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# Spokesperson's Noon Briefing

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## **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 Martin Nesirky, Spokesperson for the Secretary-General.

Good afternoon. Welcome to the briefing.

### **\*\*Arms Trade Treaty**

The United Nations has [opened](#) the landmark Arms Trade Treaty for signature today. The Secretary-General will [speak](#) at the ministerial part of the today's event, which begins at 3 p.m. He is expected to say that, with the Treaty, the world has decided to finally put an end to the "free-for-all" nature of international weapons transfers.

He is expected to say that the Arms Trade Treaty will make it harder for weapons to be diverted into the illicit market; to reach warlords, pirates, terrorists and criminals; or to be used to commit grave human rights abuses or violations of international humanitarian law.

And just to say that, at 1:15 p.m., there will be a [press conference](#) here on this topic. And the speakers will be: Angela Kane, the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs; Christine Beerli, the Permanent Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC); Brian Wood, the Head of Arms Control and Human Rights at Amnesty International; and Anna Macdonald, who is the Head of Arms Control at Oxfam.

### **\*\*Somalia**

Nicholas Kay, the Head of the new United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), arrived in Mogadishu today to assume his duties. Mr. Kay said that the people of Somalia rightly have high expectations, and the international community looks forward with hope towards a national election in 2016.

UNSOM is a political mission and it started its operations today. It has a mandate to support State-building and peacebuilding, with a focus on good governance, security sector reform, the rule of law, human rights, 'good offices' for mediation and political reconciliation and also coordination of international assistance.

And there is a press release with more information on that.

### **\*\*Afghanistan**

The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) strongly condemned the two deadly attacks, which took place in the east of the country today. The attacks killed at least 19 people, including a dozen children.

Jan Kubis, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan, said that any such violence is unacceptable, but especially when it involves civilians, and even more so when it involves children.

In the past two weeks, conflict-related violence has killed 125 Afghan civilians and wounded 287, about a 24 per cent increase in total civilian casualties compared to the same period last year. The UN Mission stresses once again that the use of suicide attacks and improvised explosive devices against civilians must stop. It notes that the indiscriminate use of such attacks is in contravention of humanitarian law and may amount to war crimes.

We have a press release from the Mission with more details on that.

#### **\*\*International Labour Organization**

The International Labour Organization (ILO) says in a report released today that, as the global economy continues a slow recovery, many advanced economies continue to face high or even rising unemployment and increasing inequalities.

According to the World of Work Report 2013, income inequalities rose between 2010 and 2011 in 14 of the 26 advanced economies surveyed, including France, Denmark, Spain and the United States. The report shows that middle-income groups in many advanced economies are shrinking, fuelled in part by long-term unemployment, weakening job quality and workers dropping out of the labour market altogether.

The report is available online with many more details.

#### **\*\*Capital Master Plan**

The renovation of the United Nations Headquarters under the Capital Master Plan has reached a new stage.

On Friday, 31 May, the General Assembly building closed down for renovation.

And as of this week, the General Assembly will meet in the North Lawn Building, where a temporary General Assembly Hall has been set up. The General Assembly is scheduled to return to its renovated Hall in time for the opening of its sixty-ninth session, and that is in September 2014.

Over the weekend, the Security Council moved back to its renovated chamber and suite of rooms in the Conference Building, after having worked in temporary accommodations since March 2010.

#### **\*\*Youth**

The Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, Ahmad Alhendawi, said that he welcomes the efforts made to include young people in the consultation process of the Report on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, which was submitted to the Secretary-General last week. Mr. Alhendawi noted that the proposed five transformative shifts in the report have the potential to improve the life chances of young women and men.

The full press release is available in my Office.

#### **\*\*Noon Guest/Press Conferences Tomorrow**

Tomorrow, I will be joined by Kyung-wha Kang, the Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, who will be here to brief on her recent mission to the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

And then at 1:15 p.m., there will be a press conference by Ambassador Mark Lyall Grant, the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the United Nations and, as you will be aware, the President of the Security Council for the month of June.

Questions, please? Yes, Masood?

**\*\*Questions and Answers**

Question: On the Syrian thing, as you are probably aware, that there are now reports of the clashes between Hizbullah and the Syrian rebels inside Lebanon. But, things have become, I mean, of course, things have been bad to worse every day, but what is now... it has been expanding into other countries. Does the Secretary-General's Special Representative over there, Mr. [Lakhdar] Brahimi, does he have anything to say about all this and as to how to move this process forward, if at all?

Spokesperson: There are a number of things here. First of all, Mr. [Derek] Plumbly in Beirut has had something to say last week about the spill-over effect in Lebanon and his concerns; the Secretary-General obviously shares those concerns. It is extremely troubling to see the level of violence and the intensity there. With regard to Mr. Brahimi, he and Jeffrey Feltman, who is the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, they will be in Geneva in the middle of this week for talks with Russian and [United States] officials.

This is part of the process to push as hard as possible for the political track for an international conference to be convened as soon as possible. Obviously, there is no alternative to a political solution to this crisis; and that is why there is another concerted effort being made this week in Geneva to try to push that process along. But, just to come back to the first part: obviously, the Secretary-General is alarmed by developments in Lebanon, the spill-over effect from Syria. Other questions, please? Yes, and then you, Matthew?

Question: A follow-up question. What's the main problem in preparation to the conference in Geneva? What's the main problem, which should be discussed on 5 June in Geneva to prepare this conference? The opposition, the delegates from opposition or other things...?

Spokesperson: Look, when there has been an increasing military conflict over a period of many months, it is obvious that you cannot easily, rapidly, swiftly switch track. But, that is precisely what the [United States]-Russian initiative set out to do. And, it is now through the auspices of the United Nations, and not least Lakhdar Brahimi, the Joint Special Representative, that efforts are really being focused and harnessed to try to bring about an international conference. There are many facets that need to be worked out, and that's why this triumvirate will be meeting in Geneva in the middle of this week. Yes, Matthew?

Question: Sure, I wanted, thanks. I, I wanted to ask you two things I tried to ask over the weekend and then also something about the move of the Security Council. But first, is the, does the Secretariat have any response to or comment on the widely seemed, I guess you could call it a crackdown in, in Taksim Square in Istanbul over the weekend use of tear gas, comments about the use of, that social media is a, is a problem that the protesters are akin to terrorists; is there any response from the UN to that?

Spokesperson: Well, we are obviously watching the developments there very closely. If I have anything further, I will let you know.

Question: Okay. And this, this letter, there was a letter, at least reported by them, by 19 members of the [United States] Congress to the Secretary-General about cholera in Haiti and they, they, you know they, they run through a lot of things but they, they, they ask the UN to "take responsibility" for the introduction of cholera into Haiti and they cite the dismissal or, or, or non-receivability of the claims. Was this letter received, and what's the Secretary-General's response to it?

Spokesperson: I am aware of the letter, and if there is any further comment, I'll let you know. But, I don't have any at the moment. Other questions? Yes, please?

Question: Thank you. Sheikh [Youssef] al-Qaradawi, a top clergy in Qatar, this past weekend, said that, he said that Alawites in Syria are more [Secretary-General] has anything to say about that; such an inflammatory statement against religious minorities in Syria.

Spokesperson: I haven't seen that particular specific comment, but obviously, generally speaking, any rhetoric which further inflames the situation in Syria is hardly going to be helpful. Other questions, please? Yes, Matthew?

Question: Sure, yeah, yeah, I wanted to, I wanted to be sure to be able to ask this; it, you, you'd said how the Council moved over the weekend and did. There has been some, some back and forth about these media access guide, rules, but I actually have a, have a, this morning, since there was no table, I put a small table there to work on in order to cover the bilaterals. And returning there from the ATT [Arms Trade Treaty] stakeout, the table was gone and I was told the lady from DPI [Department of Public Information] took it. So, I am wanting to know: what are the rules? Did these rules which, which, which, would seek to prohibit media workspace in front of the Security Council, have they gone into effect, or are they still being considered? And, and why was the small table actually used for work in covering the Council taken?

Spokesperson: Well, I know you've had extensive exchanges both with my colleague Eduardo [del Buey], sitting here in the past couple of weeks; and also with Stéphane Dujarric. I don't have anything to add on that at this point.

Correspondent: The only thing, the only, the rea... the reason I ask that is just because it seems like the UN often talks about, you know, rules, and transparency and since it moved and since it was foreseeable, I, I wasn't aware that, that, that there was already a ban in effect on work space. That's why I put the table there. But it's gone.

Spokesperson: As I say, Matthew, I don't have anything to add to the extensive exchanges you've had with a number of people, primarily with Eduardo and Stéphane. Any other questions?

Question: Would you tell us when the rules go into effect? That's the only, I just wanna know when...?

Spokesperson: Matthew, you can put the question any way you like; I don't have anything further to add to the extensive exchanges you've already had, okay? Yes?

Question: Thank you. Since Qatar is a chair of the UN Alliance of Civilizations, I wonder if Mr. Ban Ki-moon has any concern about Qatar's role in openly backing the extremist groups in Syria and elsewhere, and the fact that this could undermine their credibility and work of this committee, which is supposed to promote the diversity, culture diversity, religious tolerance in the world?

Spokesperson: The Alliance of Civilizations does an extremely important job, and the Secretary-General has full confidence in the work of the head of the Alliance of Civilizations. Any other questions, please?

Question: Can I just; if you don't mind, one of the, the, the...

Spokesperson: I don't mind at all, Matthew, please.

Question: Okay. In, I, I, I saw that the Secretary-General met with President [Jakaya] Kikwete of the [United] Republic of Tanzania in, in, in, in Japan, and I wanted to ask two questions about it: One, some wonder whether this, the, the comments he about Rwanda should negotiate or should have talked to the

FDLR [Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda] has caused quite a stir in Rwanda, came up; it didn't seem to be in the readout and, and, and the Madagascar one didn't mention that he talked about it. I just wonder if there is... we can see, if, if anything more can be said about this idea of, of barring Lalao Ravalomanana from, from, from, from, from running? There are also people that wonder whether that's consistent with even the stated SADC [Southern African Development Community] road map in the past, given that she was expelled from the country and then, now that's being used that she can't run. I mean, I've seen the readout, I am just asking for a little...

Spokesperson: I am sure you have, Matthew. You will also have seen that we've spoken very clearly about the position of SADC and that the United Nations Secretary-General fully supports that approach by SADC. I don't have anything to add to that. And, you are right that there was readout on Tanzania; there were many readouts over the weekend. I think we've done quite a good job of keeping you informed over the weekend on what the Secretary-General has been discussing with a number of leaders while at that meeting in Yokohama.

Question: But, the issue of the intervention brigade and, and, and, and questions now about the kind of impartiality of it; did, did this come up in any of the, of the, of the meetings?

Spokesperson: The intervention brigade, as you well know, is mandated by the Security Council. It is an important part of the work that needs to be done in the eastern DRC [Democratic Republic of the Congo], and you should be aware that the deployment of the intervention brigade continues and troops continue to be deployed with each day that passes. And nearly 870 troops of the brigade have been deployed; and indeed, more are expected to arrive today. And MONUSCO, the [United Nations] Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, is saying that the brigade has, indeed, started operational activities in Goma, including day and night patrols jointly with other MONUSCO troops.

That's what I have for you. Thanks very much. Have a good afternoon; thank you very much.

Question: Martin.

Spokesperson: Yes? Let's... yes, go ahead.

Question: Could I put on the record that I was angry and dismayed that EZTV, on a very important day, went out and was not working for those of us who rely on it?

Spokesperson: Thank you.

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