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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 a question-and-answer session with Enrique Yeves, Spokesperson for the President of the General Assembly.

Briefing by Spokesperson for the Secretary-General

Good afternoon all.

\*\*Guests at Noon Today

Our [guests](http://www.un.org/News/briefings/docs/2009/090112_Gaza.doc.htm) at the noon briefing today are John Holmes, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator; and John Ging, Director of Operations in Gaza for UNRWA [United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East].  As you know, they have been updating us on a daily basis on the situation in the Gaza Strip.  And they will, of course, brief on the humanitarian situation.

\*\*Secretary-General’s Travels

The Secretary-General will give a [press conference](http://www.un.org/press/en/2009/sgsm12044.doc.htm) this afternoon at 3 p.m., in this Room, on his upcoming trip to the Middle East, as he has to leave earlier than previously scheduled.

He is scheduled to meet with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Cairo on Wednesday, as well as the Secretary-General of the Arab League, Amre Moussa, and the Foreign Minister of Egypt, Ahmed Aboul Gheit.  He will then meet with Jordanian King Abdullah Bin Al Hussein in Amman.  On Thursday, the Secretary-General will be in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, with meetings scheduled with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Tzipi Livni, the Minister of Defence, Ehud Barak, and with Prime Minister Ehud Olmert.

He will then visit Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad and President Mahmoud Abbas in Ramallah.  He will briefly travel to Turkey to meet with Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.  He will then move on to Beirut to meet Lebanese President Michel Sleiman, Prime Minister Fouad Siniora and Speaker Nabih Berri.  He will also visit UNIFIL [United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon] headquarters in Naqoura.  He is also going to visit Syria.  His last scheduled stop at this point is Kuwait, where he will attend the summit meeting of the Arab League.

The Secretary-General will speak to you this afternoon on what he wants to achieve.  He will, of course, in Syria meet the Head of State.

\*\*Human Rights Council on Gaza

The Human Rights Council concluded its ninth special session today in Geneva by adopting a resolution on grave human rights violations in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.  By that resolution, the Human Rights Council strongly condemned the ongoing Israeli military operation in Gaza.

It also called for the immediate cessation of Israeli military attacks in Gaza and demanded that Israel immediately withdraw its military forces from the Gaza Strip.

And it decided to dispatch an urgent, independent and international fact-finding mission to investigate all alleged violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law by Israel against the Palestinian people throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

The Human Rights Council also asked the Secretary-General to investigate the latest targeting of United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) facilities in Gaza, including schools, which resulted in the killing of Palestinian civilians.

Today’s resolution was adopted by a vote of 33 to 1, with 13 abstentions.  We have more information on that upstairs.

\*\*Humanitarian Operations in Gaza

Over the weekend, the World Food Programme (WFP) launched Operation Lifeline Gaza, a global appeal to ramp up the distribution of food to people caught in the current conflict.

WFP’s Executive Director, Josette Sheeran, who went to the Egyptian border with Gaza on Friday, made the announcement after meetings with the Egyptian Minister of Trade and Industry and Suzanne Mubarak, who is the head of the Egyptian Red Crescent, as well as Egypt’s First Lady.  The Egyptian Government, which gathered a large number of companies in Cairo for the launch of the new initiative, pledged to facilitate Operation Lifeline Gaza by offering assistance to companies that can provide food to WFP.

WFP says that, while it has enough food stocks to feed almost 360,000 people for the next three weeks, the heavy fighting has limited the possibility of wide-scale distributions.  Many truck drivers and forklift operators have been unwilling to work due to the insecurity, and the civilian population is often too frightened to go to food distribution points.  I’m sure we will get a more accurate picture of the situation on the ground with John Ging in a few minutes.

For its part, UNICEF reports that a charter flight from its supply hub in Copenhagen was due to arrive this morning in the region, carrying emergency medical supplies for Gaza.  Those supplies include equipment for specialized obstetrics care.

UNICEF also says that yesterday it managed to deliver 30,000 bottles of water from the West Bank to Gaza, where safe water supplies are dangerously low.  In addition, 500 family water purification kits were delivered into Gaza from the Israeli port of Ashdod.

Meanwhile, the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Koïchiro Matsuura, has deplored attacks on media installations in Gaza and condemned the killing of Palestinian journalist Basel Faraj.

\*\*Secretary-General Appointment

The Secretary-General has announced his intention to appoint Major-General Robert Mood of Norway as Head of Mission and Chief of Staff of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO), which is based in Jerusalem.

Major-General Mood, who was appointed Chief of Staff of the Norwegian Army in April 2005 and has served twice with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s (NATO) Kosovo Force, will replace Major-General Ian Campbell Gordon of Australia.  Major-General Gordon will relinquish the post on 15 January.  We have more information on General Mood in a short bio upstairs.

\*\* Democratic Republic of the Congo

Prosecutors at the International Criminal Court have formally accused Jean-Pierre Bemba, the founder and ex-leader of the Movement for the Liberation of Congo, with war crimes and crimes against humanity.  If the charges are confirmed, Bemba will go on trial for crimes that include torture and murder.  Bemba’s crimes are alleged to have taken place in 2002 during a bloody power struggle in the Central African Republic.  Prosecutors say Bemba’s fighters, who were leased to the embattled Government of the Central African Republic’s then leader Ange Felix Patasse, engaged in a systematic assault on the civilian population.

Bemba was arrested in Belgium in July last year and remains in International Criminal Court custody at the Court’s detention facility in The Hague.

\*\* Cyprus

And finally, Greek Cypriot leader Demetris Christofias and Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali Talat met today in the United Nations Protected Area of Nicosia.

Speaking to the press afterwards, the Secretary-General’s Special Adviser, Alexander Downer, said that the meeting began with a half-hour tête-à-tête discussion.  That was followed by a long discussion on relations between a federal Government and the constituent States, as well as talks on deadlock-resolving mechanisms.

The discussions are scheduled to continue on Friday, when governance and power-sharing issues will be taken up.  At that time, a date will likely be set for a future meeting to begin discussions on the property question.  We are expecting a press release from the United Nations mission there later this afternoon.

All the other information I have for you will be in the Highlights because of time and because we want to devote as much time to the Gaza issue as possible.  So you can get that information later today on our website.

If you have any questions for me and for the Spokesperson for the President of the General Assembly -– Enrique is right here in the Room –- we can do so briefly before we give the mike to Mr. Holmes and to John Ging.

\*\*Questions and Answers

Question:  The Secretary-General more than a couple of times appealed to the Israelis to hold their heavy machineries to kill people and the Israelis didn’t do anything.  Do we take it that the Secretary-General and the United Nations are unable to do anything in this context?

Spokesperson:  Well, that’s what we’re trying to do.  That’s why the Secretary-General is travelling.  That’s why he’s been pushing for a ceasefire in Gaza.  That’s why he went to the Security Council meeting and he spoke after the resolution.  You have all that information.

Question:  But, so far, nothing has happened.

Spokesperson:  It takes a lot of effort.

Question:  Still, a lot of people in Gaza are being killed by the heavy machinery and all that we see in the television of poor women and children being killed.  So, that’s why I’m asking if the United Nations and the Secretary-General, in particular, are unable to stop the Israelis?

Spokesperson:  The Secretary-General is making every effort.  For the last 10 days, he has been doing everything he can on the phone, meeting people, trying to get results, trying to get a ceasefire.  It takes a lot of effort to stop a conflict of that sort.  And that’s all I can say really.

Question:  There’s a letter on the racks today from Qatar’s First Lady, Sheikha Moza, in which she calls on the Secretary-General to create a plan by which schools in Gaza can be used as safe havens for civilians.  Is the Secretary-General going to be following up on this?  Does he have any reaction?

Spokesperson:  We’ll certainly be following up on this.  We don’t have a reaction right now because the whole idea of his trip is essentially about the civilian population in Gaza.  And you heard also the resolution taken by the Human Rights Council, that the primary objective is a ceasefire and the protection of the civilians of Gaza.  Definitely that is something that goes in the same direction that the Secretary-General has been wanting.

Question:  There are some hints by the Israelis that Al-Shifa hospital is being used as a base for Hamas.  Could the United Nations, for example, verify that there is nothing of that sort, so that the Israelis will not bomb Al-Shifa like they did other hospitals and mosques?

Spokesperson:  I will leave that answer to John Ging, who is the head of our operations in Gaza.  He will answer you in a few minutes when John Holmes is here and we can all talk about it, if you want to be a little patient.

Any other questions?

Question:  Does the Secretary-General have a statement or opinion on those who say that, since 27 December, the start of this invasion, that it’s only empowered Hamas and that the political situation is actually going further away from what the Secretary-General wants to achieve rather than getting closer to his goal?

Spokesperson:  He does not feel this way.  He feels that there are signs that we can get to what he wants to achieve and what he has stated that he wants to achieve.  But I would like to leave my place to John Holmes.  I just want to ask you, before we do, if anyone has questions for the General Assembly, for Enrique?

Question-and-Answer Session with Spokesperson for General Assembly President

Question:  I just want to follow up on plans by the General Assembly to hold a special session on the situation in Gaza considering that the Security Council resolution has not been respected by Israel in particular?

Spokesperson:  The President of the General Assembly is right now talking to several Member States and several ambassadors to decide what will be the next step.  Most likely there will be a session of the General Assembly probably this week, but we will know by today or tomorrow the kind of action that is going to be taking place.

Question:  With all the measures that have been taken, the Prime Minister of Israel has said that he is not going to recognize any decision given by the United Nations and others.  So how are they going to solve the problem?

Spokesperson:  That is a very relevant question.  It is up to the Member States to decide what kind of action can be taken when one of the Member countries is not respecting the mandatory decisions of the Security Council.