

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

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Spokesperson's Noon Briefing

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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.

****Secretary-General's Remarks**

This morning, the Secretary-General spoke at a meeting on Financing for Development, where he encouraged all countries to fulfil their pledges and meet their development assistance targets. He said for many developing countries and the most vulnerable, predictable levels of development assistance remain critical. The Secretary-General also emphasized the private sector's vital role in financing and investing for a more sustainable and prosperous world. He said we must put sustainability at the core of the Financing for Development process.

And his full remarks are available online and in my office.

****Secretary-General's Travel**

As I announced last Friday, the Secretary-General will leave New York later today for Hungary, where he will participate in the Budapest Water Summit. The Summit is organized by the Hungarian Government in cooperation with the UN System and the World Water Council, and it's one of the major events this year concerning water and sanitation. We will distribute the Secretary-General's remarks to the Summit, as well as details on his meetings with the President, Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Hungary.

And then on Thursday, as we mentioned, the Secretary-General will travel to Brunei Darussalam, where he will take part in a summit of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the United Nations.

****Security Council**

The 15 members of the Security Council are in Kampala, Uganda, today, as part of their visit to the Great Lakes region of Africa. And about now, they are meeting President Yoweri [Kaguta] Museveni.

Earlier today, the delegation of the Security Council was in Rwanda, where they met senior Rwandan Government officials, including President Paul Kagame, in Kigali. The Council members also visited a demobilization centre for ex-combatants and the Gisozi Genocide Memorial Site.

Over the weekend, the delegation was in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. On Saturday, while in Kinshasa, the delegation met with senior Government officials, including President Joseph Kabila. On Sunday, the delegation travelled to Goma, in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. They also met civil society representatives, with whom they discussed the topics of sexual violence in conflict and child protection. And they visited a camp for internally displaced people, too.

The Security Council delegation will arrive later today in Addis Ababa, and that will be the last leg of the visit to the Great Lakes region.

**** Central African Republic**

The Secretary-General said in a statement yesterday that he is very concerned about the prevailing situation in the Central African Republic, which remains volatile, unpredictable and lawless.

He is particularly worried about the increasing number of targeted attacks and retaliations against Muslims and Christians, including the most recent incidents on the Bossangoa-Bossembele axis. He strongly condemns these attacks, which have the potential to further escalate the crisis in the country.

The Secretary-General is calling on all parties, including ex-Séléka combatants and new self-defence groups, to refrain from acts of violence against civilians and to respect human rights. And he reminds national authorities of their responsibility to bring to justice perpetrators of these massacres and protect all Central Africans from abuses.

**** Iraq**

In the aftermath of yet another series of bloody attacks, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Iraq, Nickolay Mladenov, called on political, religious and civil leaders in the country to work together with the security forces and take joint

action to halt the accelerated surge in violence and bloodshed. He said that it is their responsibility to ensure pilgrims can practise their religious duties, that schoolchildren can attend their classes, that journalists can exercise their professional duties and that ordinary citizens can live a normal life, in an environment free of fear and violence.

**** Syria**

The process of destroying Syria's chemical weapons programme began yesterday. Under the supervision of experts from the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, supported by the United Nations, Syrian personnel used cutting torches and angle grinders to destroy or disable a range of items, and these included missile warheads, aerial bombs and mixing and filling equipment. And the process will continue in the coming days.

That's what I have. Questions, please. Yes? And then Pamela, yes, please?

****Questions and Answers**

Question: Thank you, Martin. On this Syrian chemical arsenal destruction, how the Secretary-General is satisfied with the dynamics of how it is going on the ground? And is he concerned that Syrian arsenal will be put under control, but not those if they are in possession of the rebels, also?

Spokesperson: Well, one of the key reasons for trying to have a full itinerary, a full inventory of the chemical weapons arsenal and the sites is to be able to lock them down as soon as possible. That's part of the mission and the mandate that the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons will have with the support of the United Nations. The Secretary-General is obviously aware of the work that has been carried out so far, and as I have said, already the United Nations and the OPCW, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, are satisfied with the cooperation that they have received so far, and are continuing to receive. And I think that the Secretary-General would share that assessment, too.

Of course, these weapons are ghastly, and they need to be eliminated as swiftly as possible. That's why there is an extremely tight deadline in the Executive Council of the [Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons] and the Security Council here at the United Nations in their respective decisions. That's why this work has to be carried out very quickly and in a rigorous fashion. Yes?

Question: Thank you, Martin. The... you have expressed optimism about the November, mid-November date on the Geneva II conference last week, and the Russians had exp... the Foreign Minister had expressed some doubt. Now we hear Lakhdar Brahimi express some doubt on the weekend about that, the ability. Do you, do you know what is slowing it down? The... uh, both the Government and uh, the [Syrian National Coalition] say they have a delegation ready, um, uh, to, that, that might be slowing it down, according to at least this, the Joint Representative Brahimi? And also, do you know what time, if today, the Secretary-General's report on chemical weapons will be released? Thank you.

Spokesperson: Last one first; during the course of the day, it will be given to the Security Council. But, I can't say exactly when at this point. I beg your pardon?

Question: Sorry, here in New York?

Spokesperson: Yes. With regard to the dates for the international conference on Syria in Geneva, the Secretary-General continues to believe that this can take place in mid-November, and it is his firm determination to seek to make that happen. Everybody knows that it is not easy, that it is going to be difficult to bring the sides to the table. And I think that Mr. Brahimi is expressing his concerns in that regard, but the intention is very clear that we want to push for mid-November, as the Secretary-General mentioned in the Security Council a couple of weeks back now. And that work continues to try to marshal the forces and to bring an opposition, a single opposition delegation to the table, and of course, a Government delegation. That's the aim.

Question: And if you wouldn't mind a follow-up: Just, have you gotten any sense from Mr. Brahimi of what, where, where his concerns are in terms of the delay?

Spokesperson: Look, this has been going on for an extremely long time. There are very bitter rivalries and divisions between the opposition and the authorities in Syria. So, therefore, it is obvious that it is not going to be easy to make it happen. But, he is determined to work hard to make it happen. And that's certainly the Secretary-General's intention, and he is, that is why he is saying that we are aiming for a conference in mid-November. And that remains his determination. And... say?

Correspondent: I said thank you.

Spokesperson: Okay. Yes, Nizar? And then Tim?

Question: A follow-up on that? On what does Mr. Brahimi bet in this case, I mean, that it could happen? Especially that many of the opposition fighters have defected and joined Al-Nusra and the Iraq and Syria, Islamic States... on, on which countries on which sides can he bet that he will wield some influence to bring these people to the conference?

Spokesperson: Well, I think the Secretary-General has said so himself, and Mr. Brahimi too, that all those countries or parties that have an influence on the different parties within Syria need to exercise that influence to ensure that we can have a single opposition delegation and the Government delegation at such a conference, which is extremely necessary and has been for many, many months, of course. And when the Secretary-General met with the members of the... the permanent members of the Security Council during the general debate, they agreed that it was necessary to make sure that the Syrian participants would come to the conference and negotiate in good faith. And so, that's why Mr. Brahimi has, is launching and has been working on the preparations that are necessary to make this conference happen.

Question: Would that include those people who have allegiance to [Ayman] al-Zawahiri, for example, like the Jabhat al-Nusra and...?

Spokesperson: Well, Nizar, as I say, Mr. Brahimi has his work cut out, and he is liaising with the key parties in this regard,. But, I don't have anything specific on that. I'm coming... Nizar, I am coming to Tim...

Question: On the chemical, if I can do something...?

Spokesperson: Yes, and then I am coming to Tim.

Question: As for the areas which are controlled by the opposition, and they are, obviously, not all the inventory of the Syrian chemical weapons, is just the area of the Government forces, so what is happening on that side? How are they going to have an inventory and how are they going to destroy it?

Spokesperson: We are not giving details on locations of where the team will be going to observe the destruction work that will need to go on with regard to the plants that there are for manufacturing the chemical weapons, for putting them

together. So, we are not going to be giving details on that, Nizar. Timothy?

Question: Thank you, Martin. How many bombs and warheads can the Syrian personnel blow-torch in one day? And do you think that 1 November deadline for the protection of facilities will be met, I mean, given the optimism and the good cooperation that's been given?

Spokesperson: I don't have any specific details on that. We'd have to see what we could get from the team in Damascus on that particular topic, Tim. It is a very tight deadline, but I can tell you that the team there from the [Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons] are experts in this field, and they are monitoring this extremely closely, as we have said. And just to underscore the point that you also made yourself: that it is the Syrian personnel who are actually wielding blow-torches and angle grinders and so on. They are the ones who do the work, and that work is verified and monitored by the experts from the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. Matthew, and then I am coming to Edie, okay?

Question: Sure, thanks. I have some questions about the Great Lakes trip, but I wanted to ask a couple of things first. One is, is there any UN or the Secretary-General comment on the, these [United States] raids in, in both Libya and Somalia, particularly because Ali Zeidan of Libya has said, called it a kidnapping and basically complained that it violates international law. Does the UN have any view on that?

Spokesperson: Not at this point. We have obviously seen the reports, but I don't have any independent information on that, Matthew. [He later said that we have seen the news reports about [United States] counter-terrorism actions over the weekend in both Libya and Somalia. We do not have direct information about them. Where the respective Governments may be seeking clarification, it is for the [United States] authorities to provide this, given the sensitivity of such matters for any sovereign State.]

Question: And I wanted to ask you about this shell, this shelling in Gao, the, the, it seems like it is reported that, that bombs are falling on, on, on the city, the two houses have been hit, so I wonder given its protection of civilians mandate, what MINUSMA [United Nations Support Mission in Mali], what its response to the shelling of the city is.

Spokesperson: Well, the UN Mission in Mali, MINUSMA, confirms that several rockets were fired this morning in Gao. And the Mission is working in Gao with the Malians authorities and Operation Serval to gain more information on these events. That's what I have at the moment. Yes, Edie?

Question: Martin, just a follow-up on the Syria report. Several Council diplomats seem to be under the impression tat the report on Syria expected today was going to be made public after it was given to the Security Council. Is that true?

Spokesperson: Made public by whom?

Correspondent: By your office... that it was going to be...

Spokesperson: That's not my understanding; I will need to check, okay?

Correspondent: Thank you.

Spokesperson: Yes, Erol?

Question: Martin, just to ask you on Egypt; does the Secretary-General have any comments on the, probably I missed that, sorry, on the recent developments in Egypt?

Spokesperson: Well, even before the weekend events, the Secretary-General issued a statement in which he outlined his concerns about what might happen over the weekend. Of course, those concerns have been realized, and he, of course, is appalled at the level of violence. And, of course, it is likely that we will have something a little bit later further to say on this matter. But, the key point here is that the Secretary-General had said that there needs to be the right for people to demonstrate; there needs to be freedom of assembly; there needs to be freedom of expression. And the authorities need to guarantee that right.

But, by the same token, all involved need to refrain from violence. We obviously did not see that at the weekend. Many people died, according to officials figures, and other people were hurt in the clashes. Obviously, the Secretary-General would continue to call for maximum restraint here. This is not something that obviously one would expect to see. I think you had another question. Matthew? And then, Nizar; then last question to Nizar, okay?

[He later issued the following statement: The Secretary-General strongly condemns the violence yesterday in Egypt, where more than 50 people were killed in clashes. He conveys his condolences to the families of those killed and his wishes for a full and speedy recovery of those injured. As he had stated ahead of the announced demonstrations, the Secretary-General once again stresses the importance of peaceful protest, respect for freedom of assembly and commitment to non-violence. The Secretary-General continues to underscore the need for political inclusion, full respect for human rights, including of those detained in prison, and the rule of law as the basis for a peaceful, democratic transition in Egypt. These are the same principles to which the Egyptian authorities themselves have committed in the road map they have set forth. The Secretary-General also strongly condemns today's attacks against military personnel and facilities, which reportedly killed eight persons and injured many more.]

Question: Okay, I wanted to ask you about, about on the trip, and this is, I understand the limitations of what you'd said on Friday, but I wanted to ask you, there was, it seems to have been a briefing by a MONUSCO (United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo) staffer, Dee Brillenburg Wurth, in which she says, she is quoted as saying that the [Democratic Republic of the Congo], "doesn't recruit children, child soldiers any more." This is contrary to the Group of Experts report, which says in at least two paragraphs that they do. So, I am wondering just fac... one, is it possible given that this was, you know, the, the, the, it was a trip, this may have been a press conference, I am not sure in which context this was said, it was said two reporters, is it possible to get a transcript or some audio file of, of what was said and what would you say to a seeming total disparity between what MONUSCO told uh, uh, uh, reporters, if not the Council, and what UN reports actually say about the recruitment of child soldiers by [the Democratic Republic of the Congo]?

Spokesperson: Well, I mean, I wouldn't say anything at this point until I check into it myself, Matthew.

Question: Okay, and one, if you don't mind, one more on the trip, I just, since there is still, it's, it's coming to a close, I wanted to just get a kind-of, a, a, a, an answer from you from the Secretariat side. It seems, you know, on one hand in Syria you are calling for the pro... [Bashar al-]Assad should meet with any and all opposition, that this is the way to have a meeting. And, meanwhile the, the Council, with the, the Secretariat and MONUSCO accompaniment, attend a national dialogue in Kinshasa which the le... the le... le... you know, the legal-elected opposition chose to boycott, and therefore, kind of legitimated or, or gave its blessing to an extremely limited dialogue. And so, how would you, how would you put the, square these two

together? How can the UN, on the one hand, be calling for a broad dialogue in Syria, and in, in the Congo be, be, be giving its blessing to an extremely narrow one boycotted by the opposition?

Spokesperson: Well, as you will be aware, there is a framework for peace and reconciliation in the Great Lakes region, and specifically in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, that is a broad-based framework that includes the need for national reconciliation. And the Secretary-General's Special Envoy on this, Mary Robinson, has been working very closely to ensure that that framework in its entirety is properly implemented. And, I think it is in that context that the Security Council members were there. So, I think you'd have to ask the Council members themselves why they went to certain events. That is not for me to speak on their behalf, but simply to put the bigger picture there, that there is an overall framework, and that it was in that context that they were visiting the region. Nizar, this will be last question, okay?

Question: Martin, what were, will, would an op... the operations that took place in Somalia and Libya recently influence the operations of the United Nations in both countries? Also, do you have any readout about the meeting between the Secretary-General today and the Israeli Defence Minister?

Spokesperson: Well, on the second question, Nizar, that meeting is taking place around now. So, I think it would be almost magic for one to appear at this point. But, I hear your interest, and we'll see what we can do. And with regard to the first question, we wouldn't comment on security matters for our missions, wherever they are. And I have already answered — Matthew asked the question — I already answered that we don't have any independent information on, in the case of Libya, and indeed that applies also to Somalia.

Okay, thanks very much. Have a good afternoon, thank you.

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