

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 Eduardo del Buey, Deputy Spokesperson for the Secretary-General.

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the briefing.

****Secretary-General's Update**

Before I begin, we have Martin Nesirky online who will be giving us a short briefing as to the Secretary-General's travels to date. Martin, can you hear us?

Spokesperson: I certainly can, Eduardo. Thanks very much for having me at the start of the briefing here.

Deputy Spokesperson: My pleasure. What have you got to say to us?

Spokesperson: Well, first of all, I just thought I give you a quick overview of what the Secretary-General has been doing here today in the United Arab Emirates, and then I will very quickly go over the Framework that was signed in Addis Ababa on Sunday.

So first of all, just very briefly on the Secretary-General's activities today in the United Arab Emirates, we are now in Abu Dhabi, and earlier in the day we were in Dubai. In Dubai, the Secretary-General had meetings with the Vice-President, who is also the Prime Minister. He had a meeting with Princess Haya bint al-Hussein, who as I am sure you know, is a Messenger of Peace for the United Nations. He also met the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs. And then, when he arrived in Abu Dhabi, the Secretary-General had a meeting with Dr. Sultan Ahmed al Jaber, who is the CEO of Masdar; this is a large commercial venture which is looking at clean energy, so green economy, if you like.

And along the way, the Secretary-General also visited the International Humanitarian City. This was something that was set up by Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashed al Maktoum, who is, as I mentioned, the Vice-President and Prime Minister, and Princess Haya is also heavily involved in this project. It is a complex that brings together UN and other humanitarian agencies. They have offices there and they are able to coordinate their logistical operations. In addition, they have an enormous warehouse complex, where, for example, the World Food Programme, UNHCR [Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees], refugee agency, have all sorts of supplies arriving and, of course, not sitting on the shelves terribly long, but being sent out where they are needed. And this was a very good opportunity for the Secretary-General to see the other end of the humanitarian and

relief efforts. Often, he is in refugee camps and other locations and can see this material and equipment being used, and here he was able to see how a very large warehouse system can be used to move supplies very efficiently, including for Syria and other parts of the region, for example, Jordan.

So then just to — going back to Sunday — there was also the signing of the Framework, a peace, security and cooperation framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region, and you will have seen that there was a statement from the Security Council, there has been a statement from the European Commission and others welcoming this. The Secretary-General feels that this is an extremely important development. He says it is a milestone, but he also recognizes that having the signatures on this document is the start. And what now needs to happen is for the commitments that have been signed up to, to be implemented. And that's now going to be the focus of his work.

The Secretary-General moves on to Vienna next, and then to Geneva. As you know, he will be back in New York over the weekend. Early next week, he will be briefing the Security Council on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and at that point, I am sure that he would be able to brief you in person himself. So that's it. I am happy to take a couple of questions, if there are any.

Deputy Spokesperson: Thank you, Martin. Nizar?

**Questions and Answers

Question: Martin, I wonder if the Secretary-General raised with the United Arab Emirates the issue of the balance outstanding with regard to their pledge to the refugee situation of Syria. Also, if the discussions touched on the prevalence of Al-Nusra in the conflict in Syria, and how both sides view that situation?

Spokesperson: Well, they spoke at length about Syria, both in the meeting with the Prime Minister and with the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, and indeed also with Princess Haya. There was a focus more on the humanitarian track, but there was also, obviously, a discussion about political aspects of this. I don't think that I would go further than that at this point. One aspect that is important to refer to, and that is that there is a broad understanding in these meetings that have taken place today that there can only be a political solution. There cannot be a military solution to this conflict in Syria, and everybody needs to be working in that direction.

Question: On the humanitarian side, the pledge of the United Arab Emirates, how much has been paid so far?

Spokesperson: Ah, yes, Nizar, I am sorry I didn't get to that bit. The Secretary-General has simply reiterated his desire to see that pledges and commitments made in Kuwait turn into real money really soon. Now, as you are aware, some of these pledges are being used bilaterally, and others are being used through multilateral channels. I am sure that the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is tracking this very carefully and diligently, and they will be able to give some more details on that. The Secretary-General's role here was simply to emphasize the general need for pledges to turn into cash.

Deputy Spokesperson: Matthew?

Question: Sure, hi, Martin. I... I wanted to ask you about something that took place in the [United Arab Emirates], I guess, just days before you guys got there, which was the... the... the barring of this professor, Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, from an [London School of Economics]-sponsored event about Bahrain. It's made a lot of news around the world that the conference was cancelled; [London School of Economics] said that academic freedom was... was violated by the [United Arab Emirates]. Is the Secretary-General aware of that, and... and... and what's his... what's his comment on... on the state of academic freedom in the [United Arab Emirates]?

Spokesperson: He is aware of that, and I would simply reiterate that the Secretary-General, in his meeting with the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, did discuss human rights, amongst other topics, and the Minister in turn briefed him on the Universal Periodic Review of the United Arab Emirates. But I haven't got any further details on that particular point.

Deputy Spokesperson: Sylviane?

Question: Hello, Martin. This is Sylviane speaking. On the Hizbullah fighters, they are intervening in the battles in Syria, and also there is a big tension, very high on... after the Syrian army kills four in Lebanon, there is... any... any comments on that from the Secretary-General?

Spokesperson: Well, the Secretary-General is obviously watching this extremely closely, and he has said for a long time that he is concerned about a potential for spillover from the Syrian crisis inside Syria to neighbouring countries. He is watching this very closely, he is concerned about it, and certainly, there was discussion today here in the United Arab Emirates generally about the violence and the potential for spillover.

Deputy Spokesperson: Any more questions? Hank?

Question: Good morning, Martin, thank you. Hank Flynn, Press TV. Maybe a little late to ask, but I wondered, is the Secretary-General reacting to last week's UN report that [United States] drone strikes rose sharply in Afghanistan last year? And also, what's the Secretary-General's reaction to confirmed [United States] plans to build a drone base in Nigeria?

Spokesperson: I haven't got any specific comment on that, Hank. You know the position of the Secretary-General on the use of unmanned aerial vehicles, namely that there is an entire body of international humanitarian and human rights law that applies in these kind of circumstances, and there are concerns, and the Secretary-General himself is concerned, about civilian casualties when such unmanned aerial vehicles are used, but I don't have any specific comment on the two points that you have mentioned there.

One aspect that I did want to come back to on Syria, if I may, the Secretary-General continues to believe that dialogue between the opposition and the Syrian Government is absolutely crucial, and he continues to encourage the offer that initially came from Mr. al-Khatib to stay in place, and for that, dialogue which represents a window of opportunity, to take place. Obviously, we have seen twists and turns on this topic, including today, and that is why I am saying that the Secretary-General remains convinced that dialogue is the right path, and he continues to encourage the proposal from Mr. al-Khatib and the response from the Syrian authorities that we have heard today from Moscow.

Deputy Spokesperson: Do you have time for three more questions?

Spokesperson: Please.

Deputy Spokesperson: Tim, then Nizar, then Matthew.

Question: Just to follow up on the dialogue question again, Martin, has the Secretary-General been in contact with the Syrian coalition to talk about their threat not to go to the international talks in Rome and other places this week? Which obviously is a blow to any chance of [inaudible].

Spokesperson: No, he has not, but that's precisely why I am saying that the Secretary-General continues to believe that dialogue is the right route and he continues to believe that that initial proposal by Mr. al-Khatib is the right way to go. And, of course, we have seen a reaction from the Syrian Foreign Minister during his visit to Moscow.

Deputy Spokesperson: Nizar?

Question: About a different topic, Martin, the tension in the West Bank is very high, especially after the killing of Mr. Jaradat, who was under... he was... he was... who died under... under investigation. I wonder how the United... the USG, sorry, how the Secretary-General sees the situation in the West Bank, and what should be done at this stage when everybody is talking about a new... a third uprising in the... in the territories?

Spokesperson: Well, the Secretary-General has been closely watching these developments. I believe that Eduardo may have more to say on this, if not now, then shortly. I would simply reiterate what the Secretary-General said in the statement that we issued last week. He's expressed his concerns about Palestinian prisoners in custody, and he has also spoken about the need for those who are detained to be charged and face trial or be promptly released. Now, it may be that Eduardo has something further on that, if not now, then potentially later. And I'll make this the last question please, from Matthew.

Deputy Spokesperson: Matthew?

Question: Sure, great. I... I want to go back to the... the... the Secretary-General's time in Addis Ababa. Did... did... I mean, Rwanda President Paul Kagame gave a speech there, as well, as... as... as obviously all the signers did? But, I am wondering, it just seemed... I didn't see a readout... did... did the Secretary-General seek to meet with President Kagame? He had some criticism of kind of outside political agendas that was part of his speech, but was it possible, did the Secretary-General think it would have been useful or... or did he not meet with Paul Kagame? What... what... what was the... the... what can you say about that?

Spokesperson: This is what I can say, Matthew, that the meeting that took place with President Kabila and the Vice-President of Uganda was originally also going to include President Kagame. However, that meeting was taking place right before the signing ceremony, and President Kagame was at that point just arriving in his aircraft and making his way to the signing ceremony. So, he could not be at that meeting. But, as you saw, all of those signatories were there, all the key players were there. And the Secretary-General will be briefing the Security Council early next week on this Framework, which the Council has welcomed, and on future developments in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Deputy Spokesperson: Thank you very much, Martin. Safe travels and we'll talk soon.

Spokesperson: Very good. Thanks. Bye-bye everyone, bye-bye.

Deputy Spokesperson: Bye-bye.

**** Security Council**

Okay, ladies and gentlemen, further to what Martin spoke about earlier on the Framework Agreement signed in Addis Ababa over the weekend, the Security Council issued a press statement yesterday evening in which it also welcomed the signing of the Agreement.

The Council called on the signatory States of the Framework to fully implement their commitments in good faith. It also voiced support for the swift designation of a United Nations Special Envoy to support, coordinate and assess national and regional efforts for the implementation of the Framework.

**** Palestinians**

Robert Serry, the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, is deeply saddened and concerned about the death in Israeli detention on 23 February of Arafat Jaradat, who was arrested on 18 February. He sends his condolences to the family of Mr. Jaradat.

The Special Coordinator takes note of the preliminary findings of the autopsy that was conducted on Mr. Jaradat's body, with the participation of Israeli and Palestinian experts. The United Nations expects the autopsy to be followed by an independent and transparent investigation into the circumstances of Mr. Jaradat's death, the results of which should be made public as soon as possible.

The Special Coordinator reaffirms the position expressed by the Secretary-General last week, that international human rights obligations towards all Palestinian detainees and prisoners in Israeli custody must be fully respected. The United Nations remains concerned about the deteriorating health of Palestinian detainees on hunger strike. We reiterate that those held in administrative detention without charge should be charged and face trial with judicial guarantees, in accordance with international standards, or else be promptly released.

**** Darfur**

The United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Sudan today expressed his profound concern about the safety of civilians in the town of El Sireaf in North Darfur.

Ali al-Za'tari said that the renewed fighting which erupted last week, resulting in the deaths of more than 50 people, has once again highlighted the vulnerability of civilians in the area. Fighting between two tribes in the area last month uprooted more than 100,000 people, according to the African Union-United Nations peacekeeping mission in Darfur, UNAMID.

Yesterday, the mission airlifted 37 wounded civilians for medical treatment. The mission has also transported medical and other supplies to those affected by the violence. Both Mr. al-Za'tari and the mission underscored the need for an end to the fighting.

****Human Rights**

Navi Pillay, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, opened the twenty-second session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva today. She warned that, despite progress, there are still far too many people with command responsibility who escape justice for serious crimes and gross human rights violations. She said that we must continue to nurture and strengthen the system designed to deal with such crimes and violations, and those who commit them.

Ms. Pillay noted that two important situations — Darfur in 2008 and Libya in 2011 — have been referred to the International Criminal Court. Yet, she added that the Security Council has so far failed with regard to Syria, despite the repeated reports of widespread or systematic crimes and violations by her Office, the International Commission of Inquiry on Syria, civil society organizations and others. Her full remarks are on the website of the Human Rights Office.

****Press Conference**

And the Operations Director of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, John Ging, will be the guest tomorrow. He will be here to brief on his recent visit to Mali.

I have time for a few questions. Sylviane?

****Questions and Answers**

Question: Do you know who would be briefing the Council tomorrow? Security Council on the Middle East?

Deputy Spokesperson: No, I'll have to find out for you.

Question: [inaudible]?

Deputy Spokesperson: I don't have that information with me, we'll find out for you and let you know.

Question: And something, another topic. When the new report on 1701 report could be released? It was... it has to be issued very soon, but you don't know? My question, do you know when?

Deputy Spokesperson: I don't have an exact date for that, no. We'll find out. Yeah. Carla?

Question: [inaudible] where and when Mr. Brahimi will be back here?

Deputy Spokesperson: No, we have no word on when he will be back. He continues to operate out of the region in his determination to try and find some solution to the Syrian problem.

Question: Does he feel there is any progress?

Deputy Spokesperson: Well, we'll have to find out from him when he does come to New York. Matthew?

Question: Sure. I wanted to ask again about the... the... the... the ruling last week on... about Haiti. Having co... there's been a lot, as you... I am sure you are aware, a lot of commentary, most... most of it critical about the ruling, but I just want to understand this, since I want to understand it better. It was said that the UN won't comment on... on... on... on its resolution of such claims, but the basis seems to be because it... because the claim involve public issues, it couldn't be resolved under this article 29. So I want... I mean, how do you square the two? Many people are saying it's kind of the UN having it both ways. And is it possible, as we heard on some... somewhat similar issues, to get some senior UN official to come and explain why this very high-profile case...?

Deputy Spokesperson: Matthew, as Martin said last week, we have provided you with the information we are going to provide and we are not making any further comments on this.

Question: Do you think it will undermine...? I mean, I... I... I... I've... I've... I've heard a lot of... I am sure you have, as well...

Deputy Spokesperson: Well, I think what we have to look at is the fact that the Secretary-General has embarked on a course of action to try and resolve the situation in Haiti and the Dominican Republic with a programme that calls for the international community to contribute funding and efforts to be able to eradicate cholera from Hispaniola.

Question: Is that viewed as some kind of settlement of the claim? That's what I am trying to understand, because it was said...

Deputy Spokesperson: This is the Secretary-General addressing a humanitarian situation that exists currently on the island of Hispaniola. One more question.

Question: Can I ask...?

Deputy Spokesperson: Well, I guess that's you. You are on a roll today.

Question: No, no, a controversy has arisen and... in... in connection with the... with the Human Rights Council's meeting that began this week, in which Sri Lanka has said that this film that's called *The Killing Fields*, that... by Channel 4 in the [United Kingdom], Martin had said that the... the Secretariat, if not the Secretary-General is aware of the content showing summary executions. They have said that... that... that the Government of Sri Lanka has said it shouldn't be screened in connection with the Human Rights Council, even as a side event... that... that Amnesty International should not be allowed to participate because it was going to sponsor the film. I guess I am wondering, as... as the pinnacle of the UN system, does the Secretary-General have any view for the screening of this type of film in connection with the Human Rights Council's meeting?

Deputy Spokesperson: Well, all I can tell you is, the Secretary-General has consistently underlined the critical importance of addressing accountability issues in Sri Lanka through a genuine and comprehensive national process and achieving national reconciliation. That is basically where we are at. The Human Rights Council has begun to focus on Sri Lanka, and the accountability issue is currently being dealt with by Member States, and that's where we'll leave it.

Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen. Have a good afternoon.

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