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**Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General**

\*\*Guests at Noon Briefing Today

Our [guests](http://www.un.org/News/briefings/docs/2009/090107_Gaza.doc.htm) at the noon briefing today are Robert Serry, UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process; John Holmes, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and UN Emergency Relief Coordinator; and John Ging, Director of Operations in Gaza for UNRWA, the UN Refugee and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.  They will brief you on the situation in Gaza in a few minutes.

\*\*Secretary-General’s Statement on Darfur

First, I have a [statement](http://www.un.org/press/en/2009/sgsm12039.doc.htm) attributable to the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General on Darfur.

The Secretary-General conveyed to President Bush his warm welcome of the most recent commitment by the United States to airlift to Darfur critical equipment required by UNAMID [African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur].  The expedited arrival to Darfur of this material, which includes trucks and other essential equipment, will strengthen the ability of the United Nations to protect civilians and carry out other aspects of its mandate.  This initiative sets a constructive precedent for broad international support to expeditiously deploy UNAMID, and the Secretary-General calls upon other Member States to seriously consider undertaking similar efforts to expedite the full deployment of UNAMID.

\*\* Gaza -- Security Council

We’ll come back later, in a few minutes, to Darfur, but, first, the Security Council this morning has resumed its formal [meeting](http://www.un.org/press/en/2009/sc9565.doc.htm) on the Middle East, which began yesterday afternoon with an open [debate](http://www.un.org/press/en/2009/sc9563.doc.htm) on the recent fighting in Gaza and southern Israel.  Fifteen more speakers are inscribed today.  Then, at 3 this afternoon, the Security Council has scheduled consultations on the Middle East.

Speaking to the Security Council yesterday, the Secretary-General said that attacks by Israeli military forces which endanger United Nations facilities acting as places of refuge are totally unacceptable, and should not be repeated.  Equally unacceptable, he said, are any actions by Hamas militants which endanger the Palestinian civilian population.  The attacks on UN Relief and Works Agency schools yesterday underscore the dangers inherent in the continuation and escalation of this conflict, and the Secretary-General called once again for an immediate ceasefire.  The Secretary-General told the Security Council that he intends to travel next week to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and to regional capitals.

But he added that he does not believe we can wait until then to end the violence.  There must be an immediate ceasefire, durable and respected fully by all sides, he said.  Immediate humanitarian measures, including open crossings for humanitarian assistance, should be ensured.  In addition, viable international mechanisms will be required to ensure that borders are properly functioning.  And Gaza's enormous social relief and reconstruction needs will need to be addressed.

The Secretary-General has been actively engaged with regional and world leaders to bring the violence to a speedy end.  Yesterday, he met with President George W. Bush in Washington, D.C., and stressed the importance of acting immediately, and he also spoke with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

The readout of the Secretary-General’s meeting with President Bush was made available to you yesterday, to those who asked.  We have the Secretary-General’s [statement](http://www.un.org/press/en/2009/sgsm12038.doc.htm) for the Council, as well as a separate one on the strikes on the UNRWA school upstairs and on the web.

\*\* Gaza –- Joint Statement

We also have upstairs a joint statement from UNESCO [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization] Director-General Koïchiro Matsuura and the Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Radhika Coomaraswamy, expressing grave concern over the attacks against UNRWA schools and associated facilities set up by the United Nations as places of refuge for civilians fleeing the fighting in Gaza.

\*\* Gaza -- Humanitarian

Despite continuing insecurity, the World Food Programme (WFP) has succeeded in delivering food assistance to more than 50,000 people since the latest hostilities erupted on 27 December.  Another 15,000 people have been provided with bread, while canned meat and high-energy biscuits have been delivered to 13 Gaza hospitals, sufficient for 6,000 patients and staff for up to one month.  But we will in a few minutes, of course, have a humanitarian update with Mr. Holmes, who will be with you, and with John Ging, who is in Gaza, with us.

\*\* Gaza –- Human Rights Council

The Human Rights Council in Geneva has announced that it will hold a special session this Friday, to address “the grave violations of human rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including the recent aggression in the occupied Gaza Strip”.  The session was requested by Egypt, on behalf of the Arab Group and the African Group; Pakistan, on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference; and Cuba, on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay will address Friday’s meeting; representatives of United Nations agencies working in the region, States and observers of the Council, and the countries concerned will also speak.  There is more information in a press release upstairs.

\*\*Secretary-General’s Meeting with Salva Kiir

The Secretary-General spoke yesterday in Washington, D.C., with First Vice-President of the Sudan and President of the Government of Southern Sudan Salva Kiir.  They discussed the implementation of existing agreements:  the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and the Abyei road map.  They exchanged views on the situation in eastern Sudan and the activities of the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) in the area, as well as recent events in Abyei.

The Secretary-General expressed his concern over the deployment of forces, by both sides, just north and south of the Abyei area outlined in the agreement.  On Darfur, the Secretary-General affirmed “we must make progress as a matter of urgency, especially if the people of Darfur are to participate and be represented in the national elections in 2009.”  Vice-President Kiir and the Secretary-General also discussed the possible impact of indictments by the International Criminal Court on peace and stability in the Sudan.

\*\* Democratic Republic of the Congo

The Third Session of the Nairobi Dialogue on the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo between the Democratic Republic of the Congo Government and the Congrès National pour la Défense du People (CNDP) resumed in Nairobi earlier today.  The talks have now progressed into substantive discussions.  The day began with the Co-Mediator, former President Benjamin Mkapa [of the United Republic of Tanzania], chairing the session in the absence of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on the Great Lakes region, Olusegun Obasanjo, who is engaged in consultations in the region.

Mkapa told the meeting that consultations are well under way to see if a summit of Heads of State of the Great Lakes region can be held by the middle of this month so they can get an update on what progress has been made, what obstacles lie in the way and what possible future actions to take.  He went on to say that it will also be critical to reach an understanding concerning a formal and joint cessation of hostilities, or truce, in order to alleviate the human suffering that continues in the areas affected by the conflict.  A full transcript of these remarks is available in my office.

\*\*Appointments

The Secretary-General has informed the Security Council of his intention to [appoint](http://www.un.org/press/en/2009/sga1169.doc.htm) Christopher Ross as his Personal Envoy for Western Sahara and Michael von der Schulenburg as his Executive Representative for the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL).  Mr. Ross will replace Peter van Walsum.  Mr. von der Schulenburg will replace Victor Da Silva Angelo.

Mr. Ross will work with the parties, and neighbouring countries based on the most recent Security Council resolution 1813 and previous resolutions, building on progress made to date, in pursuit of a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution, which will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara.  Mr. von der Schulenburg is currently Acting Executive Representative for the United Nations office in Sierra Leone.  We have their bios available for you upstairs.

And I will stop here, because I would like to give the floor to our guest, Robert Serry, who is with us, John Holmes, who is also here.  And we also have, as we did yesterday, John Ging on the other side, in Gaza.  Please.