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**Daily Press Briefing by the Offices of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General and the Spokesperson for the General Assembly President**

The following is a near-verbatim transcript of today’s noon briefing by Michèle Montas, Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, and Enrique Yeves, Spokesperson for the President of the General Assembly.

Briefing by Spokesperson for the Secretary-General

Good afternoon all.

\*\*Guest at Noon Today

Our [guest](http://www.un.org/News/briefings/docs/2009/090114_Gaza.doc.htm) at the noon briefing today is John Ging, Director of Operations in Gaza for UNRWA, the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.  Welcome, John.  He will brief you, of course, on the situation on the ground via videoconference link from Gaza.

\*\*Secretary-General’s Middle East Trip

The Secretary-General is currently in Amman, Jordan, where he just met with King Abdullah and Queen Rania.

Earlier today, he met in Cairo with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.  Their discussions focused mainly on Gaza, on which the Secretary-General expressed his appreciation for Egypt’s efforts to get the parties to reach a ceasefire.  They also talked about Somalia and Darfur.

Speaking to reporters after a later meeting with Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit, the Secretary-General said that he and the President shared their feelings of frustration and pain over the ongoing violence in Gaza.

They also discussed in depth how to attain an immediate ceasefire and to further secure humanitarian relief.  He added in his comments to reporters that he is asking that all those who have influence with any party to the conflict to use all means to end the violence and to find a durable solution.

The Secretary-General also met with Egyptian First Lady Suzanne Mubarak, who briefed him on the efforts by the Egyptian Government and the Red Crescent Society on humanitarian efforts.  They discussed the possibility of sending a needs assessment mission to Gaza once the fighting stops there.

\*\* Gaza

The Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process (UNSCO) reports that the Kerem Shalom crossing between Israel and Gaza and the Rafah crossing between Egypt and Gaza are partially open today, but the Karni grain conveyor belt and the Nahal Oz fuel pipelines remain closed.  And the Erez crossing is closed today to all Palestinians except for very urgent medical cases.  We will join John in a few minutes to get more on the situation on the ground.

Meanwhile, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reports that, as part of United Nations efforts to meet the rapidly growing humanitarian needs of civilians caught in the fighting in Gaza, John Holmes, Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, today allocated some $7 million in funding from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) to this crisis.  We have more on that upstairs.

For her part, the Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Thoraya Ahmed Obaid, says that pregnant women and their newborn babies are some of the unseen victims of the current crisis in Gaza –- with some 170 women giving birth in Gaza each day.  UNFPA says it is alarmed by reports of premature labour and delivery resulting from shock and trauma from continuous bombing.

It is also concerned by the exposure of premature and newborn infants to hypothermia due to the lack of electricity, warm clothing and blankets among the displaced.

The agency notes that, because of ongoing military operations, most pregnant women are unable to leave their homes or shelters to access maternity care facilities or delivery services.  Even those who can make it to a hospital may not be able to receive proper care, as many delivery wards have been turned into surgical facilities to treat the wounded.

To help respond to the crisis, UNFPA has delivered medicine and surgical instruments to Gaza’s hospitals, as well as hygiene products, blankets and first aid supplies to families.

Meanwhile, UNICEF Executive Director Ann Veneman issued a statement today, saying that, each day in Gaza, “more children are being hurt, their small bodies wounded, their young lives shattered”.  This is tragic and unacceptable, she said.  Her agency adds that 840,000 children are suffering from extreme stress and experiencing trauma-inducing conditions.

We have more information upstairs on the different agencies.

\*\* Lebanon

On Lebanon, according to preliminary information received by the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), some rockets were fired at Israel from Lebanese territory this morning.  There were no reports of damage or injuries, and there were no immediate claims of responsibility.  Israel Defense Forces returned fire, with two rounds of artillery.  We have no report of damage or injury from the shells.

UNIFIL, in cooperation with the Lebanese Armed Forces, is currently investigating on the ground, close to the northern boundary of UNIFIL’s Area of Operations in the Eastern Sector to locate the launching site of the rocket fire.  UNIFIL Force Commander Major-General Claudio Graziano urges maximum restraint, and he is working with both parties to maintain the cessation of hostilities.

A joint UNIFIL-Lebanese patrol, during a search operation in the general area of El Hebbariye later today discovered three live rockets prepared for launch.  The rockets were deactivated on the spot.  UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces are continuing intensive patrolling and search throughout the area.

\*\*Security Council

The Security Council this morning adopted two resolutions.  The first one [urges](http://www.un.org/press/en/2009/sc9570.doc.htm) Djibouti and Eritrea to resolve their border dispute peacefully and, among other steps, demands that Eritrea withdraw its forces and all equipment to the positions of the status quo ante.  In the second resolution, the Council [extended](http://www.un.org/press/en/2009/sc9569.doc.htm) the multidimensional presence in Chad for a period of 12 months, and extended until 15 March 2010 the mandate of the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad (MINURCAT).

After that, the Security Council began an open [debate](http://www.un.org/press/en/2009/sc9571.doc.htm) on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, on which 50 speakers are inscribed.  Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs John Holmes stressed the need for strict compliance with international humanitarian law.  In that regard, he drew attention to the fighting in Gaza, emphasizing that allegations of violations there must be fully investigated, and those responsible held to account.  He also discussed conflicts in Afghanistan, Somalia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

\*\* Democratic Republic of the Congo

The Secretary-General’s Special Representative for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Alan Doss; his deputy, Ross Mountain, the Resident Humanitarian Coordinator; and General Babacar Gaye, the Force Commander of the United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, have completed a two-day visit to the province of North Kivu.

Yesterday, the Special Representative and the Force Commander met 20 former child soldiers who were about to be returned to their families with the support of the United Nations Mission.  After meeting the children, Alan Doss renewed his appeal to the North Kivu armed groups to release all the children in their ranks.

“The recruitment and the use of children by armed forces and groups is a war crime, and a crime against humanity,” he said.

\*\* Darfur

UNAMID, the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur, yesterday helped rescue six women who had been kidnapped outside a camp for internally displaced persons.  The women were abducted outside the Hassa Hissa camp while collecting firewood.

UNAMID was alerted and dispatched a team of protection force personnel to the scene.  When the abductors saw the UNAMID team approach, they released the women.

\*\* Iraq

We issued yesterday a [statement](http://www.un.org/press/en/2009/sgsm12045.doc.htm) attributable to the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General on the occasion of the deposit by the Republic of Iraq of the instrument of accession to the Chemical Weapons Convention.

On 13 January 2009, the Republic of Iraq deposited its instrument of accession to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction (CWC).

The statement says:  “The Secretary-General firmly congratulates Iraq and firmly believes that reaching universality of the Chemical Weapons Convention will significantly promote international peace and security and urges the remaining States not party to take the necessary measures to accede to the Convention as early as possible.”  You have, of course, the full statement upstairs.

\*\*United Nations Development Programme Event

The United States Launch of the World Festival of Black Arts is taking place in the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Chamber from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. this afternoon.

The President of Senegal, the Reverend Jesse Jackson, singers Akon and Angélique Kidjo, and jazz pianist and composer Randy Weston will be among the participants.  Under-Secretary-General Ibrahim Gambari and other African senior United Nations officials will also be attending the event.

Because of space limitations, those interested in covering the event must contact the United Nations Development Programme ahead of time.  The contact there is Richard Leonard, and he can be reached at 212 906 5469.

\*\*Guests at Noon Briefing Tomorrow

Our guests at the noon briefing tomorrow will be John Holmes, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and UN Emergency Relief Coordinator.  And, of course, we hope to have once more John Ging, Director of Operations in Gaza for UNRWA, the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.  He will once again brief on the humanitarian situation in Gaza.

I will take briefly your questions.  Then we have Enrique coming to us and then we’ll have John.  Let’s make it brief, please.

\*\*Questions and Answers

Question:  Can you confirm that Mojanku Gumbi, former legal aid to Thabo Mbeki, has been confirmed as the Secretary-General’s new Special Envoy to the Sudan and, if that is true, what are the Secretary-General’s hopes for his mission in the Sudan?  Is he going to work on getting the full UNAMID force in place or other matters?

Spokesperson:  I cannot confirm this at this point.

Question:  I know there’s a time difference, but has the Secretary-General heard about, and does he have a reaction to, the audiotape from Osama bin Laden, which calls for a holy war on Israel to stop the enemies of Gaza and call on people, especially youth, to enlist in jihad to fight in Gaza?

Spokesperson:  No, we have no specific reaction to that.  The Secretary-General certainly is aware.

Question:  You mentioned about the rocket attacks today in Israel and vice versa.  How about the amassing of the troops?  Since yesterday, there were many troops.  Have you received any report from UNIFIL, for example, about Israel amassing troops on the border with Lebanon and also the intensive air assaults over Lebanese air space?

Spokesperson:  The violations of the air space are reported every day.  So, I’ll try to get that for you.  You can get that directly from UNIFIL.  As far as the amassing of troops, this is outside of the area of UNIFIL’s mandate.  As you know, they are working on the Lebanese side of the border.

Question:  But even before these attacks, they were amassing troops.  Isn’t that a matter of concern for UNIFIL that any escalation may happen as a result of this?

Spokesperson:  They don’t have any specific reaction to that.  Whether they are aware of it is a different story.  What I’m saying is that this is not part of their mandate.

Question:  How about the mock attacks they do, for example, in the areas like (inaudible) and the other areas?

Spokesperson:  I’m not aware of that, but we can put you in touch with UNIFIL of course.

Question:  In light of what Mr. Ging reported yesterday about the destruction of infrastructure in Gaza, I’m wondering, especially on the second part of the Secretary-General’s trip, is he going to try and solicit funds in Kuwait and other places specifically for rebuilding infrastructure in Gaza, in response to what John said yesterday?

Spokesperson:  Reconstruction is part of the Secretary-General’s objectives in his visit to the region.  But, as you know, you cannot talk about reconstruction.  You can make plans for it.  You can start asking for funds.  But, at this point, reconstruction cannot be envisaged until there is a ceasefire and the destruction stops.

Question:  But we’re eventually going to get a ceasefire sooner or later and we’re going to need money.

Spokesperson:  A reconstruction plan is being worked on.

Briefing by the Spokesperson for the General Assembly President

Let’s try to be quick.  I only wanted to bring to your attention that, at the request of several Member States, the President of the General Assembly is calling a General Assembly session tomorrow, Thursday, at 10 a.m. to discuss the issue of Gaza.  He will call for the resumption of the tenth emergency session of the General Assembly on the illegal Israeli actions in occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the same meeting that was deferred last week.  This is the announcement that I wanted to make.  Unless you have any questions, we’ll pass on to Gaza.

\*\*Questions and Answers

Question:  Is this upon the request of the NAM [Non-Aligned] Movement and, also, do you expect some sort of a resolution to be circulated tomorrow among the General Assembly Members?  What’s going to be the end product of this meeting?

Spokesperson:  This is at the request of several Member countries, including the NAM countries, the Non-Aligned Movement, and several others that have expressed their opinion on the willingness to discuss this issue at the General Assembly and the President has echoed that.  Whether there’s going to be resolution, it looks like there’s going to be a resolution.  I have heard some of the ambassadors discussing several possibilities, but that’s obviously up to the Member countries to decide.

Question:  Will the President, in formulating his statement or presiding tomorrow, repeat the word, that he used in an interview with Al-Jazeera, “genocide” to describe the actions of the Israeli Defense Forces in Gaza?

Spokesperson:  Well, I have not seen the draft of his speech yet.  He’s working on it right now.

Question:  But that’s an accurate report of his words yesterday, right?

Spokesperson:  He was interviewed by Al-Jazeera and he said those words.

Question:  Will legal actions by parties other than IDF [Israel Defense Forces] be considered on the agenda?

Spokesperson:  Again, this is up to the Member countries to decide.  The President of the General Assembly has called for this session and now it’s up to the different countries to decide what they want to put in the resolution, if anything.  We’ll see.  It’s very difficult to foresee what is going to happen.

Question:  Can you just explain the format of how the meeting might work?  Will everybody be allowed to make a statement and then possibly vote on a resolution?  I know it’s somewhat up in the air, still.

Spokesperson:  It’s the typical, ordinary format of the General Assembly.  That is, the President of the General Assembly starts the meeting.  He will make an opening statement and then we’ll have all the countries that have requested to speak deliver their speeches.  What I can assure you is there are going to be many countries speaking.  We might even go, and this is only a guess, into Friday with the session.  At the same time, the different countries discuss among themselves the possibility of negotiating a draft or several drafts.  If they have a common draft and a common resolution, there will be consensus.  They will put it to a vote if they have differences, that’s part of the negotiations.

Question:  The other day, I think the President was asked which countries had asked for the last meeting that was cancelled.  That question wasn’t answered.  Which countries actually requested the meeting and what is the protocol behind actually establishing such a meeting in the first place?

Spokesperson:  There are two different issues.  On the question of which countries have requested, I can tell you that several countries requested it both verbally and in writing.  In terms of writing that I can recall, at least right now, we had Malaysia.  Malaysia sent a letter from the Prime Minister.  Indonesia.  We had Syria.  We had Venezuela.  There were several countries that, in writing, requested that meeting.  And some others that verbally requested that meeting, too.  Among others, the Non-Aligned Movement.  The main point about that meeting that we were talking about last week was whether to wait for the Security Council to finish and let them work, or whether to do it.  It looked like, at that moment, there was a deadlock.  And that’s why several Member countries requested the General Assembly to convene it.  And then, as some countries have said, it might have helped to unlock the situation in the Security Council, and that’s why one hour before the President deferred the meeting to further notice, which is now.

Let me also add that one of the main reasons for the meeting that countries are expressing right now is that we have now a ceasefire resolution from the Security Council that is not being respected.  And, if anything, since Thursday, when it was approved and the resolution called for a ceasefire, the military operations have increased.  That’s why the Member countries believe that this is the right moment also for the General Assembly to convene a strong message to the parties in the area that the international community is fully in favour of an immediate ceasefire for the benefit of the population of Gaza.

Question:  Just a clarification, when does President d’Escoto then deem that a session needs to be held?  You didn’t go over that protocol aspect.  And just one quick follow-up, what relationship did President d’Escoto have with the Non-Aligned Movement’s statement that was released yesterday evening?

Spokesperson:  What do you mean by his relationship?  I don’t understand.

Question:  What is his relationship with the Non-Aligned Movement specifically, and was he involved in the drafting of this letter that was released yesterday evening?

Spokesperson:  Certainly he wasn’t involved.  He is the President of the General Assembly and he talks to the different groups.  As far as I know, as far as we know, even the President, we know that the Non-Aligned Movement, which is around 120 countries.  If I can trust my memory, I think 119 countries met on Monday amongst themselves and decided to draft that statement calling for the General Assembly session.  They conveyed that message to the President of the General Assembly yesterday morning.  But, the Non-Aligned Movement is not the only one.  Today, the President of the General Assembly met with several Arab States who also requested that meeting.  And he has been in touch with many other ambassadors from the different regional groups.  The support for the calling of this meeting is very wide among the Member countries.

Coming back to your first question, in what we can call the legal procedure, in this particular case, we have a resolution referring to the tenth emergency special session, that’s A/RES/ES/10/17, in which it says it decides to adjourn the tenth emergency special session temporarily and to authorize the President of the General Assembly at its most recent session to resume the meeting of the special session upon the request of Member States, which is what he has done for this particular case.  He could have used other formulas, because in the General Assembly you can discuss anything that the Member countries want.

If you recall, in the agenda of the General Assembly for this year, we have the issue of Palestine, that’s item 16, and we have the issue of peace in the Middle East, that’s item 15, if I recall well.  He could have also used that formula.  In other words, the General Assembly has several possibilities to discuss this particular issue.  It’s up to the Member countries to decide which one they believe is the most appropriate.  Many countries believe that this was the best formula, among other things, because it wants to call to attention that this is an emergency session.  It is not an ordinary session.

Question:  To follow up on the question, you mentioned that the President of the General Assembly deferred the meeting when it was close for the Security Council to take action.  Can we assume that, if there is a ceasefire reached or some sort of being close to that, would you also think of deferring that session as well?

Spokesperson:  Again, it is up to the Member countries.  I want to make this very clear, because the President of the General Assembly is echoing the will of the Member countries.  There are many countries who believe that having a ceasefire is good.  However, it is not good enough right now, because nobody is respecting the ceasefire.  That is one of the items.  But, it is not the only one.  There are many countries that would like the General Assembly to discuss other issues.  There are different positions depending on the countries, as you know, from the setting up of a much-more clear monitoring system for the ceasefire, to accountability, to the violation of international law.  It’s up to the countries to decide what to do and to bring this issue to the General Assembly and to any other bodies.

Question:  What procedure does the President of the General Assembly anticipate using at the end of the discussion?  Would he contemplate adoption of whatever document that will come out, resolution or declaration, by consensus or will he call for a vote?  After that, what impact does he think it will make on getting or not getting the ceasefire?

Spokesperson:  Again, and I keep repeating myself, but I think it’s important to mention that this is up to the Member countries.  It’s up to the Member countries to decide what action they want to take.  If we go into a resolution, if a resolution has wide consensus, it will be approved by consensus.  If there is not a wide consensus, but there is a majority, then the President might decide to go to a vote.  Those are the rules of the game, as you know.  What impact can that have?  That is hard to say.  As you know very well, the Security Council approved that resolution asking for the ceasefire.  As I said before, if anything, the military operations have increased in the area.  Many Member countries, including the President of the General Assembly, believe that, at least if the General Assembly sends a very strong message supporting the ceasefire, and supporting the resolution of the Security Council -- the Security Council only has 15 members while the General Assembly represents the whole international community -- it will be a strong message for all the efforts that have been done in order to achieve the ceasefire, which is what is really needed right now.  The other options depend on the Member countries.  I’m not going to take many more questions, because I think we have Mr. Ging waiting for us with very fresh information.

Question:  The President of the General Assembly has been very active and outspoken, condemning Israel for its campaign and blaming Israel for the civilian suffering in Gaza.  And he’s called for a ceasefire.  But he has not spoken about the Hamas rockets against Israeli towns and cities and targeting civilians.  What is his position about Hamas firing rockets and the inability of holding a ceasefire and Hamas’ role?

Spokesperson:  Jonathan, I fully disagree with you.  He’s been extremely outspoken in favour of a ceasefire, in favour of condemning any kind of violence coming from anywhere.  In this particular case, we are talking about an area where he has been condemning both acts of violence.  He has condemned it publicly.  He has condemned it to you when you asked that very same question at the stakeout.  I don’t think it is fair to say that he’s not been calling for this.  When you call for a ceasefire, you call for a ceasefire from both parties to a conflict.  He has said, from day one, first that he is against any sort of violence and he has said that very explicitly.  He has also underlined, in a question from you that was in the last press conference, that he understands the right of the Israeli people to defend themselves and that he understands also the right of the Palestinian people to defend themselves.  Right now, what is needed, at this moment, is an immediate ceasefire respected by all the parties.

Thank you very much.