending somebody over there, at least to show concern for Mr. Morsy?

Spokesperson: Well, I think, with respect, Masood, the Secretary-General has shown tremendous concern and repeatedly in recent days, he spent an inordinate amount of time on the telephone speaking to Egyptian leaders and with other leaders in the region, and indeed, just yesterday, spoke with Catherine Ashton of the European Union. As you mentioned yourself, Ms. Ashton was in the region herself, in Cairo, and did see Mr. Morsy. The Secretary-General reiterated once again his call for Mr. Morsy to be released and also for other Muslim Brotherhood officials to be released.

Question: [inaudible] expect somebody from the United Nations, which is such an international body, [inaudible] that somebody will go from here and ask the Government...?

Spokesperson: Look, I think in this modern era, it doesn't necessarily mean that you have to be present to be able to make your point very clear. That point about the need for restraint, the need for inclusive dialogue and the need, specifically, for the release of Mr. Morsy and in the absence of his release, for a transparent process, judicial process to be started. All of these points have been made very clear to the Egyptian authorities in repeated phone calls, to senior leaders within that transitional administration in Cairo. Yes, Mr. Abbadi? And then Pamela.

Question: Thank you, Martin. The military authorities in Egypt have declared that the demonstrations by the supporters of President Morsy pose a national threat to national security. Does the Secretary-General... what is the reaction of the Secretary-General to this assertion?

Spokesperson: The Secretary-General has repeatedly said... we have repeatedly said that peaceful protests are a fundamental right. They should be allowed to go ahead. They need to be peaceful and there needs to be restraint on all sides in Egypt as there must be anywhere where there are tensions of this kind. But, I think the key point here is that the Secretary-General has repeatedly said that freedom of expression, freedom of assembly need to be guaranteed, but that those participating in the protests, demonstrations need to do so peacefully. Pamela?

Question: Martin, the Secretary-General has talked about what his goals are at the G-20 Summit in September on sustainable development, MDG [Millennium Development Goal] acceleration. Do you expect him to have any sideline meetings on Syria, on Middle East, on any other big issues and who might be attending or not?

Spokesperson: Well, at this point, the Secretary-General has, indeed, repeatedly said what he would expect to see at the G-20 meeting. As you know, typically, the Secretary-General, if he attends such meetings, has a particular role, which is to make sure that the voices of all Member States and the international community are heard at those meetings. But, if and when we get to the point when we can say more about that, then I will, indeed, say so, but at the moment, I will leave it there. Yes, Matthew? And then I will come to you.

Question: Okay. Thanks for answering yesterday's question about the UAV contract. I wanted to ask you two things about the Democratic Republic of the Congo. One is: now that the MONUSCO deadline has occurred, there are at least some reports of the... of the Government, the FARDC [Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo], closing the border to Rwanda and of arrests of Kenya-Rwanda speakers in Goma. And I wanted to know whether MONUSCO is aware of any of that or has any update as its... as its deadline expired? And also, yesterday, alongside the drone answer, you'd said that the [Department of Peacekeeping Operations] won't disclose the units of the Congolese army that it supports. I've gone back over it and it seems like that doesn't seem to be a policy. It seems that in MONUSCO press conferences, where... I guess, where it suits them or serves them, they do name battalions. So, I wanted to know, what's the basis of... given that it's particularly in terms of assessing compliance with the human rights due diligence policy, what's the basis of disclosing some units supported and not others? Can you just explain more about what you said yesterday? I don't understand it.

Spokesperson: On the last part, no, I can't. And on the first part, let me just update you a little bit. The Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo is reporting to us that, as planned and in close coordination with Congolese security forces, its peacekeepers have now established a security zone in the greater Goma area and along the Goma-Sake axis, in North Kivu Province. The objective of the security zone is to provide better protection to more than 1 million civilians — including internally displaced persons — living in the area. UN peacekeepers and Congolese security forces will continue their patrols to ensure that the area is free of unauthorized weapons. The Mission adds that the security zone is not an offensive operation and is not targeted at any one armed group. MONUSCO reiterates its commitment to a political solution to address the recurring cycles of violence and instability in eastern [Democratic Republic of the Congo] and calls on all parties to implement their commitments under the Framework agreement, signed by the leaders of the Great Lakes region.

Question: Sure, I just wanted to... is it possible to get from them... I mean, are they monitoring these questions of arrests... these reports of arrests have come out? And also, what would you say to the theory or... or... that... that by establishing the zone, the idea is to allow the FARDC to head north and... and engage various or some of the armed groups? Is that... is there some coordination with the FARDC to establish a back area that's unarmed in order to allow offensive operations in the front?

Spokesperson: Just to say, this is not an offensive operation and this security zone is to be able to better protect civilians in that area and heaven knows they've endured enough already in that area and this is a core part of the mandate of the Mission — protection of civilians — and this is the aim of this latest development. Yes, please? Yes, please? Matthew, you can shake your head if you like. You've asked a series of questions. There are others who would like to ask questions.

Correspondent: But, I asked how many weapons were turned in.

Spokesperson: Please, please, please.

Question: This goes go back to Syria and the chemical weapons inspections team. It would be great if you would... if you were able to give us a little more detail on the team of how many people will it actually consist. Where are they now, and for how long are they going to stay in Syria? Is there... is there any way of knowing that by now? Is there any timeframe of that? And then the other thing would be, yesterday, in the statement, you said that there were three reported incidents that they were going to look into as of now. You named one. Is there any possibility to also name the other two?

Spokesperson: On the last part, no, there isn't. In addition to the reported incident at Khan al-Asal, which you referred to, at this stage, the mission will also investigate two other incidents as we've said yesterday. Those two other incidents where the evaluation of the available information has indicated an on-site investigation is warranted. To answer your question, specifically, the locations of the two other incidents are being kept confidential as a safety and security precaution. And then, you asked about the team; in addition to the head of the mission, the team will consist of about 10 experts from the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the World Health Organization (WHO). You asked about how long they will be in country. That's not something that I am in a position to speak about at the moment, but simply to say that the team is now assembling and reassembling in The Hague, and will be ready to depart once the remaining logistical and legal details for the mission have been finalized. Yes, Nizar?

Question: Yeah, Martin, today, there were a lot of protests in south Palestine for people who... the Israeli Government intends to take their land and build colonies in the South, in the Negev. What's the reaction to this law called "brother law", which has been accepted by the Cabinet?

Spokesperson: I don't have anything for you on that at the moment, Nizar, but if I get anything, I will let you know. Right in the back of the room, please?

Question: Thank you. I wanted to know any update on the North Korean ship in Panama, please?

Spokesperson: I don't have any further updates. As I've said before, this would be something for the relevant Sanctions Committee and the Panel of Experts to comment on and I don't have anything further from them to pass on to you. So, you may wish to speak with the Chairperson of the Sanctions Committee concerned. Yes, Ivan?

Correspondent: Thank you. To follow-up this question, I was just wondering...

Spokesperson: Which one?

Question: About North Korea. Yesterday, it was said the experts could not reach Panama to start an investigation because the ship is not unloaded yet. I'm just wondering why... why the experts should arrive after the ship should be unloaded — not to be present at the process of unloading the ship to see all the details. Isn't it strange that they cannot arrive before everything will be unloaded from the ship?

Spokesperson: Well, Ivan, to follow up on my answer to the previous question, this is not a question for me. This is a question for the Panel of Experts and the Sanctions Committee, neither of whom I speak for. Yes, Pamela?

Question: Just on a follow-up, can you see if you can find out if there are any scheduled Quartet meetings since the Secretary-General did mention... I mean did... the Quartet did make a statement; if there is anything planned or maybe at the sidelines at the G-20?

Spokesperson: I think there is nothing to add to what was said yesterday and what was said in the statement. In other words, there is an intention to meet at the envoys level and if and when I have details on that, I will let you know, but I don't have any update today.

Correspondent: Okay, thank you.

Spokesperson: Yes, Masood?

Question: The deployment of the UAV that you were earlier referring to for peacekeeping missions, will there be any iron-clad guarantees given that they will not be used in a combat operations and so forth, these UAVs, which are [inaudible] elsewhere?

Spokesperson: Well, Masood, I did say very clearly that these unmanned aerial vehicles do not carry weapons, okay? They carry a range of payloads that help with surveillance, but they do not carry weapons.

Correspondent: But you're saying unmanned aerial vehicles do not carry weapons; they do carry weapons. That's what they're so infamous.

Spokesperson: I think that, Masood, your understanding of what a UAV is seems to be rather narrowly defined. There are a number of different sizes of unmanned aerial vehicles that can do different things. This kind of UAV, unmanned aerial vehicle, that has been procured by peacekeeping operations is a very specific kind that is used specifically for surveillance reconnaissance and does not, cannot, carry weapons. Yes, last question to Mr. Abbadi?

Correspondent: Thank you, Martin.

Spokesperson: Why can't it be the last question, Matthew?

Correspondent: I have a lot of questions for you.

Spokesperson: Well, tomorrow is another day.

Correspondent: Well, you did this yesterday, as well

Spokesperson: Tomorrow is another day, Matthew.

Question: What about Sri Lanka? When is the report going to be released?

Spokesperson: Tomorrow is another day, Matthew. Yes, Mr. Abbadi?

Question: Thank you, Martin. Regarding the elections, recent elections, in Zimbabwe, the African Union has certified that these elections were transparent, impartial and fair. What is the position of the UN regarding the manner in which those elections were held?

Spokesperson: Well, as you know, the United Nations is not on the ground with regards to those elections. We are aware of the various reports that are coming out after the voting took place and I know that my colleagues in the Department of Political Affairs are closely monitoring that, and once I have an update from them, I'd be very happy to let others hear about that, too.

Thank you very much. Have a good afternoon. Thank you very much.

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