

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.

****Migration**

The Secretary-General spoke at a major meeting on international migration and development this morning. Before beginning his remarks, the Secretary-General offered his deep condolences for the dozens of African migrants who have died in the Mediterranean after their ship sank. He noted that this incident emphasizes the importance of the dialogue on migration and that we should take this tragedy as another spur to action.

The Secretary-General said that migration deserves and requires our concerted attention and we must make migration work for the benefit of migrants and countries alike. He also said that we must do more to protect the human rights of all migrants and address the plight of stranded migrants, as well as of those caught in conflicts or natural disasters. His full remarks are available online and in my office.

****Refugees**

And the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, António Guterres, has also expressed his shock at the news of this boat tragedy off the Italian island of Lampedusa. Mr. Guterres expressed his dismay at the rising global phenomenon of migrants and people fleeing conflict or persecution and perishing at sea. The UN refugee agency (UNHCR) says that of the estimated 500 passengers on the boat, only 147 have been rescued so far. The boat, which had set sail from Libya, caught fire half a mile from the coast. The press release also says that today's incident was the second boat disaster this week off Italy's coast. And the full press release is available on the agency's website.

**** Syria**

The joint team from the United Nations and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) has made "encouraging initial progress", following the first working day of meetings with Syrian authorities. Documents handed over yesterday by the Syrian Government "look promising", according to team members, but further analysis, particularly of technical diagrams, will be necessary and some more questions remain to be answered.

The team hopes to begin on-site inspections and the initial disabling of equipment within the next week, but this depends on the outcome of the technical groups established with the participation of Syrian experts yesterday. These groups are working on three areas which are key to the mission's success: verification of the information handed over by the Syrian Government; the safety and security of the inspection teams; and practical arrangements for implementing the plan, under which Syria's chemical weapons material and equipment are to be eliminated by mid-2014.

****Security Council**

The 15 members of the Security Council will depart New York this afternoon on a trip to the Great Lakes region of Africa. The delegation will travel to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Uganda and Ethiopia. One of the aims of this visit is to reiterate the Security Council's support for the implementation of the commitments under the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region. On its way to Africa, the delegation will stop in Brussels, where it will meet with the Political and Security Committee of the European Union.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Security Council delegation will meet in Kinshasa with senior Government officials, including President Joseph Kabila. On Sunday, it will depart to Goma, in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. There, members of the delegation will meet civil society representatives and visit a camp for internally displaced people.

And then, they will travel to Kigali, Rwanda. And while in Kigali, the delegation will meet with President Paul Kagame. It will also visit the Gisozi Genocide Memorial site and a demobilization centre for ex-combatants.

Then, the delegation will travel to Entebbe, Uganda, where it will meet with President Yoweri Museveni.

The last leg of the visit to the Great Lakes region will be Addis Ababa, in Ethiopia. And, on Tuesday, 8 October, the Security Council delegation will meet with Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn and with the Peace and Security Council of the African Union. The delegation will return to New York on Wednesday, 9 October.

****Afghanistan**

The Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan said today that that he is encouraged that the attention of the international community — including the Security Council — remains focused on the country. Speaking to reporters in Kabul today, Ján Kubiš said that, in a meeting last month, Council members highly praised Afghanistan's progress in preparing for forthcoming elections. He said this has strengthened the resolve of the international community to continue with their long-term support for the country. The full transcript of his press conference is available on the website of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

****Press Conference**

And today, as I think you will already be aware, at 12:30 p.m., there will be a press conference by Ambassador John Ashe — of course, the President of the General Assembly. And he will be here to brief you on the key outcomes and milestones from the high-level week that has just passed.

So, please, questions? Yes?

****Questions and Answers**

Question: Sure, Martin; thanks. I want to ask you this about the Democratic Republic of the Congo. There is a... one... I had asked, I, I think may be yesterday or the day before, about these two escapees in the FARDC (Congolese Armed Forces), officers that were condemned to, sent to, sentenced to, for human rights violations, so I wanted to know if you may have gotten an answer on that. And also, there is a press release by the M23 (23 March Movement) where they are saying that flying over their positions, the positions assigned to them under the Kampala Accords are white helicopters, and that they've... with UN markings and had said that they have asked MONUSCO (United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo), MONUSCO says it is not their helicopters; and so, their press releases says they intend to shoot at helicopters next time they fly over. And I just wondered: what is, what does MONUSCO make of this? Are there, as what seemed to be taking place in the Golan Heights, another conflict, are there people impersonating UN personnel and or... or... or is there, what's the response of the UN to that?

Spokesperson: I'll check with the Mission, Matthew. And on the first part, I don't have anything on the earlier question you'd asked. When I get something, I will let you know. I don't have anything.

Question: And I just, I guess to put, put this one in the hopper, MSF (Médecins Sans Frontières) has put out a press release about... about... I mean, what sounds like really some pretty horrendous, uh, horrendous fighting in Misisi territory, where they said that 46 children were taken, were kidnapped, along with their teachers, after their school was burned down, so this seemed like a pretty extreme incident, and I wanted to know whether MONUSCO was aware of it and what steps are being taken to try to free these children.

Spokesperson: Again, I will check with the Mission to see if they have any information on that. Yes, Ivan?

Question: Do you have any... thank you; do you have any comments on attack on the Russian Embassy in Libya?

Spokesperson: Nothing specific. We are obviously aware of the reports, and the Secretary-General is also aware of the reports. And, as in any such incident where diplomatic premises come under attack, for whatever reason, this is obviously reprehensible and unacceptable. Diplomatic premises should be inviolable, and I think everybody is aware of that. If there is anything more formal to be said later, then I will let you know. But, that is certainly what I can say at this moment. Yes, please, Oleg?

Question: Thanks, Martin. What kind of documents did the Syrian authorities provide the chemical experts with?

Spokesperson: Well, varying documents, including, as I mentioned, technical diagrams. I don't think that you would expect me to get into too much of the detail, partly because I simply do not know, but also because the technical experts need to be able to do the technical work that they have been assigned to do in Damascus. And, obviously, they are needing to study everything that they are given very closely, and as we have also said, there is clearly good cooperation with the Syrian authorities at that expert level to try to understand the material that is being provided to the advance team of OPCW and the UN. All right, any other questions, please? Yes?

Question: Sure, I wanted to, I wanted to ask you about this interview of Angela Kane that is in *The New York Times*. She actually, a couple of things about it; she says that she, in hindsight, regrets not having simply gone to... to... to... to Khan al-Asal, but instead, having requested to go to other sites which led to these, these months' delay; so, one, I wanted to know this, the... whether the Secretary-General also has that analysis that that, that the delay may have actually played some role in the further use of chemical weapons.

And I also wanted to know whether this, me... do... the [Åke] Sellström team, in their most recent visit, just to be sure: did they, did they actually get out to Khan al-Asal and... and... and... and...

Spokesperson: I have already answered that, Matthew: no, they did not.

Question: Okay. Alright. So, why not? That's what, I'd only learned yesterday, I may, I might have missed your earlier answer, but why didn't they go where they were initially going to speci...

Spokesperson: I answered that, as well.

Question: Okay. Can you say why?

Spokesperson: Read the transcript.

Correspondent: It seems like we have [talkover]

Spokesperson: It's not a question of that, Matthew. I have already answered the question and I would refer you to what I have said already on this.

Question: So what about Ms. Kane [inaudible]?

Spokesperson: And, with regard to Ms. Kane's interview, I think that what she said speaks for itself; and I would encourage you, if you wish to know more about that, to speak with Ms. Kane's spokesperson in the Office for Disarmament Affairs on that particular topic. And, with regard to the other part of the question: the Secretary-General certainly believes that the work that was done by Dr. Sellström and his team in establishing the facts relating to the 21 August incident, that work was really crucial, and that the work is now being completed on the other allegations, including Khan al-Asal. And that work will be wrapped up in a report that is due to be delivered at the end of this month.

Question: And just one last thing on Ms. Kane, did, do, you were able, I wanted to ask you again about this, invi... this \$100 charge to hear her speak in Oct... later in the month. I... I... I went back in, your office had said when, when, when, when Mr. Bob Orr spoke at the Korean Society for \$10, that it was customary and okay...

Spokesperson: Well, hang on a minute, Matthew. Again, the way you phrase your question is implying that somehow Mr. Orr... [talkover] well, in which case phrase your question very carefully, so as not to give any impression that anybody received... Thank you.

Question: The attendance was charged for \$10, and this is now a \$100, and what I wanted to know is consistent with the Ethics Office ruling that you can charge for refreshment and hall rental, is the Global Security Institute pay, is, is this their actual cost of attendance, to rent a UN space and to provide food?

Spokesperson: Well, first of all, with regard to the cost question, that's something that you would need to address to that particular entity. The other part of this is that I can assure you that Ms. Kane intends to adhere strictly to the Ethics Office guidelines on this. And when I have something further to say on that, and what that actually means, in practice, I will let you know. But, I have spoken to Ms. Kane about this and I think I will be able to give you a little bit more information in the days to come. She certainly intends to stick very firmly within the ethics guidelines, as always.

Question: And just... I... I actually... no... no, absolutely, and I want to make it clear, I, I am actually asking about the event; I am not. I wasn't trying to imply that she was getting the money; the question is can an... an institution charge money to hear a UN institute, a UN speaker, that's what the question is.

Spokesperson: As I say, with regard to the costs, you need to speak to the organizers. With regard to the general rule, it is as we said before: that this is not the way that we would usually do it. So, I think I will have a more concrete answer for you in a couple of days' time, but not just at the moment. All right, thank you very much. Have a good afternoon. Thank you.

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