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Secretary-General

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PRESS CONFERENCE BY SECRETARY-GENERAL BAN KI-MOON AT UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS

Following is a transcript of UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's press conference, held in New York today, 17 April:

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen.

It is a great pleasure to see you. I am telling you that, tomorrow, I will visit Washington, D.C., to participate in the annual finance ministers [meeting] organized by the World Bank. I have a series of meetings with finance ministers who are participating on major issues.

These meetings mark a new advance in cooperation between the United Nations and the World Bank.

The discussions, which will continue on Friday, coincide with the spring meetings of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Presidents, prime ministers, finance ministers and others will be there — high-level attendance that we hope to turn into high-level political support for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

We will focus on four main areas. First is education, one of the smartest investments we can make in the world's future well-being.

Second, climate change and sustainable energy. Climate change is a crisis in the making; sustainable energy will be a major part of any solution.

Third, poverty. Earlier this month we marked 1,000 days until the 2015 deadline for achieving the MDGs. We have made remarkable progress. But there remains much to do and we must make this period one of action.

Fourth, the role of the development banks. For the first time, I will meet with the heads of all the world's leading development banks to strengthen our partnership on financing and in the key area of statistics. The Deputy Secretary-General, Jan Eliasson, will join me and will use his time to highlight the crucial issues of sanitation and the rule of law. I thank President Dr. Jim Yong Kim of the World Bank for his commitment to strengthening this partnership.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me now turn to a number of pressing peace and security matters.

First, the tragedy in Syria worsens by the day. The military dynamic is destroying the country and imperilling the region. Civilians are paying the price and must be protected. The United Nations is doing its best to deliver desperately-needed aid and to support the crushing burden of more than a million refugees on Syria's neighbours.

The prospects may seem dim, but I remain convinced that a political solution is possible. This is the

only way to end the bloodshed and bring about a new and democratic Syria. The United Nations will continue to push in that direction. I will meet later today with Joint Special Representative Lakhdar Brahimi to consider the options.

I remain focused on my fact-finding mission to investigate allegations of chemical weapons use in Syria. The team of experts is ready to deploy quickly as soon as we have the Syrian Government's consent. The mission needs to be able to investigate all the allegations made by Member States.

I have been urging the Syrian Government to show flexibility in accepting the proposed modalities. While awaiting consent from the Syrian Government, the mission will proceed with its fact-finding activities. To this end, specific information has been requested from the Governments concerned.

On Mali, security has greatly improved as a result of the timely actions of French and African military forces. However, much remains to be done to restore Mali's constitutional order and territorial integrity. Military operations and stabilization are essential. But let me emphasize once again that political progress is the key to any lasting solution.

I am also alarmed by the clashes in the Central African Republic. I urge the de facto authorities to restore law and order throughout the country. I welcome the efforts of the African Union and the Economic Community of Central African States — ECCAS — to promote peace.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Security Council adopted an important resolution setting out a new approach that reinforces our political efforts and strengthens the military role of MONUSCO [United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo], including through the establishment of an intervention brigade to address the problem of armed groups. I have since appointed Mary Robinson as my Special Envoy for the Great Lakes region.

The Middle East peace process remains a priority. We cannot allow the window for achieving a two-State solution to close any further. I welcome the recent visits by President [Barack] Obama and Secretary [John] Kerry to Jerusalem and Ramallah. All involved, including the Quartet, should work to breathe new life into the peace process, create an environment conducive for the resumption of negotiations and establish a credible political horizon for achieving a two-State solution.

On the Korean Peninsula, the situation remains highly volatile. The international community has responded in a firm but measured way to the nuclear test, threats and other provocative acts by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). The recent developments have strengthened the international consensus that the DPRK will not be accepted as a nuclear-weapon-State.

I continue to urge the DPRK leadership to reverse course and return to the negotiating table. I have spoken with leaders in China, the United States, the Republic of Korea and many other countries. I firmly believe that the recent offer of dialogue by the Republic of Korea is genuine and hope that the DPRK takes it seriously. As Secretary-General, I will continue my efforts to facilitate meaningful dialogue.

At the same time, the international community should not lose sight of the serious humanitarian and human rights situation in the DPRK. I encourage the authorities to focus on the well-being of the country's people.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for your attention. I will be happy to answer some of your questions.

Question: Good afternoon, Mr. Secretary-General, and on behalf of the UN Correspondents Association, thank you for being with us. My question is about what you mentioned about Syria. The Joint Special Representative Brahimi — there are reports that he is looking to resign. Will you be trying to

convince him to stay, in your meeting with him? Do you have anything to comment on that? Will you be meeting with [Nabil] Elaraby, the Arab League chief, anytime soon?

Secretary-General: You might have heard a lot of speculation and rumours. That's what I also heard. The important thing is that I am going to have a meeting, a bilateral meeting, with Dr. Lakhdar Brahimi this afternoon. And I will have another meeting with the Secretary General of the League of Arab States early next week in New York, so we will have the opportunity of meeting all together. At this time, I do not have any further comments on this.

Question: A quick follow-up on this; the Russian Ambassador has dismissed the Arab League as a viable partner in this. Should this mission be separated? Also, my main question, which is: you often remark on terrorist events around the world. Two days in, do you have anything to say about Boston? Also this morning, a rocket attack in Israel.

Secretary-General: I have already issued my statement, immediately after this tragic incident which happened on the occasion of the Boston Marathon. I have strongly condemned such an attack against civilian populations. Many people were wounded, with three people killed. I have conveyed my deepest condolences and sympathies for all those wounded and killed. Now what is important is that I've been closely following all of the investigations by the authorities of the United States. I sincerely hope that they will be able to find the perpetrators and bring anybody, whoever may be [guilty], to justice. The United Nations is also strengthening safety and security measures throughout all the United Nations compounds. We are also trying to strengthen the security measures all throughout the missions around the world. I sincerely hope that the international community should be committed and united in fighting against any such terrorist attacks.

Question: On Syria — a separation between the Arab League and the UN?

Secretary-General: There is no such consideration. Lakhdar Brahimi has been and will continue to work as Joint Special Representative. And it is very important that the United Nations works together with the League of Arab States. That is why I am going to have a meeting with the League of Arab States' Secretary General, Elaraby, next week.

Question: And the rockets in Israel?

Secretary-General: Let me just have one question by one person. Thank you very much.

Question: You said yourself that the situation worsening in Syria by the day. And all these reports and rumours about Lakhdar Brahimi's resignation are definitely having a very negative effect on the situation. Syria itself argued that it might even increase the violence. You just said that Lakhdar Brahimi is the Joint Special Representative and will stay. Are you confirming now that there is no resignation on the table and that he won't leave the JSR [Joint Special Representative] for the foreseeable future? You just said that he is and will continue to be. These are your words, sir.

Secretary-General: I think that I am not going to repeat what I have said. I am going to meet him this afternoon. We will discuss all our strategies with him, but I have nothing to confirm, anything, as you are suggesting, that he has resigned... No, I have not received.

Question: But you are saying that he is now and he will continue to be. As I'm sure you agree that all these reports are very negative. Some people say that it brings the process back to the first steps, including the Deputy Foreign Minister of Russia saying that, in the case of him resigning. Can you assure us that he will be there for the foreseeable future?

Secretary-General: Let me get back to you later. I have nothing further to add at this point.

Question: I would like follow up on your comments on the DPRK situation. I would like to know if you see the situation that there is less possibility now somehow that they will explode a nuclear explosion or launch of missiles. And also, you mentioned that we should be mindful of the humanitarian and human rights situation. What can the UN or the international community do about it?

Secretary-General: The tension in and around the Korean peninsula is still remaining and persisting. That is why it is important for concerned countries in and around the Korean peninsula [to] exercise all their diplomatic efforts to, first of all, reduce the tension so that there should not be any miscalculation or misjudgement. This is very important. If by any misjudgement and miscalculation, if there is violence, then the situation will be uncontrollable. That is why we are very much concerned. That is why I have been working very hard with all of the leaders in the region. Again, it is important that we first reduce the tension, and, at this time, I'm urging the authorities of the DPRK again to reverse the course and do more for enhancing their people's well-being.

You asked about the humanitarian situation and human rights situation. As far as humanitarian situation, it is well known that they have a very serious food and nutrition crisis and the stunting of children. That is very worrisome. The United Nations has been providing humanitarian assistance through the CERF — the Central Emergency Response Fund. I sincerely hope that with the reduction of tension, the international community should also consider providing humanitarian assistance. When it comes to the human rights situation, you may remember that the Human Rights Council last month adopted a resolution establishing a commission of inquiry into all of the allegations of human rights abuses and violations in the DPRK. That is what I expect — that this commission will carry out their missions and mandate.

Question: Mr. Secretary-General, you helped open a newly refurbished UN Security Council last night. It had that new room feel. My question, though, deals with the people who do a lot of the hard work for the UN — the staff, the people out in the field. There seems to be a rising trend over the last few months of staff members saying there are untouchables, that there is management that is calcified, there is no chance for new opportunities, that people either on the Secretary-General's staff or elsewhere — it's a very sclerotic system. What have you accomplished? Do you believe in trying to change this? Is there any hope for younger staffers who are in the field risking their lives or are in difficult situations to either get jobs here or to believe that there are chances for promotion? This comes as you have other whistleblowers who say the UN is not being fair and they get overruled in tribunals and things like that. Thank you.

Secretary-General: First of all, you know that my commitment and my vision, as well as priority, [is] to make this Organization a global Secretariat — more effective and efficient and more mobile and transparent and accountable. That has been my strong commitment. And I think we have been making good progress so far. But I admit that there is much more to be done when it comes to management reform — “change management”. I understand that there are frustrations [among] some young staff for their opportunities of having promotions or being able to move around, having different opportunities. That is why I proposed my mobility proposal as part of human resources reform programmes. I am glad that the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly has approved my proposal for human resources management reform, including mobility. I am now going to provide more information to the September regular session of the General Assembly.

On this whistleblower issue, as you know, we have well-established practice and regulations to protect those whistleblowers. This has been in place since January 2006. Still, we are receiving certain complaints about implementing all of these whistleblower-protection policies. Therefore, we have asked outside consultants to look into this process, whether there is any area for improvement. This report will come to me and we will do our best. As you know, this administrative justice system has been one of my key legacies. Since 1 July 2009, we have established the Dispute Tribunal and Appeals Tribunal. And the staff, when they have complaints or grievances, they have a very good way to bring their grievances to this Dispute Tribunal, then later, the Appeals Tribunal.

Question: Thank you, Secretary-General. My question is on the eastern Congo. There have been some steps taken by the Security Council at the end of March for the intervention brigade and last week's

call by G8 (Group of Eight) members, and also William Hague from the United Kingdom, to step up the call to action to protect women and girls. There has been a recent statement by African women's groups that indeed the intervention brigade could escalate the violence against women and girls. What is your view about the brigade and the next steps going forward to protect women in that region?

Secretary-General: The Security Council's resolution, recently adopted, to deploy an intervention brigade is a very new concept and a very important one. It would be unfair to judge anything even before the intervention brigade is deployed. We are working very hard to deploy this intervention brigade. I sincerely hope that the intervention brigade will really make a great contribution in ensuring peace and security in eastern DRC [Democratic Republic of Congo]. I am going to have a meeting with the leaders who have signed this framework agreement on peace and security and cooperation on the DRC and the Great Lakes region in May, on the occasion of my participating in a special African Union summit meeting, in late May. I am going to organize a meeting with all those so-called 11+4 framework who have signed, the 11 leaders who have signed the framework agreement and four guarantors, including SADC [Southern African Development Community], the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), the African Union and the United Nations. Therefore, I sincerely hope that with this new deployment of the intervention brigade, we will have a much greater assurance of peace and security, including protecting the civilian population, women's rights; all these will be our priority.

Question: Thank you, Mr. Secretary-General. You have already spoken about the horrible earthquake that hit the Pakistan-Iran region. But are you planning to send teams to assess the damage and to provide relief for the victims of the earthquake? And sir, you may have also noticed that the Taliban violence has increased dramatically against the political candidates fighting for the historic elections in Pakistan. Are you planning to send observers to monitor the elections?

Secretary-General: Let me think about that. I had brief talks with Ambassador Khan of Pakistan and I re-conveyed my deepest condolences and sympathy to the people of Pakistan on this [damage] caused by the earthquake. We will have to see. We need to have more information. As I said yesterday, the impact of this earthquake seems to be less than might have been expected, considering the magnitude of this earthquake. We are still getting information on this issue.

Question: And on the Taliban?

Secretary-General: This has been our consistent position, that we condemn all Taliban attacks against the civilian population. I think it is not only the Pakistani Government, but all the regional countries and the international community [that] should work together with one voice to counter all these terrorist attacks.

Question: Mr. Secretary-General, diplomats from here, from the UN, confirmed to me that Serbia did offer to the UN and to ICTY [International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia] withdrawal from last week's debate on the international system if UN allows Serbian nationals convicted for war crimes to serve their sentences in Serbia.

Secretary-General: For that particular situation...

Question: This was said at last week's debate by the President of Serbia, as well.

Secretary-General: I am not aware of whom the President of the General Assembly has invited, specifically. It is his mandate, his prerogative. As you know, I participated myself with the strong belief that strengthening the mandate and the role of the international criminal justice system is very important for accountability and justice. That is my firm belief. That is why I participated in that meeting. On the specific questions raised about those people convicted by the ICTY to serve their terms in Serbia or in their own home countries, I understand that the ICTY has gone through a very comprehensive review of this system, and they concluded that it is not proper at this time to allow those convicted persons, prisoners, to serve their terms in their own home countries. That I have conveyed to President [Tomislav] Nikolić and Prime

Minister [Ivica] Dačić of Serbia in my bilateral meetings. This is what I can tell you at this time

Thank you very much. I have a meeting with the President of the General Assembly now. I should keep this time; I should not be late.

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