



# 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 Martin Nesirky, Spokesperson for the Secretary-General.

Good afternoon. Welcome to the briefing.

### **\*\*Secretary-General's Travel**

The Secretary-General will travel to Paris this weekend. He will first attend France's National Day military parade which this year will include peacekeepers from the newly established United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, MINUSMA.

The Secretary-General will have meetings with the French President, Prime Minister, Defence Minister and the President of the National Assembly. He is also expected to meet with Heads of State attending France's National Day celebration, as well as with the Secretary-General of the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie.

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

And this morning, the Security Council was briefed in closed consultations on Sudan and South Sudan by the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Hervé Ladsous.

This afternoon, the Council will be holding an [open meeting](#) on Sudan, followed by closed consultations on the UN peacekeeping mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

### **\*\* Central African Republic**

The Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Valerie Amos, and the European Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response, Kristalina Georgieva, are on a two-day mission in the Central African Republic.

Today, in Bangui, they expressed deep concern about the plight of the people affected by instability across the country and called for increased humanitarian access to people in need of urgent aid. Ms. Amos said that the entire population of 4.6 million people was affected by the crisis and expressed particular concern about the impact of the crisis on women and children.

She also said that security was a major concern and that the UN was working hard to re-establish its presence and programmes in different parts of the country.

Ms. Amos and Ms. Georgieva met the Head of the transition and members of the transitional government and urged the authorities to guarantee that humanitarian organizations can carry out their programmes.

**\*\* Mali**

The UN Stabilization Mission in Mali, MINUSMA, facilitated the arrival in Kidal, northern Mali, of Governor Adama Kamissoko today. The Governor arrived in Kidal with 10 other Malian officials to work on the planning of the presidential election. Speaking to journalists, Bert Koenders, the Secretary-General's Special Representative, noted that the Governor's arrival was an important and timely step in the process towards elections. He added that he was confident that all parties will cooperate on fully implementing the peace accord.

**\*\* Cereals**

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) said in a new report today that cereal production is forecast to increase by nearly 7 per cent this year compared with last year, bringing the global total this year to the highest level in history. The Organization said that wheat production dropped significantly below average in Syria this year, with the conflict disrupting farming activities, while in Egypt, civil unrest and dwindling foreign exchange reserves have raised serious food security concerns.

The report also said that, despite an improved cereal harvest in 2012 and the near-normal outcome of the harvest so far this year, chronic food insecurity exists.

The full report is available on the website of the Food and Agriculture Organization.

**\*\* Malala Day — UN Youth Assembly**

Tomorrow at 9:30 a.m., in the Trusteeship Council Chamber, Malala Yousafzai will address the United Nations Youth Assembly on her sixteenth birthday. The event will be a call for action on global education. It will be attended by the Secretary-General; by Vuk Jeremić, the President of the General Assembly; Gordon Brown, the UN Special Envoy for Global Education; and Ahmad Alhendawi, the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, among other people.

**\*\* News and Media Division**

And finally, due to an error on the part of the News and Media Division of the Department of Public Information, the Indian Trade Minister, who met the Secretary-General yesterday, was wrongly identified in the caption of the official UN photo and in the media alert. Our colleagues regret the error and have apologized to the Permanent Mission of India.

Questions, please? Tim? And then Mr. Abbadi.

**\*\* Questions and Answers**

**Question:** In the past... about the... The UN has accepted the invitation to go to Damascus — Mr. Sellström and Ms. Kane. In the past, the Secretary-General has insisted on unfettered access. Now will that still be the case when they go there, to Damascus?

**Spokesperson:** Well, let us be very clear about what this is about. First of all, let us simply say the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs and the Head of the United Nations mission to investigate allegations of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic have obtained the Secretary-General's approval to accept the invitation of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to visit Damascus, and the Secretary-General hopes that this visit will occur as soon as possible. Now, to answer your specific question, the purpose of the visit will be to complete the consultations on the modalities of cooperation required for the proper, safe and efficient conduct of the mission — in other words, the mission to investigate allegations. The Secretary-General wishes to emphasize that, in light of the seriousness of

allegations of the use of chemical weapons, the mission will continue its activities which are aimed at establishing the facts in a credible manner. In accordance with the guidelines and procedures approved by the General Assembly, there can be no substitute for an on-site investigation at all relevant locations in the Syrian Arab Republic.

But I just want to emphasize that Ms. Kane and Dr. Sellström have, with the Secretary-General's approval, they have accepted the invitation. The Secretary-General hopes that that visit will occur as soon as possible. And this visit will be to complete consultations on the modalities of cooperation required for the proper, safe and efficient conduct of the mission. In other words, it is not the investigation mission, it's to go there to complete the consultations on the modalities.

Question: But... but that would include where they would go in Syria; where they could go?

Spokesperson: Well, this is what consultations are about, and I've just emphasized what the Secretary-General has said in the past and what the guidelines and procedures are in the General Assembly resolution. Namely that there could be no substitute for an on-site investigation at all relevant locations. And also that the Secretary-General is emphasizing that the mission will continue its activities which are aimed at establishing the facts in a credible manner. And as we already mentioned the other day, Dr. Sellström and his team have continued to monitor developments and collect and analyse information made available by Member States. And it was as a result of those activities that the Secretary... that the Secretary-General met Dr. Sellström yesterday so that Dr. Sellström could bring him up to speed on those latest activities. Yes, Matthew?

Question: Sure, Martin. There is a... it's said that the... the cabinet in Nepal met to... to approve the... the deployment of troops, the article from Nepal says, to Syria, but I am wondering, is that the... is that the goal... as UNDOF, have they receive... have they sought and received a yes answer from Nepal to deploy peacekeepers to UNDOF and also I wanted to a... to... to... wherever they are being deployed and with all due respect to Nepal, given what happened in Haiti, I wanted to get some kind of an update on what screening is done by the UN of peacekeepers from any country and which has cholera hotspots before they are deployed to another area?

Spokesperson: Well, on the second part of your question, I don't have anything to add to what we have said in the past on that topic. On the first part of your question, I will need to check with my colleagues in Peacekeeping Operations. As I said the other day, we have confirmed the deployment partly completed and under way of Fijian peacekeepers. And I did say at that time that the Department of Peacekeeping Operations is in discussions with a number of troop-contributing countries. And I don't have details at this point on which countries they might be. Okay. Other question, please? Yes, Mr. Abbadi, yes?

Question: Thank you, Martin. You relayed the difficult economic, financial and food situation in Egypt. Does the Secretary-General have any comment regarding the decision of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and UAE to grant Egypt \$12 billion?

Spokesperson: No, not really, Mr. Abbadi, I don't, no. We've simply reiterated that the Secretary-General is following developments in Egypt very closely. I can tell you in fact that he just spoke a short time ago to the Foreign Minister of Egypt, Mohamed Kamel Amr, and I would expect to have some more details on that conversation a little bit later. Yes, Pamela?

Question: Thank you, Eduardo. The Secretary-General...

Spokesperson: Eduardo?

Correspondent: Ooh... Wow! Wrong day!

Spokesperson: I need to grow a beard!

Correspondent: [laughter] Thank you, Martin.

Spokesperson: It might take some time!

Question: Sorry about that. The Secretary-General has said a lot about Malala; written an op-ed; he will say a lot more tomorrow. Anything you have to add about why this... the greater significance about the Malala visit in terms of women's rights; in terms of education?

Spokesperson: Well, I think we have said from the outset, from the day that that terrible shooting, assassination attempt, took place that Malala Yousafzai is a symbol for the rights of girls, and indeed the rights of all young people to an education. And she has further underscored that symbolism through her remarkable recovery and her eloquence in explaining her case and her position. And I think it is in that context that the Secretary-General will be welcoming her here at the United Nations. As you have seen, the President of the General Assembly will also be there, and Gordon Brown, who is after all, the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Global Education for this initiative, which was launched and which really seeks to build on the Secretary-General's existing efforts, and also to mobilize through the increased awareness that there is as a result of Malala's own activism. So this is a way to combine those efforts. I am sure that there will be a great deal of attention on what Malala has to say. And of course, the Secretary-General will be meeting with her, as we said, as I said yesterday.

Correspondent: Thank you.

Spokesperson: Okay, other questions, please? Matthew? And then back to Mr. Abbadi, yes?

Question: Sure. If... if you have any beard questions, I am ready for you, but...

Spokesperson: Okay, thank you. You're the expert.

Question: No, no, no expert, but I... I wanted to ask you about... in the... the DRC, there is a... the... the... Médecins Sans Frontières has complained that MONUSCO was "imposing armed escorts" on humanitarian workers, and they have raised this as a problem that blurs the line between military and humanitarian and... and it seems... if it were ru... it seems that the MONUSCO spokesman has kind of confirmed it and has actually said that Médecins Sans Frontières is... you know, shouldn't complain about this, this is all about protecting civilians. Since I know there is... it's kind of a big issue this... this independence...and impartiality of... of humanitarian workers, is there... at the Secretariat level, is... that the policy of the peacekeeping missions: to impose armed guards on humanitarians that are not requesting it and don't want it?

Spokesperson: I'd need to check with my colleagues in the Mission there precisely what the story is before I respond on that, Matthew. Before I come to you, Mr. Abbadi, let me just provide the readout which I said I thought would be coming.

I have a readout of the Secretary-General's telephone conversation with Mr. Mohamed Kamel Ali Amr, who is the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Arab Republic of Egypt. The Secretary-General spoke today with the Egyptian Foreign Minister, Mohamed Kamel Amr. The Secretary-General expressed deep concern about continued detentions in Egypt and arrest warrants issued against Muslim Brotherhood leaders and others. He reminded the Foreign Minister of Egypt of Egypt's international obligations, and the need to fully respect the right to freedom of association, speech and due process.

He made clear that there is no place for retribution or for the exclusion of any major party or community in Egypt. He reiterated his support for the aspirations of the Egyptian people and called for a peaceful dialogue that includes all parts of Egypt's political spectrum to find a way forward.

The Secretary-General underscored the United Nations' support for an Egyptian Government fully accountable to the Egyptian people.

That's what I have for you. Yes, Mr. Abbadi?

Question: Thank you, Martin. The visit of the Secretary-General to Paris you just announced, is there a precedent for such a visit of a Secretary-General from the UN attending national celebrations? And who is accompanying the Secretary-General in this trip?

Spokesperson: Well, first of all, I believe there is a precedent, including at that very celebration just a couple of years ago, I believe. I could provide you the exact details. So it is not unprecedented. I don't have the delegation list with me. I do believe the Head of Peacekeeping Operations will be there. I don't have a list of others within the delegation, and I don't think we would probably disclose the entire list any way. Yes, Pamela? And then Matthew.

Question: Thank you, Martin. My question is about that letter, I did follow up and Eduardo had... did say that the Secretary-General doesn't comment on International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia decision, but there was a letter written by 100 journalists and organizations to the Secretary-General. Can you just find out if that has been received and if he intends to respond at least to the letter which is a plea to intervene or comment on the acquittals of two Serbian intelligence officers?

Spokesperson: I will check again, but I think that you have had the answer from Eduardo. But I can certainly check again.

Question: He wasn't able to confirm if the letter was received.

Spokesperson: I'll check again, Pamela. Yes?

[The Spokesperson later confirmed that the letter was received.]

Question: Sure. I want to ask about Mali and Myanmar. But first... I mean, in the same spirit, do a... just a follow-up which I am sorry to do, but... about 12 days ago, I asked DPKO if the units named in the group of experts report disc... in... on the DRC described in a variety of acts of child soldiers looting even of UN compounds and rape, whether — just for a simple yes or no answer — whether MONUSCO provides military support to them. And I... at least it was indicated then that an... an answer would be provided, there was some delay by... because they had to ask MONUSCO, but given that 12 days have past, I am just wondering how long it can take DPKO to know if there is a human rights due-diligence policy which means that you can't support units that are... that are shown and this is on the UN report to be engaged in these activities. Is an answer ever gonna be forthcoming or they're essentially saying they're not gonna say if they support those units? I am sorry to put it that way, but I don't...

Spokesperson: Well, you can put it any number of ways, if I don't have any follow-up at the moment, then I don't have any follow-up. I am sure my colleagues have heard your impassioned plea for an answer, and will respond accordingly.

Question: And this is...

Spokesperson: And what was the other one?

Question: Yeah, this is... this is on Mali, and it... I... I don't know if it is equally as impassioned, it hasn't been 12 days, so I'll just put it this way, it seems that Mr. Ladsous did a briefing yesterday about his trip to Mali, so I wanted to ask you a question about it. He... you know, he'd said that... that there would be electoral support and then there is a... there is a quote from a... an unnamed senior UN official at this briefing, saying that the Chadians, Chad, yes, that... that all of the Chadian soldiers to participate in

MINUSMA have been checked for age and passed the test and, therefore, that's why they are included. And I just wanted to make sure if... if there hadn't been some misunderstanding. It had been said that... that... that because they are on the UN's list of child soldier recruitment, even if they don't send child soldiers to Chad they have to take ex... five, short-term steps and five more long-term to remain in MINUSMA, that a... there is a... there is some kind of a grace period of four months. I just wanted to, I guess, to get... to maybe you will have it here or maybe you can get it from them, is... what is the UN's position on the participation of a listed child soldier recruiter in MINUSMA? Is it enough to just not send children or do they actually have to get themselves off the list or take the steps that Mr. Ruggi described?

Spokesperson: Well, I think that quite a lot has been provided on this already, but let me check again for you, Matthew. I don't have anything else in my...

Correspondent: Okay.

Spokesperson: ...otherwise very useful folder.

Question: I think this one will be right in your bailiwick, and maybe... you may... slap me down, and so I'll just throw it up there. Yesterday, sitting where you are, the... the Ambassador of Saudi Arabia, the Permanent Representative of Saudi Arabia, gave a kind of a readout of... of his meeting and others with the Djibouti and other ambassadors with the Secretary-General, Mr. Nambiar about the Rohingya. And he seemed to say — in fact he said — that... that... and I don't know if... whether it was the Secretary-General or Mr. Nambiar that he was quoting, that they indicated that the President of Myanmar may not be fully informed of the plight of the... of the Rohingya, but that there was a commitment to do more, but that possibly the problem was a lack of information on the... on the part of the President of Myanmar and... and the Saudi Arabian Ambassador said that wasn't it — to him it, he didn't really understand that. So I wanted to know, is that kind of an accurate, what the rep... what's your response to that? Is that an accurate presentation of what took place in the meeting? Is that the Secretariat's position and what... what steps... since that meeting with the ambassadors yesterday, di... is the Secretariat going to take on the Rohingya issue?

Spokesperson: Well, the meeting only took place yesterday afternoon, Matthew. So, I don't think that you would anticipate that anything dramatic would have happened in the meantime. There was something, I think rather meaningful that took place earlier in the day as well. And that was the Group of Friends on Myanmar. I think that you will probably agree that the [remarks](#) that the Secretary-General made there and which we publicized were quite strong and are quite clear with regard to the Rohingya population. And I would simply refer you to those remarks, in particular where the Secretary-General said that the President has strongly condemned these acts and made clear his determination to punish the perpetrators. He also evoked the country's religious and ethnic diversity and expressed resolve in protecting all lives. These commitments must be translated into concrete action. There is a dangerous polarization taking place within Myanmar. If it is not addressed urgently and firmly, underlying tensions could provoke more upheaval, undermining the reform process and triggering negative regional repercussions. And there is more there — I won't read it all out — but simply to say that the Secretary-General made it very clear that he is troubled by the communal violence that we have seen there and spelled out a number of steps that need to be taken. And the meeting with the ambassadors you mentioned was an important meeting, and the Secretary-General and the Special Adviser on Myanmar were certainly in listening mode, but I am not going to characterize any responses that there were.

Thanks very much. Have a good afternoon, thank you.

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