



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 Michèle Montas, Spokesperson for the Secretary-General.

Good afternoon, all.

****Security Council**

Turkey has assumed the rotating presidency of the Security Council for this month. There are no meetings or consultations planned for today.

Council members are expected to be discussing this month's programme of work at a meeting tomorrow morning, followed at 12:30 p.m. by a press briefing by the Council's President, Turkish Ambassador Baki Ilkin, here in this room 226.

****General Assembly**

The Secretary-General this morning briefed an informal meeting of the General Assembly on the latest developments, including a first-hand account of some of his recent missions, as well as a look ahead to events in the coming weeks. The remarks were made available to you.

The Secretary-General noted that he had travelled to Geneva where he addressed the Conference on Disarmament. There, he had stressed the need to break the stalemate that has persisted for more than a decade. In his speech today and in a statement issued Friday, the Secretary-General welcomed that members of the Conference have done just that by adopting a programme of work after 12 years at an impasse. This augurs well for developments in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation, he said.

But he said he deeply regrets that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is choosing to go in a negative direction. He repeated his call for the country to refrain from taking any further provocative actions and to return to the process of dialogue.

The Secretary-General also briefed on his recent visit to Sri Lanka. He noted that he had consistently and repeatedly raised the strongest concern over civilian casualties. In regard to some reports in the media, he said the final total is not yet known. Most of these figures do not emanate from the UN and most are not consistent with the information at our disposal. He went on to categorically reject any suggestion that the United Nations has deliberately underestimated any figures. And he again said whatever the total, the casualties in the conflict were unacceptably high.

He said he had strongly urged the Government to recognize international calls for an inquiry, and repeatedly stressed the need for full accountability and transparency. The Secretary-General hopes the Government will follow up on the joint statement, issued at the conclusion of his visit.

Any inquiry conducted by the international community would require, he said, first, the full cooperation of the host government, or, second, the support of the UN Member States, expressed through the Human Rights Council, the General Assembly or the Security Council.

The Secretary-General said: "I stand ready to do whatever we can in the interests of justice, human rights

and Sri Lanka's political future.”

On Pakistan, which is witnessing one of the largest, fastest displacements the world has seen in the past 15 years, he reported that some 2.4 million people in the Swat valley have fled their homes, including nearly 2 million in the past three weeks. Noting the immense human suffering, he said that only one fifth of a \$543 million appeal had been received. He warned that if we do not get the rest of the funds, we will have to start cutting services.

The Secretary-General also flagged important occasions in the weeks ahead, including the planned launch at the G8 Summit in Italy of the UN's Global Vulnerability Alert, which will provide real-time information on the social effects of the economic crisis worldwide.

** Sudan

The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Sudan, Ashraf Qazi, has expressed major concern over the recent increase in violent ethnic clashes in two states in Southern Sudan. In a statement issued at the end of a two-day visit to the area, Mr. Qazi said that compared to Darfur, recent casualties from the clashes in Upper Nile and Jonglei States have been higher, for the same period. He urged the international community, the regional and local actors, to address the situation as an utmost priority.

In recent months more than 1,000 people have been killed in Upper Nile and Jonglei States as a result of violent ethnic clashes. Just last month, the United Nations deployed 120 police, military, as well as civilian personnel in Akobo and Pibor counties in an effort to calm down tension between rival ethnic groups.

In a separate statement, Mr. Qazi has also, on behalf of the United Nations, extended his condolences to both the bereaved family and the people of Sudan over the death of former Sudanese President Jaafar Nimeiri, who died over the weekend.

** Darfur

Meanwhile, the new Deputy Force Commander for the UN-AU Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), Major General Mbutyana Duma Dumisani of South Africa, arrived in El Fasher over the weekend to take up his duties. He is replacing Major General Emmanuel Karenzi of Rwanda. Dumisani said upon arrival that he plans to work, among other tasks, on addressing the Mission's enormous logistical and deployment challenges. This is Major General Dumisani's third peacekeeping assignment. There's more on this in a UNAMID press release upstairs.

And delivering a Secretary-General message in Dar-es-Salam at an event marking Peacekeeping Day on Friday, the UN country representative, Julitta Onabanjo, said that 22 female soldiers are expected to be among the 835 Tanzanian peacekeepers who will soon be joining UNAMID's ranks.

** Democratic Republic of the Congo

On the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) is supporting Congolese government forces in an ongoing effort to flush out Rwandan rebels from the DRC's north-eastern regions. The offensive, launched this past Thursday, involves an aerial manoeuvre over Lubero territory in the restive North Kivu province, where fighters from the FDLR (Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda) have routinely attacked civilians and destroyed their property. The Mission says that a top objective of the operation is to exert pressure on the FDLR and prevent threats against the vulnerable populations.

And earlier today in The Hague, the International Criminal Court began public hearings to consider challenges by defence lawyers to the admissibility of the case against alleged Congolese militia commander Germain Katanga. The Court says that it is the first time that it will take up a challenge to admissibility based on the complementarity principle. The hearing will see the participation of a Government of DRC delegation headed by the Minister of Justice.

An alleged commander of the Patriotic Force of Resistance in Ituri (FRPI), Katanga was arrested and transferred to the Court in October 2007. In March, the Court decided to join his case and that of accused Congolese militia leader Mathieu Ngudjolo Chui of the Nationalist Integrationist Front (FNI) into one single case of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

**** Pakistan**

We also have a number of humanitarian updates for you.

First, in Pakistan, the number of people displaced by the conflict in the North-West Frontier Province is at least 2.5 million. That number was already quoted by the Secretary-General today in his address to the General Assembly.

The UN refugee agency, UNHCR, and the Commissionerate of Afghan Refugees are carrying out registration inside camps, while the Emergency Response Unit is registering people outside camps.

Over the past week, five spontaneous camps have been closed with people moving into established camps.

The existence of numerous spontaneous camps continues to be a matter of concern as they impede registration procedures for internally displaced persons (IDPs). They also restrict their ability to receive relief supplies, services and information on long-term support.

On the issue of shelter, rising temperatures are making it more difficult for families to remain in tents. So efforts are being made to provide adequate and culturally acceptable shelter. UNHCR is working closely with the World Food Programme (WFP) to assess and provide necessary facilities such as shaded areas, water points and toilets for internally displaced persons living outside camps. Many of them have been staying in lines in the heat for the distribution of non-food items.

The UN Population Fund (UNFPA) has initiated psychosocial support for women in camps of four districts (Lower Dir, Peshawar, Nowshera and Charsadda) through individual counselling and focus group discussions. General health, hygiene awareness and reproductive health sessions are also conducted in camps.

And the UN children's agency (UNICEF) is supporting 29 child-friendly spaces which are functional and effectively engaging children in different learning, creative and recreational activities in 13 IDP camps.

Water and sanitation conditions in IDP camps need urgent attention to prevent the spread of water-borne diseases. That was for Pakistan.

**** Somalia**

Another humanitarian update, this time on Somalia. In Somalia, more than 70,000 people have been newly displaced since fresh fighting erupted in the Somali capital, Mogadishu, on 7 May, according to the UN refugee agency, UNHCR. Most of those displaced are in need of emergency shelter, sanitation and clean water.

Along the Afgooye corridor, where a third of the newly displaced people have gone, the UN children's agency and its partners are reaching a total of 250,000 people with clean piped and trucked water. In the same corridor, UNHCR, through a local implementing partner, has started the distribution of non-food items, such as plastic sheets, mats, blankets, jerry cans and cooking utensils, to some 50,000 people recently displaced.

The World Food Programme has also been using local partner organizations to distribute a total of 4,600 metric tons of assorted food commodities to around 333,900 beneficiaries in the same area.

**** Zimbabwe**

Third humanitarian update today: Zimbabwe. The United Nations and humanitarian agencies in Zimbabwe have issued a revised appeal for \$718 million to assist 6 million people. This is an increase of \$168 million from the original appeal launched in November 2008.

The upward revision is due to a sharp decline in the provision of basic social services, which is considered one of the root causes of the extensive spread of the current cholera outbreak. The disease has claimed the lives of more than 4,000 people and infected nearly 100,000 people to date.

According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), food insecurity continues to be a major problem.

In November 2008, agencies requested some \$550 million to respond to the humanitarian crisis in Zimbabwe, of which only \$246 million has been received.

Catherine Bragg, Assistant Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, said: "We hope that donors will continue to be generous to the people of Zimbabwe who need help to save and rebuild their lives after years of adversity."

**** Lebanon**

On Lebanon, a ceremony marking a transfer of authority in the Maritime Task Force of the Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) took place today aboard a Belgium ship off the coast of Lebanon. Rear Admiral Jean-Thierry Pynoo of Belgium passed the leadership of the Task Force to Rear Admiral Ruggiero Di Biase of Italy in the presence of UNIFIL Force Commander Major-General Claudio Graziano, senior Lebanese Armed Forces officers and foreign diplomats in post in Lebanon.

Force Commander Major General Graziano praised "the constructive relationship" between the Maritime Task Force and the Lebanese Navy, saying it is vital to the successful implementation of the UN mandate.

**** Afghanistan**

And on Afghanistan, the UN Mission in Afghanistan says that some 35,000 Afghan police officers will be trained before elections this summer. You can read more about this and other developments in Afghanistan in the weekly press conferences notes from Kabul.

**** Climate Change**

On Climate Change, a second round of UN climate change talks kicked off today in Bonn, Germany. It's the first time that delegates from 182 countries will discuss key negotiating texts -- which can serve as the basis for an international climate change deal in Copenhagen in December.

As you know, the Copenhagen agreed outcome is to follow on the first phase of the Kyoto Protocol, which expires at the end of 2012.

The Executive Secretary of the United Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Yvo de Boer, expressed confidence that the world was on track towards negotiating a solid deal in Copenhagen. He said the political moment was right to reach an agreement.

The talks opening in Bonn today will run through 12 June and are the second in a series of five major negotiating sessions this year leading up to the UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen. We have more in a press release upstairs.

**** Food and Agriculture Organization -- Climate Change**

And still on Climate Change, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is urging climate negotiators to ensure that fisheries and aquaculture are not neglected during the ongoing discussions regarding the Kyoto Protocol's successor. FAO is among 16 international organizations that are warning that the world's fishing and coastal communities will bear the brunt of climate change's impacts. We have more on this upstairs.

**** World No Tobacco Day**

And then yesterday was World No Tobacco Day. In a [message](#) to mark the occasion, the Secretary-General urged governments everywhere to address the needless threat to public health that tobacco consumption represents.

He stressed that some 5.4 million people die from illnesses caused by tobacco consumption, while up to half of all smokers die from a tobacco-related disease. Left unchecked, he said, tobacco-related deaths will rise to more than 8 million by 2030.

That we continue to allow such diseases to be caused by tobacco consumption is a global tragedy, said the Secretary-General, adding that it also comes at vast expenses. We have his full message upstairs.

****Population Awards**

And later this afternoon, the Secretary-General will present the 2009 United Nations Population Award to two laureates: an Egyptian doctor, Mahmoud Fathalla, and a Nicaraguan non-governmental organization, Movimiento Comunal Nicaragüense. The Population Award is given to individuals and institutions for outstanding work in population and in improving the health of individuals.

In his [remarks](#), the Secretary-General is expected to underline Dr. Fathalla's impact in the field of family planning, reproductive rights and ending maternal deaths. He will also highlight the work of Movimiento Comunal Nicaragüense -- which focuses on development, gender equality and environmental protection. The award ceremony will start at 5 p.m., in the ECOSOC Chamber.

And this is all I have for you. For those who had asked, Mr Ehud Barak, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence of Israel, is due to go to the Security Council stakeout to brief the press following his meeting with the Secretary-General. Yes.

****Questions and Answers**

Question: This prospect of cutting off, I mean aid and help to the Pakistani displaced people which was expressed by the Secretary-General in the speech today is rather alarming and devastating to Pakistan. Are there any contingency plans being made...?

Spokesperson: Of course, that's what the appeal is about. The appeal is about that: to get really extra money...

Question: The appeal is about the money that is not received, only like \$118 million out of \$543 million received. That I understand. But the prospect of cutting off of services is rather dangerous.

Spokesperson: It's going to be really an extreme measure in case, you know, nothing comes in, in case not enough comes in. This has been the case in several situations where we have asked for money from the international community and the money has not come in. So, in cases we've had... The World Food Programme and other assistance organizations have had to, let's say, curtail some of their distribution. But it doesn't mean that, you know -- I think the concern is there, and they will do as much as they possibly can. Believe me.

Question: [inaudible] the CERF (Central Emergency Response Fund), funds and CERF could be used to mitigate this... make up this money, that shortfall, the money that until such a time more money comes from the international community? You know, I mean there was a shortfall, basically a shortfall of \$425 million...

Spokesperson: Well, the UN can do what they can. I mean we don't have a treasury. We depend on Member States to get the money.

Question: No, what I'm saying is can that difference be made up by CERF, the Central Emergency Response Fund of the Secretary-General?

Spokesperson: Wherever they can do it, they do it, but you know, I don't think we have enough funds to do it...

Question: I see.

Spokesperson: Yes.

Question: Michèle, I just... excuse me, but I wanted to get your response to these things that were reported in *Le Monde* about Sri Lanka. I heard your statement...

Spokesperson: The SG has [inaudible].

Question: ...but there some very specific things. He quotes UN sources in Colombo as saying, for example, that Mr. Nambiar told UN staff and UN representatives to "keep a low profile", that the UN should be playing a sustaining role compatible to Government. Those are quotes they ascribe to Mr. Nambiar. What I am wondering is, does that mean he didn't say that? I mean, having looked at the article, as I am sure the UN has, and it also says that Neil Buhne, the country director said that the death statistics should only go to him, and should not be given to any other person. It sort of... it paints a pretty, you know, I am sure you've seen it. The *Times of London* has said, you know, Ban must do something, it's like Srebrenica. So does the specifics...?

Spokesperson: These statistics that you mention, these statistics were estimates. As you know, starting in the month of May, absolutely no numbers could be verified, because the numbers we had were from the hospital people, and health people who were on the ground and were communicating with us, or our own people on the ground. In the month of May we had absolutely no way of knowing what the casualty figure was. The number of 20,000 is not a UN number.

[The Spokesperson later added that as regards to the media reports on the figure of 20,000 civilian casualties in Sri Lanka, it was verified with the concerned United Nations staff who were present at meetings of United Nations senior officials that no such internal report was made at those meetings. She emphasized that the United Nations had never underestimated the casualty numbers, nor engaged in any manner in manipulating them nor in soft-peddling the message that was communicated to the Sri Lankan Government on the necessity of avoiding civilian casualties.]

Question: Both the *Times of London* and *Le Monde* cite this to UN sources in Colombo.

Spokesperson: Well, actually, we checked. This morning, I was in touch with Colombo and they have absolutely no idea where that number came from, the 20,000 number.

Question: Okay. So I guess I mean, what, the quote they ascribed to Mr. Nambiar, I guess that the idea is somehow that staff there feel that from Headquarters the message is keep a low profile. I mean, unless both newspapers made up the quotes, somebody there said them. So I am just wondering...

Spokesperson: Well, I want you to really read what the SG said this morning. You had this text earlier...

Question: Okay.

Spokesperson: ...and where he categorically, I can give you the exact quote, in fact you can get it yourself. He categorically dismissed some of those allegations.

Question: Okay. I know on Friday he met with the Turkish Ambassador and I was told one of the topics was whether he wants to brief the Security Council about Sri Lanka. That was an issue that was going to be resolved in that meeting. Does he want to? I understand some...

Spokesperson: Well, whether it's going to be something that the Security Council is going to ask him. If the Security Council asks him to, he will. The way he did for the General Assembly today, of course.

Question: But it was said there that they sort of wanted to feel him out to see if he wants to do it. See what I'm saying? Because he did meet with...

Spokesperson: Well, if he met with the General Assembly on this, he is of course willing to meet with the Security Council on it.

Question: And then just one practical thing?

Spokesperson: Sure.

Question: There is this issue that I know he raised when he was there, of the doctors that were in the conflict zone and reported the numbers. Has there been any, has he heard anything back? Has there been any development on the status of the doctors who were detained by the Government?

Spokesperson: Well, as far as we know we understand they're in good health for now. And we noted that they have been detained. And what I'd like to add is that these men are heroes, who have saved lives in some of the toughest conditions imaginable. And they should be receiving the maximum care and assistance possible. And the Secretary-General made clear during his visit that detaining them is not appropriate. And I think he is hoping that they will be released soon. Yes.

Question: Can I follow up on Sri Lanka?

Spokesperson: Yes.

Question: So these charges are quite serious and we have heard the Secretary-General dismissing them. But what happens now? Are you going to have a probe? Are you going to try and find out what happened? Did the UN try to downplay these numbers or...?

Spokesperson: Well, this he categorically rejected. He said the UN never tried to down play the numbers. The numbers that were circulating were estimates, as I said, first that we got from the ground, then after that, we totally lost sight of the, you know, we had no way to verify any numbers.

Question: And in Colombo, the Government has said that they're not going to have any kind of probe to find out whether there were casualties of war. Is the UN...?

Spokesperson: I would refer you to the statement that the Secretary-General signed with the President of Sri Lanka; and in there, the SG asked for accountability. And I want to refer you to that. Yes, Masood.

Question: The Ambassador of Turkey, you said he is going to have a press conference. I didn't hear when.

Spokesperson: Who?

Question: The Ambassador of Turkey.

Spokesperson: Of Turkey? I have the time now, let me check. It's tomorrow morning that they're having their consultations. Theoretically, it would be 12:30 p.m. here in 226. Yes, Masood.

Question: Michèle, I just wanted to follow up on a question that I asked you earlier. Do you have any figures of people killed in that movement in Pakistan, you know, where the fighting is going...?

Spokesperson: Well, we don't have any independent figures, no we don't. We know what we had issued before, you know. What we had, which are estimates. And this is probably one of the reasons that goes back to the question that Matthew asked earlier. A lot of the numbers that we get, I mean, we're not deployed everywhere. We cannot count bodies. What we can do is base ourselves on estimates from different agencies, whether they be the Red Cross, whether they be... none of them are really deployed everywhere. So we can only deal with estimates. And that's what OCHA bases itself on when it issues a number. And this is probably why they said that they don't want the numbers to circulate, because they have no way to verify those numbers. Those numbers are not UN numbers.

Question: Are there any estimates...?

Question: You don't, Michèle, sorry...

Question: Go ahead.

Question: You didn't give any estimates about the number of the people who were killed in Swat or [inaudible] Pakistan. You've given only numbers about...

Spokesperson: Yes, we don't have a -- we don't have them! We don't have them, that's what I am saying. You know, the estimates, we get different estimates from different groups, but we don't have numbers that we can ourselves check and verify.

Okay, I have a statement that was just brought to me on Sri Lanka. As regard the media reports... It's not a statement, it's just clarifying.

As regards the media reports on the figure of 20,000 civilian casualties in Sri Lanka, I have verified with the concerned UN staff who were present at meetings of UN senior officials that no such internal report was made at those meetings.

And here I would like to emphasize that the UN has never underestimated the casualty numbers, as I said earlier, nor engaged in any manner in manipulating them nor in soft-peddling the message that was communicated to the Sri Lankan Government on the necessity of avoiding civilian casualties. And I think this is a very strong message and I hope it gets through. Thank you. Any other thing? I think some of you wanted to go to...

Question: I have one Pakistan question.

Spokesperson: Yes, sure.

Question: There were reports that over the weekend the UN told its staff members not to go to their offices in Pakistan through the country, and that now, only in Islamabad. I understand you don't speak about the exact threat level, but how does that impact the UN's work and is there an idea of sending them back in places other than...? Is it accurate that only in Islamabad and that only essential personnel are working today?

Spokesperson: Well, I understand that it was a limited decision. It was based on some security concerns and, as you said yourself, I am not at liberty to give you the security levels in any given UN post. I can tell you that they did do their work from home and we'll try to get an update for you on where the situation is right now as soon as I get back to my office. Thank you so much.

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