

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

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[UN press.un.org/en/2013/db130508.doc.htm](http://press.un.org/en/2013/db130508.doc.htm)

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.

**\*\* Syria**

Lakhdar Brahimi, the Joint Special Representative for Syria, has warmly welcomed the statements made on Tuesday in Moscow by Russia's Foreign Minister and the US Secretary of State about Syria. He said that this is the first hopeful news concerning that unhappy country in a very long time.

Mr. Brahimi said that the statements made in Moscow constitute a very significant first step forward, but are nevertheless only a first step. He once more called on all Security Council members to work together and with the Secretary-General to carry the process forward.

He added that all Syrians will occupy pride of place in the process that should be launched as early as possible. It is equally important that the entire region mobilizes in the support of the peace process.

**\*\* Democratic Republic of Congo**

The United Nations Joint Human Rights Office in the Democratic Republic of the Congo says that serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law were committed in November of last year during fighting between Government forces and rebels of the M23 (23 March Movement) in the Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The Office issued a report today, which details victim and witness accounts of mass rape, killings and arbitrary executions, and violations resulting from widespread looting. It noted that particularly systematic and violent abuse was committed by some parts of the

Congolese Armed Forces as they retreated from the towns of Goma and Sake in North Kivu Province and regrouped in and around the town of Minova in South Kivu.

The UN investigation documented 135 cases of sexual violence perpetrated by FARDC (Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo) individuals in and around the town of Minova as units retreated from the front lines. The victims included 33 girls aged between 6 and 17.

During the period of their occupation of Goma and Sake, M23 combatants also perpetrated serious violations of international humanitarian law and gross human rights violations. Rebel combatants of the M23 were responsible for at least 59 cases of sexual violence.

The High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, said that those responsible for such crimes must know that they will be prosecuted. She noted that recent efforts made by the authorities in Democratic Republic of the Congo to investigate these violations in North and South Kivu were an important step towards accountability but that much more needs to be done.

And the Secretary-General's Special Representative in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Roger Meece, added that the UN continues to offer its support to both the investigation and the Congolese armed forces. However, he stressed that for this support to be continued, the investigation should be pursued in an independent and credible fashion, and justice should be delivered to the victims.

There's a full press release available online.

**\*\*Secretary-General Statement on Democratic Republic of Congo**

Last night, we issued a statement in which the Secretary-General said he was appalled by the attack on a United Nations Mission military convoy by unidentified assailants in South Kivu, in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. He condemned in the strongest terms the killing of a Pakistani peacekeeper in this attack.

The Secretary-General recalled that the killing of peacekeepers is a war crime.

The Secretary-General has offered his sincerest condolences and sympathy to the family of the victim, and to the Government of Pakistan.

He called on the Government of the Democratic Republic of Congo to bring the perpetrators of this crime to justice. And the Mission has launched an investigation into the attack.

### \*\*Security Council

The Security Council received a briefing this morning from Fatou Bensouda, the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court. She discussed the work her Office was doing concerning the situation in Libya and the court proceedings already taking place there.

The Security Council members are also discussing the Democratic Republic of the Congo in consultations. This afternoon, the Council will hold consultations on resolution 1559 (2004), concerning Lebanon.

### \*\* Somalia

The United Nations and the Government of Somalia signed a joint communiqué yesterday in London on the prevention of sexual violence.

The Deputy Secretary-General, who signed the agreement on behalf of the United Nations, said that conflict-related sexual violence must be addressed as part of Somalia's peacebuilding and State-building process.

The Secretary-General's Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict has welcomed the new agreement, which lists commitments, including ensuring the protection of survivors, witnesses and journalists who report on sexual violence.

The full joint communiqué is available online.

### \*\*Human Security

The Secretary-General will speak at an event on human security this afternoon. In his remarks, he is expected to say that he welcomes growing calls by citizens around the world for justice, dignity and true democracy. He is also expected to say that the human

security approach can help frame efforts to address interlinked global problems that need comprehensive solutions.

**\*\*Noon Briefing Guest Tomorrow**

And tomorrow, I will be joined by the Deputy Secretary-General, who will be here to brief you on the Somalia Conference, which he recently attended in London, as well as on his recent visit to Thailand and Singapore.

Questions, please. Tala, and then Benny?

**\*\*Questions and Answers**

Question: Martin, the attack on the Pakistani peacekeeper in South Kivu, is there any indication that that may be related to the beefing up of the intervention brigade in the region? Is there going to be an investigation; are you going to give us any update on who it actually was?

Spokesperson: As I mentioned, the mission has immediately launched an investigation into the attacks. I have no more than that at this point. What the statement also said was that these were unidentified assailants in South Kivu. So, obviously, that's being looked into. I can't prejudge what the outcome of that investigation would be. Thank you for the question. Yes, Benny?

Question: On Al Jamla, first of all, the, can you confirm that the UN has decided to leave that position that it may [inaudible] were those Filipinos leaving from?

Spokesperson: You said first of all; is there another question?

Correspondent: Yes. There is a follow-up on that on the situation on that position, which I get reports from the ground that the group, the kidnappers whatever you want to call them, took over the position and looted it and so on and so forth.

Spokesperson: Well, with regard to Position 86; in light of the evolving security situation, peacekeepers from that position have been relocated.

But, just to stress, that the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) continues to do its utmost to ensure the implementation of its mandate while mitigating risk to its personnel.

And also, I would advise you that the Force is constantly reviewing and adjusting its security arrangements to address the dynamic and rapidly evolving situation in its area of operations.

The four peacekeepers are still being detained, we believe in the vicinity of Jamlah. And the Observer Force has had indications that the four peacekeepers have not been harmed. And efforts are still under way to secure their release.

So, that's what I have for you at this point.

Question: What about the report on, on seizing the, the Position 86, did you say, or 84?

Spokesperson: 86.

Correspondent: 86...

Spokesperson: 86.

Question: ...uh, by the rebels and looting it and taking stuff from it; is that a problem for the UN?

Spokesperson: I don't have any details on that at the moment.

Question: And one follow-up: Apparently, there is some questioning about the idea of, to put it bluntly, deserting a post like that, because, you know, that, that would be a signal for other people to intimidate the UN and, and the UN would, uh, you know, leave any time that they are intimidated. Is, uh, how do you, what do you think of that?

Spokesperson: I think that's a disgrace; I think it's a disgraceful thing to suggest, because I have just told you that this is a dynamic and rapidly evolving situation in the area of operations. Everybody fully understands that they are operating in an extremely dangerous and unusual environment. They have a mandate that stretches back to the 1970s and they have been carrying out that mandate faithfully since that time. And they

work in extremely difficult circumstances. Of course, if the security situation is such that they need to be relocated, they will be relocated. And then, when the situation allows, they will return. And that's how they are operating. Talal, I am coming to Ivan and then I will be back with you.

Correspondent: Thank you.

Spokesperson: Yes.

Correspondent: I have, I have...

Spokesperson: Wait, I said I would be back with you. You had a question, I think, yes?

Question: [inaudible] the statement of Mr. Brahimi, but what does the Secretary-General think about the proposal of Russia and the United States to hold the press conference? And does he have any details of this, what kind of conference; who will participate, where, when?

Spokesperson: On the first part of the question, the Secretary-General welcomes the statements made by the US and Russia yesterday, and he shares Mr. Brahimi's assessment. I think it is a little too early to be speaking about the precise details, but obviously, there is a keen focus on this now. We all understand that time is of the essence. After all, the Secretary-General and Mr. Brahimi and others have been calling for this kind of peace process to begin as soon as possible. And they have been doing that for a long time. It's, this is, as Mr. Brahimi said, it's an important first step. The Secretary-General shares that assessment. Yes, Talal?

Question: Just one follow-up before Al Jamla, is this a Geneva II that has been talked about; that the Russians and the Americans have announced?

Spokesperson: Look, as I have said, this is early days. Mr. Brahimi has said that it constitutes a very significant first step forward, and it is, nevertheless, only a first step. And that the Security Council members need to work amongst themselves and with the Secretary-General to move this forward. So, think it is still early days to figure out exactly what it is and how it will unfold.

Question: On the agenda, please, I have three points. Is the Position 86 the only position that has been vacated? There are reports of two positions being vacated by the United Nations; can you confirm that? Secondly, I am not sure about this, but has the United Nations confirmed that India has withdrawn its troops from UNDOF? And thirdly, the Philippines today, can you confirm that the Philippines today called upon the Security Council of the United Nations to safeguard their four troops and declaring their intentions to withdraw their forces also from UNDOF?

Spokesperson: On the last, you'd have to check with the Security Council. On the... on India — that's on the Philippines...

Question: No, but their intentions to withdraw their forces from the peacekeeping operation; Philippines, have they informed the UN?

Spokesperson: We've heard nothing to that effect. And likewise, on India. If there are any updates, then I will let you know. But, we have not heard anything to that effect at this point.

[The Spokesperson later said that neither the Philippines nor India have indicated their intention to pull out.]

Correspondent: Okay.

Spokesperson: And on the first part, as I said, this is a very fluid, dynamic set of security circumstances in that area of operation. I don't have precise details on where different parts of that UNDOF force are located right now. So, I...

Question: As far as you can say, it is only one position that they vacated?

Spokesperson: That's not what I said; I said I don't have the details right now. If I get some more details that I can provide to you, then I certainly will do that, okay. Yes, Mr. Abbadi?

Question: Thank you, Martin. In addition to the happy developments regarding Syria that Ambassador Brahimi welcomed, as you indicated, there is another happy development in the region; that is the agreement between Turkey and the PKK [Kurdistan Workers' Party]. Does the Secretary-General welcome this development?

Spokesperson: I don't have anything specific on that at the moment, Mr. Abbadi. But, if that changes, I will let you know. And then, Erol, I am coming to you next, Erol.

Question: Me?

Spokesperson: Yes. That's your name, I think, Erol? Yes?

Question: [laughter] Thank you, indeed, thanks. Martin, I just wanted to check technical sort of question. What is the dress rule, if there is any, for the United Nations? Can, for example, anybody who is participating at the press conference or any conferences wear the T-shirt with any kind of label? And who decides and how it reads when that label becomes offensive or sort of that?

Spokesperson: I really don't know the answer to that, Erol. I will have to check.

Correspondent: Please.

Spokesperson: I think Talal must have the wrong T-shirt on; he is leaving!

Correspondent: [laughter]

Spokesperson: Yes, Matthew?

Question: Sure, I want to ask you about what you read out about, about the rapes in Minova. Now that the number is up to 135, it, is it, one, is it still the fact that only two people have been arrested for rape? Does the UN, what, what does the UN think about that? And also, will you confirm here that the two battalions involved were the 41<sup>st</sup> and 391<sup>st</sup>? Um, and that the forty-first, eh, eh, can you respond to, to reports that the forty-first is either intertwined with or involves demobilized soldiers of the FDLR militia?

Spokesperson: I can confirm that the name, the numbers of those battalions; so, the 41<sup>st</sup> and 391<sup>st</sup> battalions — that I can confirm.

And as for the numbers, I would point out that two of the 11 soldiers who were detained have been arrested. But, please bear in mind, this is in the Congolese judicial system. So, you would need to check with them whether there have been other arrests.



What you will also be aware of I think is that 12 senior officers were suspended in relation to the Minova incidents while the investigations continue — and that's obviously a positive development.

And as I said a little bit earlier, we — the United Nations and the Mission in particular — continue to support the judicial system and also is continuing to seek the completion of investigations so that those responsible for human rights violations can be brought to justice.

Question: Sure, I guess the idea is that if, if the threat was made to cut off support to these two battalions and now that threat is being, has been either removed or suspended, is two, I mean, you are not going to pick a number, but I guess what I am, you were saying, ask the Congolese, but isn't the UN itself going to be looking to see whether a proportionate number of people are, are prosecuted for 135 rapes? So, like, probably two is not enough. What...?

Spokesperson: As I said, the Mission continues to follow this extremely closely and is working with the judicial authorities certainly, to encourage them to continue with this investigation, as I have already spelt out. In addition to arrests, there have also been some internal disciplinary measures, as we understand it. And I have just mentioned that includes the suspension of their commanding officers and the deputy commanding officers of the two battalions suspected of involvement. And those officers are being put at the disposal of the military prosecutor as part of that investigation.

So, with all that in mind, and in keeping with the due diligence policy, that's why the Mission, MONUSCO, did not suspend its support. But, as I have just said to you, the Mission is closely monitoring the judicial process.

Question: When you say it is online, if you, if you don't mind, I went to the MONUSCO website and I didn't see it, I mean, just before coming here, I didn't see any press release there. One, is the full report that is described going to be made public and two, where is that, where, where, where is it online?

Spokesperson: Let me check for you, Matthew. Yes, Hank.

[The Spokesperson later provided the link to the report:

[http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/ZR/UNJHROMay2013\\_en.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/ZR/UNJHROMay2013_en.pdf).]

Question: Good day, thank you, Martin. On Al Jamla, if I may; 24 hours ago, in making note, that's what you said about the fluidity of the situation, the SG statement called those responsible armed elements. And in the time since, Syrian opposition forces have taken responsibility for this kidnapping, and they were the same ones that committed a similar kidnapping in a similar area two months ago in March. I wonder if the SG is willing to place the blame where it belongs, because it is becoming a troublesome pattern.

Spokesperson: We already did yesterday; we already, already did yesterday. We were able to confirm that the group that has taken responsibility calls itself the Brigades of Yarmuk. And this is the same group that was responsible for the last incident of this nature. So, we did say that yesterday. Other questions, please? Yes, Matthew?

Question: Can I ask you, I, I, I am, I am still, this, the, the Abyei incident, I wanted to ask something. I mean, there are some questions pending, and I guess if there is ever an answer, maybe it will be provided, but I wanted to ask a separate question, it's, I've, I have spoken to people who say that what happened is that there was four, a, a nearly four-hour standoff and that, that UNISFA [United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei] troops more of them arrived and surrounded the Misseriya who were in turn surrounding the convoy. So, what the question is, is what happened with the Misseriya if, if the, the Sudanese side said several were killed and many were injured; were any of them taken hostage, were any of them questioned, does the, what did UNISFA did with the Misseriya that they had surrounded as they surrounded the convoy; what was the outcome other than that, you know, the, the tragedy, the death of the peacekeepers and of the Paramount Chief, what was the outcome of this incident, and did UNISFA question anybody?

Spokesperson: Well, I think we did say at the time that in addition, two Ethiopian peacekeepers were seriously wounded, and one of the assailants was wounded also. And that all three were treated, taken for treatment, and subsequently, as I understand it, that wounded assailant was handed over to the authorities. I don't have any further details. I think I have already said that we don't have any details on casualties beyond this one amongst the Misseriya assailants. If we have anything further, then, obviously, I will update you. I don't have anything else at the moment, Matthew.

Question: Did you expect that, I guess; do you expect there to be some kind of report? And I say it because I have spoken to the South Sudan Mission here and they have some, some concerns whether there were, you know, without disrespecting, and UNISFA would happen, but whether there were enough people, and basically how the Misseriya knew of this travel. So, there is some, I am just wondering whether DPKO [Department of Peacekeeping Operations] is going to end up either at a stakeout or in some other forum saying here is what we believe happened in this incident.

Spokesperson: I am sure that as with any incident of this nature, it is being investigated and there will be some kind of report. Whether that is made public or not, I cannot say at this stage. But, I am sure that my colleagues in Peacekeeping Operations will be able to provide some details once they have that in hand. I don't have that to hand right now. Any other questions? A tentative hand; yes, Mr. Abbadi?

Question: Thank you, Martin. I know that you said it is too early to give any details regarding the process on Syria that Ambassador Brahimi welcomed, but there are indications that he will take the form of an international conference. I wanted to ask if so far there is any country that offered to host such a meeting?

Spokesperson: Not to my knowledge. Not to my knowledge. Yes?

Question: I want to ask one very quick question, and then one, hopefully that's a little bit lighter, but does, there is an Arab Group letter — I just want to make sure that you, that, to confirm that the Secretary-General received it. It seemed to have been, either yesterday or today, have been put in about the Israel, uh, strikes on Syria, has it been received and does the Secretary-General have any response to it?

Spokesperson: I'll check on that. All kinds of correspondence is received, and I don't necessarily get sight of it immediately. So, let me check.

[The Spokesperson later confirmed that the Secretary-General has received a letter from the Arab Group concerning Israeli overflights over Lebanon. That letter will be circulated as a Security Council document.]

Question: Here is, hopefully, the lighter one. I wanted to ask you, I was hoping to ask it yesterday, but it, it has to do with this internship at the UN, which I am aware of is not an..., a UN internship. But, since, you know, I, your, your last answer was that you know the text of it was amended, and I, I looked at it, and it's, or, what I really want to ask you about is I saw, since you made, said that, Maher Nasser of DPI [Department of Public Information] in a, in a, a webcast event pulled out the amended text and said this is inappropriate; this hurts the UN and it is possible that we won't allow the person who, the winner, it's currently at \$26,000 bidder to come in because we control that process. So, I wanted to know, can you, I guess get it, I, I don't know, if that is, is that the official UN position that the ad may, you know, remains inappropriate and hurtful to the UN or is there some, I don't, you know, may be you, it seems like there might be a split between what OLA [Office of Legal Affairs] finds acceptable and what DPI finds acceptable, or may be I am, may be I am wrong on that, but how can you square what was said here and what Mr. Nasser said?

Spokesperson: I think it is not appropriate to always to try to find a split. The two comments or the two sets of thinking that you have referred to are not mutually incompatible. I have also simply said, Matthew, that this is, it is not a UN internship, but that's the point that my colleague Maher Nasser was making. And I would also simply encourage you to speak to those who have placed this advert; and that's probably the best avenue to approach. And may be you have already done that, but that's...

Correspondent: The RFK Centre and has, has not responded. That's one of the reasons I keep coming back. And they are, they are, I believe, accredited here as is the one that would, the internship would be with.

Spokesperson: As I say, I think that is a good line of inquiry to continue to try to speak to those who have placed the advert for what we have repeatedly said is not a UN internship, okay. Any other questions?

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

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