

Blue helmets seized in Golan safe but remain captive – UN peacekeeping chief

[UN news.un.org/en/story/2013/03/433812](http://news.un.org/en/story/2013/03/433812)

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UN Photo/Wolfgang Grebien

UNDOF peacekeepers patrol Golan Heights.

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The head of United Nations peacekeeping operations said today that the blue helmets seized in the Golan Heights two days ago are all safe but remain detained, adding that the world body is working to secure their release as quickly as possible.

“Our 21 peacekeepers are detained in the village of Al Jamla. Apparently they are safe and they have been spread into 4 or 5 locations within that village in the basement of various houses,” the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Hervé Ladsous, told reporters in New York.

“That particular village is subject to intense shelling by the Syrian armed forces. Of course we are working 24/7 in the area of operation, with people in the region, and here in the Secretariat, to secure their release under good conditions as quickly as possible.”

On Wednesday, armed elements of the Syrian opposition detained a group of peacekeepers who are part of the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF), which monitors the 1974 disengagement accord between Syria and Israel after their 1973 war.

“As of now there is, perhaps, a hope – but I have to be extremely cautious because it is not done yet – but there is the possibility that a ceasefire of a few hours can intervene which will allow for people to be released,” Mr. Ladsous said, after a closed-door briefing to the Security Council.

He stressed that if the ceasefire was to happen, there would be a strong expectation that there would be no retaliatory action by the Syrian armed forces over the village and its civilian population.

Mr. Ladsous added that in light of the situation, UNDOF had vacated two positions which were particularly exposed to gunfire, and the way the mission is operating is being examined due to the degraded safety and security conditions.

Ambassador Vitaly Churkin of Russia, which holds the Council’s presidency this month, told reporters that UNDOF’s activities have been greatly curtailed and some troop contributors have been pulling out their contingents from the mission.

“We expressed the hope that the situation can improve and that UNDOF can continue its operation to the best of its ability given the situation on the ground,” he said, speaking on behalf of the 15-member body.

“The Council expressed its strong support for the efforts of the United Nations to have the UNDOF captured personnel released as quickly as possible,” he added.

[golan](#)

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Ban and Security Council demand release of UN peacekeepers held in Golan Heights

6 March 2013

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the Security Council strongly condemned the detention today by “armed elements of the Syrian opposition” of a group of United Nations peacekeepers who monitor the ceasefire in the Golan Heights between Israel and Syria, and demanded their immediate release.