

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, everyone, and welcome to the briefing. It will be a shorter briefing than usual, because we have an event that will start at 12:20, so just a few items and then I am happy to take questions in the time that we have.

****Liberia**

The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Liberia, Karin Landgren, briefed the Security Council this morning on the situation in the country, which is celebrating 10 years of uninterrupted peace. In her remarks, Ms. Landgren said that Liberia should be proud of its achievements. She said those achievements remain fragile, however, with a sense of a unified nationhood still a work in progress, and small-scale outbreaks of violence still routine.

The Special Representative said that the United Nations stands with the Government, its partners, civil society and others in their shared dedication to prevent any return to the ways of the past. The full remarks are available in my office.

****Afghanistan**

A joint report prepared by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and Afghanistan's Ministry of Counter-Narcotics says that the overall production of cannabis in Afghanistan rose by 8 per cent last year, compared with 2011. At the same time, though, there was a 17 per cent decline in the total land area used for commercial cannabis cultivated in 2012. The report says that the main reason for the increase in production was better cannabis yields compared with the previous year. And the full report is available online at the UNODC website.

****Syria — Refugees**

Tomorrow, 107 highly vulnerable Syrian refugees are due to leave Lebanon under a temporary humanitarian admissions programme that was announced by Germany in March of this year. The group is headed for Hannover and is the first to be assisted by the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) in this process. Germany's humanitarian assistance programme

provides for up to 5,000 places for Syrian refugees, and is the biggest relocation programme in existence for the Syria crisis. UN refugee agency teams in the Syria region are preparing additional referrals for this programme.

****Myanmar**

The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said today that the first aid convoy since December 2011 to the town of Laiza in Myanmar's Kachin State had succeeded in delivering humanitarian aid to displaced communities in the Woi Chyai camp.

More than 4,000 people have received food, medicine and other aid from UN agencies and partner organizations. These supplies are supplementing the assistance delivered regularly by local organizations. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs says that there are 53,000 people in need in areas such as this which are not controlled by the Government. The UN and its humanitarian partners in Myanmar said that it is essential that today's convoy be the first of many to assist the displaced.

****Yemen**

Jamal Benomar, the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Yemen, took part in the National Dialogue Conference in the capital, Sana'a, today. Mr. Benomar praised the positive and constructive spirit of the meeting and stressed that the goal is to reach a consensus on the southern question in order to secure progress in the National Dialogue Conference and the political process.

****Darfur**

The joint African Union-United Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) reports that yesterday it recovered the remains of the second of four peacekeepers who were reported missing following floods late in August. As you will recall, on 25 August, six peacekeepers were swept away by powerful currents while escorting World Food Programme (WFP) trucks. A rescue team found two peacekeepers alive. The mission said that the search for the remaining two peacekeepers continues.

****Press Conferences**

Immediately following this briefing, as I said, at 12:20, there will be a press conference here on the launch of a report by the United Nations Development Group. The report is entitled, *One Million Voices: The World We Want*. And speakers will include the Secretary-General and Helen Clark, the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The Secretary-General will make remarks, but he will not be taking questions today.

And tomorrow, at 10:30 a.m., there will be a press conference by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), and that is to present new international migration statistics.

****Film Screening: *Planet Ocean***

And finally, correspondents are invited to a screening tomorrow sponsored by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and OMEGA. The documentary film *Planet Ocean*, directed by Yann Arthus-Bertrand with Michael Pitiot, aims to promote understanding of the importance of oceans in the ecosystem. The Secretary-General and others will make statements prior to the screening, which will take place, as I said, tomorrow at 5:20 in the afternoon in the Economic and Social Council chamber.

Questions, please? Mr. Abbadi?

****Questions and Answers**

Question: Thank you, Martin. What's the Special Joint Representative, Lakhdar Brahimi, saying about the efforts aiming at introducing a resolution in the Security Council on chemical weapons in Syria?

Spokesperson: Well, he is obviously following those developments. As the Secretary-General said yesterday, a bigger part of the picture is, of course, the need to convene an international conference to have a political solution to this crisis. So I think that he is watching this with interest and following the developments, as I understand it. Yes, Pamela?

Question: Thank you, Martin. Is your understanding that there will be a reference to the international conference in a resolution? Is the Secretary-General encouraging that?

Spokesperson: I am not familiar with precisely what is going to end up in the resolution. As you know, that is something that Member States will be discussing amongst themselves within the Security Council. So I think as a general proposition — and I am not talking about what should or should not be in a resolution — but as a general proposition, as I just said, the Secretary-General has made very clear that there needs to be a political solution. There does need to be that international conference in Geneva, but this is obviously something that is being worked on. And as we have also said, and the Secretary-General mentioned yesterday, both he and Mr. Brahimi are working very hard on that.

Question: And just to be clear, there is no further statement since yesterday about the French announcement of a proposal?

Spokesperson: What do you mean? From whom?

Correspondent: From the Secretary-General.

Spokesperson: No. Simply to say that we are obviously monitoring all of those developments as they take place. And clearly, things are moving rather quickly. Yes, please? Uh, no, just in front, please?

Correspondent: I'm sorry.

Spokesperson: I didn't recognize you.

Correspondent: [Laughter] I had my hair cut.

Spokesperson: Right. Okay, I am coming to you in a second.

Question: Thank you, Martin. Has the Secretary-General expressed any confidence in being able to secure these chemical weapons if this proposal went through, given just the general unrest in... in... in Syria over the last few years? And also, does... does he believe that the Russian proposal is meant to be carried out by the UN?

Spokesperson: Look, the Secretary-General spoke at some length about this yesterday. I would simply add that he has consistently called for Syria to accede to the Chemical Weapons Convention and to fully abide by its responsibility to maintain the physical security of any chemical weapon stockpiles in its possession. I can't really get into too

much detail at the moment. As I just said, things are moving rather quickly, but what I can say is that, of course, this... that we are in touch with a number of Member States on this matter. Songhwon, and then I am coming to you, Oleg, okay?

Question: Can we just get a status update on the chemical weapons inspection report, how far along they are? I know you didn't give timelines, but just to see where they are at, with Dr. [Åke] Sellström.

Spokesperson: Well, they continue to work very hard on that. As we have repeatedly said, the analysis from the laboratory samples is a key part of that. But in parallel, you also have the work that needs to go on, based on the statements taken from doctors, witnesses and so on. So this is a work in progress, and you are absolutely right, we are not giving a timeline. Oleg?

Question: Thanks again, Martin, once again. Is the UN ready to safeguard the chemical weapons arsenal in Syria as soon as agreement is reached?

Spokesperson: As I have said, this is something that is evolving, and involving key Member States with whom we are obviously in touch, but it would be premature at this stage to say how that might look. It is something that is evolving. Karahman, yes?

Question: Thank you, Martin. If the French come with a proposal to the Security Council, how is the Secretary-General going to embed his proposal, since this might actually be one of the main things on Syria? The Secretary-General said he was thinking about coming to the Security Council with a proposal about Syria's chemical weapons. Does the Secretary-General think that this is not timely, since Dr. Sellström's report is not out yet, and I think the Secretary-General is waiting for that report to come before he goes to the Security Council?

Spokesperson: The Secretary-General clearly welcomed what happened yesterday — first of all, the remarks made by [United States] Secretary of State [John] Kerry, and then the remarks made by [Russian Federation] Foreign Minister [Sergey] Lavrov. He has welcomed that movement. Obviously, as I have said a number of times already, things are moving rather quickly, and therefore I don't think I would want to comment further, except to say that we are of course in touch with a number of Member States on this. Yes, Matthew?

Question: Sure, thanks a lot. I wanted to ask, I have heard from people in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) that they are... that... that even the... even before this recent announcement, they had been doing some planning and... and for different scenarios, and so what I wondered is, is it... it's very specifically... is it fair to say that DPKO

would... would engage in planning for some role in the... the search for and/or... and/or destruction of chemical weapons? And I also wanted to ask you something that came up, Valerie Amos and... and... and... and Farhan Haq, which was this... this idea that there had been 11 UN staff members killed in Syria. I wanted to know what the timeframe was, any information available about that. It seems obviously important, and also whether there are UN staff members who are hostage of armed groups or, in the alternative, by the Government, there is some... any sort of number, any information you can provide about that? I have been sort of...

Spokesperson: Well, on the very last part, Matthew, I don't think you would expect us to comment on that. On the middle part about staff members, certainly, a number of staff members working for UNRWA [United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East] have been killed or wounded, that I do know. And let us see if we can find out some more details. On the very first part of your question, I am not familiar with any planning that may or may not have been going on. Masood, yes?

Question: Yes, yes, sir. Given the fact that the inquiry is going on about... as to whether chemical weapons were used or not, but the ultimate thing that is the question is: who used those weapons? We know that the inspectors are not supposed to determine that, so who is going to determine who used those weapons...?

Spokesperson: Microphone. Yes?

Question: I'm sorry. Who used those weapons? Did the Syrian Government use those weapons or did the rebels use those weapons? We are... we are not clear about that at all, as to who will determine that.

Spokesperson: Well, I think all we can do is simply repeat that the mandate of the investigation team is to determine whether chemical weapons were used and not by whom.

Question: Yes, yes, sir, I understand that, but I am... what I am trying to say is that...

Spokesperson: I know what you are trying to say, Masood, and I have been trying to say what I have to say, and I don't have anything else, alright? So... microphone?

Correspondent: Yeah, and microphone is apparently broken, I guess.

Spokesperson: Well, you can give me some money on the way out, okay, for a new one.

Question: [laughter] What I am saying is that until that determination is made... I mean, the... the inquiry... I... I... I know the inquiry has its own mandate and its purview. What I am saying, until that determination is made, as to who used, how can you say, okay, Syrian Government is to be blamed or rebels are to be blamed, and we have to punish these people?

Spokesperson: Look, there is a clear mandate for what the investigation team was asked to do, and that is what they are doing. For anything else, as Farhan has said, that would be speculative at this point. Yes, Mercedes?

Question: Two questions, actually, one kind of related...

Spokesperson: Okay. So one is related and one is not?

Question: Exactly. Well, kind of related to Masood's question. Whose decision was it to limit the mandate of the inspector to just figuring out if it happened instead of who did it? Was that the Secretary-General's decision or was that something related to the Security Council, which I don't know?

Spokesperson: It's the Secretary-General's decision, as he himself said, but also based on precedent. And I think Farhan, who has a much better memory and encyclopaedic understanding of these things, gave you the examples; I believe Mozambique and Azerbaijan, where there were previous investigations going back a number of years and the same mandate was applied at that point. What's your other question?

Question: Thank you. The second question is...

Spokesperson: And then I am going to have to wrap it up, I am sorry, okay?

Question: The second question is: what kind of assistance the UN is prepared to provide in terms of disarming Syria from chemical weapons?

Spokesperson: Again, as I said, it is a little difficult to get into detail at this point, simply to say that we are in touch with a number of Member States. The Secretary-General himself, as he said yesterday, was considering such a proposal to give to the Security Council, to urge them to urge the Syrians to put their chemical weapon stocks and precursor stocks both, first of all, in a secure location and then to destroy those weapons and stocks. So I

think that it is obvious that the Secretary-General, and therefore the United Nations Secretariat, has a keen interest in this, but of course, this is something that is developing as we speak, and therefore I don't really want to get into too much detail at this point.

Question: Is there any precedent on this? For disarming chemical weapons?

Spokesperson: Of course, there have been instances, and indeed the United States and the Russian Federation themselves have worked very closely together over decades, in fact, the last two decades, on precisely that kind of, first of all, securing stocks and then dismantling and destroying. So there is certainly a large body of expertise, but this is something that we obviously need to talk about in more detail and I haven't got anything else for you at the moment. So thanks very much. And do...

Question: Can I just ask you one more, please?

Spokesperson: As I say, we are going to be moving on to the next event starting in about three minutes, so I have to leave it at that, but...

Question: One minute to ask you one more?

Spokesperson: No, Erol, I have said that we can come back here to this another day or you can ask me afterwards, okay? Thank you.

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