

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.

So good afternoon. Welcome to the briefing.

****Guest at Noon**

Today I am joined by John Ging, who is the Director of Operations for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and he is here to brief you on his recent visits to Myanmar and the Philippines. But just before I hand the floor to John, I just had a couple of points.

**** Syria**

This morning the High Representative for Disarmament, Angela Kane, met with the Permanent Representative of Syria to the United Nations.

Ms. Kane handed over a letter from her to the Deputy Prime Minister of Syria containing the modalities for cooperation, reflecting the standard provisions that would be required to ensure the proper, safe and efficient conduct of the technical mission looking into alleged use of chemical weapons.

The next step is to await the early affirmation from the Syrian Government on those modalities and arrangements, following which we can expeditiously dispatch the team. The Syrian Government confirmed to Ms. Kane their desire to cooperate. They also confirmed to Ms. Kane that they are keen to proceed.

****Security Council Stakeout**

Ambassador Gérard Araud, the Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations, will address the press at the Security Council stakeout this afternoon, and that will be following the action on the Security Council resolution on the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

****Press Conference**

And then just finally, before I hand over to John, a reminder, of course, that Ambassador Vitaly Churkin, the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations and President of the Security Council for the month of March, will be here at 12:30 p.m. to brief you. So John, please, the floor is yours. Welcome.

[Press conference by Mr. Ging is issued separately.]

I think we are running out of time because I know that Ambassador Churkin will be here at any moment. I am happy just in the next couple of seconds — John, you're free to go, so thank you very much again for coming, thank you. I am happy to take a couple of questions. I have a few more items which I would have read out; we'll place those in our "highlights" online, but if there are any questions until Mr. Churkin arrives? Yes, Hank?

**Questions and Answers

Question: Hi, Martin. Thank you. The Non-Aligned Movement... several States from the Non-Aligned Movement met with the SG this morning, as well as the Security Council President, on Israeli crimes upon Palestine. I wonder if you can give any information as for the SG's reaction to that?

Spokesperson: There was indeed a meeting with a number of representatives. Let me see if we can have any readout on that. Yes?

[The Spokesperson later informed the correspondent that the Secretary-General and the ambassadors discussed the need for progress in the Middle East peace process, as well as the situation in Gaza and the issue of Palestinian prisoners.]

Question: Sure. Martin, I asked you yesterday about the rapes in Minova and what DPKO [Department of Peacekeeping Operations] may have done. It is now reported that Mr. [Hervé] Ladsous delivered, I guess, a third ultimatum to the Foreign Minister of the DRC. Is that accurate?

Spokesperson: Not strictly, not strictly the case, but let me tell you. The UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) has been following up with the Congolese authorities on the matter of rapes in Minova. The UN Mission continues to press for the need for those who committed these unacceptable acts to face justice. On 25 March, so on Monday, Roger Meece, the Secretary-General's Special Representative in the country, met with the Vice Prime Minister and the Minister for Defence to hand over a final letter. The letter informed the Congolese Government of the

termination of all MONUSCO support to the two battalions involved in the Minova rapes should no appropriate action be taken immediately, within seven days. So, in other words, the support would terminate within seven days if no appropriate action is taken immediately.

On various occasions, UN officials have also conveyed the UN's view on this issue. And that was the case yesterday at a meeting here in New York, when Hervé Ladsous, the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, reiterated the same views to the Foreign Minister of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Question: What are the two battalions?

Spokesperson: You know what the response is there, Matthew. We need to wait until we reach that deadline, but I think you have heard what I have had to say about the deadline that has been set. Masood? Last question.

Question: Yes, sir. Just wanted to ask one question. The Secretary-General is embarking on tours of several countries. Do you have... do we have something... a compilation of how many foreign visits he has made and how much money has been spent on those visits?

Spokesperson: You can find details of all of the trips that have been made on our website. And we have also provided statistics in the past about how many trips have been undertaken in each year and where. Okay, yes?

Question: The Foreign Minister of Russia, Mr. [Sergey] Lavrov, said this morning that the fact that the Arab League gave the Syrian opposition Syria's seat in the... at the Arab League could undermine Mr. [Lakhdar] Brahimi as a negotiator. Does Mr... the Secretary-General have any reaction to that? Does he have a comment?

Spokesperson: We'd simply encourage everybody to continue to support the work of the Joint Special Representative, Mr. Brahimi. And the question of recognition or not is a matter for Member States. Okay, thanks very much.

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