

9 April 2013



# Spokesperson's Noon Briefing

Department of Public Information • News and Media Division • New York

## **DAILY PRESS BRIEFING BY THE OFFICE OF THE SPOKESPERSON FOR THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

The following is a near-verbatim transcript of today's noon briefing by Eduardo del Buey, Deputy Spokesperson for the Secretary-General.

Okay, good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the noon briefing.

### **\*\*Security Council**

The Security Council is holding consultations this morning on the Central African Republic. Council members have received an update on developments there from Margaret Vogt, head of the UN peacebuilding office in the country. We are trying to get Ms. Vogt to be able to talk to you by phone hook-up from the Central African Republic. She should be able to call in and talk to you shortly as the noon briefing guest. Once she does call in I'll stop reading and let her get into her presentation, then the Q and A session.

### **\*\*Secretary-General in Rome**

The Secretary-General met in the Vatican with His Holiness Pope Francis today. He said afterwards that they had discussed the need to advance social justice and accelerate work to meet the Millennium Development Goals. The Secretary-General added that he was very heartened by the commitment of Pope Francis to build bridges among communities of faith.

The Secretary-General also held meetings in Rome today with the Italian President and Prime Minister, and the Speakers of both houses. We have a readout of his meetings available in our office.

At a press encounter, the Secretary-General was asked about the situation in the Korean peninsula. He said that if any small incident were to occur, it may create an uncontrollable situation. He has urged the authorities in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to refrain from provocative rhetoric and has urged the countries concerned with the Korean peninsula to exercise their influence.

Asked about Syria, the Secretary-General noted the report that the Syrian Government does not agree to his proposed investigation on the alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria. The Secretary-General has not received any official communication on this matter from the Syrian Government. He regretted that the Government of Syria has not yet agreed to the modalities he has proposed for the mission to investigate the alleged use of chemical weapons at locations within Syria. The Secretary-General appealed to the Government of Syria to extend its fullest cooperation, and to allow the investigation to proceed.

### **\*\*South Sudan**

Hilde Johnson, the Secretary-General's Special Representative in South Sudan, strongly condemned today's killing of five peacekeepers and seven civilians in an ambush by unidentified assailants near the settlement of Gumuruk in Jonglei State. At least nine other peacekeepers and civilians were

injured in the attack and some remain unaccounted for.

The Special Representative has expressed her deepest condolences to the families of all those killed in the attack. The Mission's peacekeepers frequently patrol the area as part of an effort to provide protection to civilians, as well as providing armed escorts to humanitarian aid convoys.

The Special Representative said that today's attack will not deter the Mission and its peacekeepers from working to protect vulnerable communities in South Sudan. She added that the Mission is determined to continue its work in supporting authorities to ensure peace. We expect something from the Secretary-General shortly.

#### \*\* Syria

UN agencies and partners continue to deliver aid to millions of people despite the escalation of violence in Syria. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) says that some 1.2 million houses have been damaged or destroyed, representing around one third of the housing stock in Syria.

Nearly 20 per cent of all schools across Syria have been damaged, destroyed or are being used as shelters for internally displaced people.

The World Food Programme (WFP) reached about 2 million people with food assistance in March, up from some 1.7 million in February. Thank you [Deputy Spokesperson is handed a sheet of paper]. Meanwhile, a UN inter-agency convoy led by UNICEF delivered measles, mumps and rubella vaccines for about half a million children in Aleppo. The convoy also delivered health supplies to over 30,000 people.

The World Health Organization (WHO) provided emergency medical supplies and medicine, covering the basic primary health-care needs of 80,000 people in northern Syria. And the UN refugee agency provided essential items, such as blankets, quilts, mattresses, diapers, jerry cans, winter clothes and plastic sheeting, to cover the needs of 37,000 people in Homs, Damascus and rural Damascus.

#### \*\* South Sudan

I have a [statement](#) attributable to the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General on the killing of UNMISS [United Nations Mission in South Sudan] peacekeepers in South Sudan.

The Secretary-General is appalled by the attack on an UNMISS convoy this morning. He condemns in the strongest terms the killing of five Indian peacekeepers, two UNMISS national staff and five civilian staff contractors in Gumuruk, Jonglei State, South Sudan. Nine other colleagues were also injured in the attack, and some are in critical condition.

He calls on the Government of South Sudan to bring the perpetrators of this crime to justice. He recalls that the killing of peacekeepers is a war crime that falls under the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court.

The Secretary-General expresses his deepest condolences to the Governments of India and South Sudan, and to the families of the peacekeepers, staff members and contractors killed in the attack.

#### \*\* Lebanon

Derek Plumbly, the UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon, and Ninette Kelley, the Representative of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Lebanon, visited today a newly opened UNHCR centre in Tyre for the registration of Syrian refugees. The centre is intended to help accelerate registration in south Lebanon, where over 60,000 people are currently registered or seeking registration. The refugee agency already runs registration centres in north Lebanon, the Bekaa and Beirut.

At a meeting with the press at the end of their visit, Mr. Plumbly and Ms. Kelley praised the hospitality shown by the people of the south to the refugees. They also said that, with more than 400,000 Syrian refugees already registered or seeking registration in Lebanon, such assistance was heavily dependent on the urgent disbursement of donor funds.

**\*\* Sahel**

The Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Sahel, Romano Prodi, has convened a conference on women's leadership in the Sahel today in Brussels with the Acting Head of UN-Women, Lakshmi Puri, and the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton.

More than 40 participants from the region underlined the crucial contributions of women to economic recovery, political stability and conflict prevention. They also looked at ways to enhance their role in these areas. Mr. Prodi said that the women of the Sahel were instrumental in putting the region on a path to stability. He said he wanted to tap into women's potential to accelerate progress in the Sahel.

**\*\* China**

The World Health Organization said that there have now been notifications of 24 confirmed cases of influenza H7N9 in China, including seven deaths. Close contacts of the infected are being monitored, although there is no evidence of sustained human-to-human transmission. The source of the infection is being investigated, and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has teams on the ground carrying out extensive testing of animal species.

**\*\* Greece — Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia**

Ambassador Matthew Nimetz, the Secretary-General's Personal Envoy for the talks between Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, is scheduled to speak to reporters at 12:30 p.m. today at the Security Council stakeout position after meeting with representatives of both sides here at UN Headquarters. As we announced earlier, Ambassador Nimetz held meetings with the representatives, separately and jointly, yesterday and today with the purpose of continuing the UN-brokered talks aimed at finding a mutually acceptable solution to the "name" issue.

**\*\* Press Conference**

And tomorrow at 3 p.m., here in the Auditorium, there will be a press conference by Amnesty International on its annual report on the death penalty, sponsored by the Permanent Mission of France to the United Nations.

Do we have any contact?

UN Sound Technician: No, sir.

Deputy Spokesperson: No contact. Okay, we'll do some questions. Mr. Abbadi?

**\*\* Questions and Answers**

Question: Thank you, Eduardo. You indicated that the Secretary-General expressed his regret that Syria disagreed with the launching of the mission, of the investigation. How did he learn about that, since he did not receive any written communication, as you stated? And second, was... did Syria refuse the terms and mandate of the investigation?

Deputy Spokesperson: Well, as I said, we have not heard officially from the Syrian Government, so

I would wait to see what the Syrian Government has to say to the Secretary-General before commenting on the Secretary-General's response to what is happening, and to the Syrian Government's reasons for whatever decisions it is taking. Tim?

Question: A follow-up on that as well. Does that mean... I mean, he said before that the negotiations are still going on, so does that mean there are no more negotiations or...?

Deputy Spokesperson: Well, I imagine there is going to be. What we are waiting for, we are waiting for an official confirmation, an official notification, from the Syrian Government. That's part of the negotiating process. Once we have an official notification, we will see what the next step is. Nizar?

Question: There was a letter from the Foreign Minister of Syria, Mr. [Walid al] Muallem. He was protesting against the reneging on an agreement which took place with Mr... Ms. Kane, Angela Kane, on Thursday, last Thursday. They agreed that it will be centred only on investigating the situation in... in Aleppo... near Aleppo, in Khan al-Assal area. What is the response? I mean, obviously the statement by the Secretary-General ignores that letter and ignores the agreement of Thursday.

Deputy Spokesperson: Well, Nizar, I don't have any information on a letter from the Syrian Ambassador. You want to ask the Syrian Ambassador to elucidate on what he had to say. It doesn't... it's not... I don't have any information on that letter at all, nor am I going to comment on it.

UN Sound Technician: We have the call, sir.

Deputy Spokesperson: We have the call now from Ms. Margaret Vogt?

UN Sound Technician: Yes, sir.

Deputy Spokesperson: Ms. Vogt, can you hear us? Hello.

UN Sound Technician: They are working on it; technical difficulties.

Deputy Spokesperson: Okay. Hank?

Question: Thank you, Eduardo. What is the Secretary-General's general position on whistleblowers?

Deputy Spokesperson: Well, we have... I can give you something from the Office of Ethics. I can read it to you.

Question: I just wondered if that's his personal position or is it a Charter position. Is he for them or against them?

Deputy Spokesperson: Well, he has an... there is an institutional position, and that's the position I am going to read to you.

In 2011, the UN Ethics Office assessed its retaliation case review procedures to ensure clear and structured case review practices. Based on that assessment, the Ethics Office has established clear procedures for each step of a retaliation case, from the initial complaint stage to final case determination. For those retaliation cases referred by the Ethics Office to the Office of Independent Oversight Services (OIOS) for formal investigation, the Ethics Office independently reviews the completed OIOS investigation report. The Ethics Office reviews the evidence OIOS obtained, including relevant witness statements, as necessary. The Ethics Office may return investigation reports to OIOS for additional clarification to ensure the evidentiary standards under ST/SGB/2005/21 are met. Once the Ethics Office is satisfied that a full investigation has been completed, it makes an independent and final determination as to whether retaliation

has been established. If retaliation has been established, the Ethics Office makes final recommendations for corrective action to the relevant head of office and the Under-Secretary-General for Management.

UN Sound Technician: We have the call, sir.

Deputy Spokesperson: We have the call? Thank you. Hello, Ms Vogt?

Ms. Vogt: Yes, I'm here.

Deputy Spokesperson: Good afternoon. Welcome to the noon briefing.

[Press conference by Ms. Vogt is issued separately]

Deputy Spokesperson: Nizar?

Question: Yes, a follow-up on that. I mean, you did not confirm whether the Secretary-General received a letter from Mr. Muallem of Syria, did you?

Deputy Spokesperson: Well, we'll have to check; I don't have any confirmation he's received the letter, no.

Question: Another thing, why did the Secretary-General send the team to Cyprus before... before getting the clearance from Syria?

Deputy Spokesperson: Because we are always preparing, Nizar, we are always trying to be in a position to be able to react quickly when an agreement is reached. In this case, we were hopeful that an agreement would be reached and we want to be able to dispatch the team as soon as possible. Hank? And then Matthew.

Question: Thank you, Eduardo. I just wanted to follow up and to not specifically refer to Mr. [James] Wasserstrom's case. Aside from that, which I know you can't comment on, are there other instances of whistleblowers during Mr. Ban's tenure that you can talk about, that establish his track record or his sentiments towards the dynamic of the whistleblower, or...?

Deputy Spokesperson: I don't have that information with me, no. Matthew?

Question: I just, one follow-up on that, is it... can we get... it was... it was said at the press conference yesterday by Mr. Wasserstrom and... and the Government Accountability Project that there has been only one finding of retaliation by the Ethics Office since it has existed. And that... if so, that seems... can we just get the number on how many complaints of retaliation have been made and how many... maybe they are wrong, maybe there have been more findings; how many cases of retaliation have been accepted or established by the Office?

Deputy Spokesperson: We will have to find out.

[The Spokesperson later said that from August 2006 to July 2012, the Ethics Office initiated 106 formal retaliation complaint preliminary reviews. Of those 106 cases, 1 remained under review and 18 were closed as a result either of the complainant having withdrawn or abandoned his or her complaint or of the case having been resolved informally to the satisfaction of the complainant. For the remaining 87 complaints, the Office determined that 9 had presented prima facie cases of retaliation and referred those cases for formal investigation. Investigations were completed for five of the cases, after which the Office determined that retaliation had been established for one of them. Four cases are still pending completion of the investigation.]

Question: Okay. And I wanted to ask you on South Sudan, because of this... this, you know, killing of the peacekeepers. Hilde Johnson said in March that, you know, to be ready for an offensive by the South Sudan army against the David Yau Yau group, and today the South Sudan Army spokesman, Philip Aguer, is saying that this act was committed by the David Yau Yau rebels. So, I wanted to know from the UN, it is described as protecting a convoy; was this in any way related to what was described by Hilde Johnson as an offensive by the army, that the... the... the UN would sort of tag along, protect civilians...?

Deputy Spokesperson: Well, the Mission is to protect civilians, and that's what they were doing when they were ambushed.

Question: Right. But were they, in fact, accompanying an offensive force of the South Sudan army fighting rebels? That's what I am...

Deputy Spokesperson: That's not the information I have, but we can check.

[The Deputy Spokesperson later said that the attack had hit a civilian convoy escorted by peacekeepers, who were not accompanying any SPLA forces.]

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

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