

# OFF-THE-CUFF

## Full transcript of Secretary-General's press encounter at UN Headquarters

New York, 16 October 2014

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. It is a great pleasure to see you.

As you know, I just returned from my week-long trip to the Middle East. I carried a two-fold message: spare no effort to rebuild Gaza – and spare no time to jump-start peace talks.

I travelled to Gaza two days ago to survey the needs for myself. I saw whole communities destroyed, and an economy in ruins. I met with the parents of some of the more than 500 children killed in the fighting. I heard heartbreaking accounts of epic loss. So many people are homeless with winter approaching.

At the reconstruction conference in Cairo, the international community showed its solidarity by pledging \$5.4 billion. We must turn those commitments into tangible assistance.

I also visited a kibbutz in southern Israel and met with the family of a four-year-old boy named Daniel, who was killed by a Hamas rocket. I visited a tunnel discovered months before the fighting and years in the making.

I fully understand the security threat from rockets above and tunnels below. At the same time, the scale of the destruction in Gaza has left deep questions about proportionality.

I left the region with a heavy heart but a measure of hope. As I entered Gaza on Tuesday, so did the first shipment of critical building materials under a UN-brokered mechanism. I urge both sides to continue to implement this temporary mechanism in good faith.

The Gaza situation is a symptom of a larger problem: the stalemate in the Middle East Peace Process. People are understandably disillusioned with a decades-long effort that has failed to deliver a final deal. I know that trust has been eroded and unilateral actions look tempting.

But the two-state solution is the only way to end the senseless cycle of war. The international community has an obligation to press for peace and I want to once again commend the efforts of U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry. I reiterate my strong concern about provocations at Jerusalem's holy sites, which only inflame tensions at a time when the parties need to find their way back to the negotiating table.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I remain alarmed at the situation in Syria. I once again call for steps to prevent a massacre and protect civilians in Kobane.

But let us remember that civilians across Syria are under imminent threat. In addition to the barbarity of ISIL, or Da'ish, the Syrian Government continues to indiscriminately attack populated areas, including with barrel bombs.

The Da'ish phenomenon in Syria is a consequence, not the cause, of the conflict. Da'ish will continue to threaten Syria unless the deep political drivers of the conflict are resolved through a credible and comprehensive process.

Let me turn now to the Ebola outbreak.

Ebola is a huge and urgent global problem that demands a huge and urgent global response.

The people and governments of West Africa are demonstrating significant resilience, but they have asked for our help.

Dozens of countries are showing their solidarity. But we need to turn pledges into action. We need more doctors, nurses, equipment, treatment centres and medevac capacities. I appeal to the international community to provide the \$1 billion launch that will enable us to get ahead of the curve and meet our target of reducing the rate of transmission by December 1st.

The United Nations system has mobilized to meet this monumental task. We have established UNMEER – the UN Mission for Ebola Emergency Response -- to coordinate and scale up action. I have also formed a Global Ebola Response Coalition.

Ebola can be beaten if we work together effectively. We all have a responsibility to act.

I salute the courage of the medical and support personnel working on the front-lines. I offer condolences to the family of AbdelFadeel Mohammed Basheer, a laboratory technician and member of the United Nations family from Sudan who died this week from Ebola. He was the second person from the UN Mission in Liberia to succumb to this unforgiving disease.

Meanwhile, peacekeeping personnel continue to face other dangers.

Two UNAMID (United Nations-African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur) peacekeepers were killed today in an attack in Darfur. This has been a bloody October for UN Peacekeeping. In Darfur, Mali and the Central African Republic, we have lost 14 peacekeepers in hostile acts -- nearly one per day.

This highlights the exceptionally challenging environments in which today's peacekeepers operate. Blue Helmets must be allowed to undertake their life-saving work without interference.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Finally, if you will allow me, I would like to draw your attention to my tie today.

I almost always wear UN blue. On one occasion last year, I wore an orange tie to show my support for the UN's campaign to end violence against women.

Today my tie and socks are purple -- the colour of choice for "Spirit Day", which is observed in the United States and many other countries as a day of solidarity with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth, who face bullying and discrimination.

Through the UN's Free & Equal campaign, the United Nations will continue to speak out against homophobia -- and speak up for the human rights of all LGBT people.

Thank you for your attention.

Q: Secretary-General when you were with Prime Minister [Benjamin] Netanyahu he made some very strong allegations. He claimed that when there were rockets found at UN schools the UN handed those rockets back to Hamas. How do you respond?

SG: I saw for myself all destruction and also concern on the part of Israelis. No people, no country, should live under constant threat, coming from the air, by rockets and also coming from under the tunnels under the ground. This is a real serious danger. At the same time the level of destruction is serious, so serious, that I couldn't believe. I said that the level of destruction was much, much more serious than those in 2009. That is why I have been urging him to return to the dialogue table. There is no other option at this time. We don't have any time to lose.

I strongly pushed the leaders of both, Palestinians and Israelis, to sit down together and resolve all underlying issues.

I had a bilateral meeting with Secretary [of State] John Kerry. I also urged him, as I did during my meeting with President Obama here on the margins of the General Assembly, that they should, Secretary Kerry should also try to do all his diplomatic efforts to facilitate this dialogue.

Q: On the specific allegation though, Secretary-General, the allegation that the UN gave the rockets back to Hamas.

SG: I had a long talk, a long, very serious talk, here in New York and in Jerusalem. Of course you know, I am not disclosing very sensitive and diplomatic discussions. We have been providing all the information to the Israeli military authority, not once or twice, I think a dozen, more than a dozen times, and I have been emphasizing the inviolability of diplomatic missions of the United Nations and this place, the schools, they knew that people were being accommodated. They were all -- children, women and old people -- displaced people. I really strongly condemn how come Israeli soldiers who were firing against these schools.

I saw for myself during my visit to Jabaliya school and other IDP [internally displaced person] collective centres. It was quite a heartbreaking experience for me.

Q: Mr. Secretary-General - on Ebola, there seems to be quite a shortfall between pledges and money actually going into the coffers. Some of us heard yesterday that they were down to about a hundred thousand dollars in the UN Trust Fund.

What should be done to really try and increase the funding to fight Ebola? Should there be a public

campaign? Should you get people like Bono and some of the other people to do some big concerts to raise money?

As a quick second question, could you also comment on what's happening in Yemen with the Houthi rebels not only controlling the capital Sana'a but taking control of one of the biggest ports in the country?

SG: On Ebola, thank you for raising this very important and serious question for the United Nations and the international community. As I said, we launched and asked for one billion dollars for our operation. We have established the United Nations Trust Fund. We have received originally 20 million dollars but as you said our bank account has only a hundred thousand dollars. This is a very serious problem. The last few days I have been engaging extensively with many world leaders. As you already know, I talked to President Obama. Then I have been speaking to the President of France and Prime Ministers of the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany and Poland, whoever may have... These leaders have already been contributing generously, a lot in terms of financial support, logistics and medical support, as well as soldiers. I really fully appreciate this.

Now I believe it is time for other countries that have capacity that they would provide financial support and other logistical support. As you know Cuba and Venezuela or China - they are all developing world countries. They have been generously supporting. I have received many, I cannot name all the countries in fact, but I would really hope that countries who have the capacity will provide support. I appreciate Japan and the Republic of Korea, who have also contributed, even though I may not be able to name all these countries. This is quite serious. We need urgent global response and support. On Yemen, I'm going to meet Prime Minister, nominated Ambassador [Khaled Mahfoudh Abdullah] Bahah. And today I was briefed by my Special Advisor, [Jamal] Benomar.

The situation, despite the agreement made between the government and the Houthis, the Houthis are now almost practically controlling Sana'a and they are now taking control of many other important cities, a number of cities now. It's quite alarming. I have asked my Special Advisor to immediately go to Sana'a and engage in dialogue, try to facilitate further dialogue. They have agreed and signed this agreement and this is an agreement that should be implemented in good faith, in good faith. I am asking those who may be manipulating these situations should refrain from doing that. We are doing our best.

Q: Secretary-General, you say that you wanted to jump start the peace talks and that's one of your chief goals and in the region you also said that you condemn one sided acts such as settlement activity. There is a growing concern in Israel that the Palestinian moves at the UN and other international organizations is going to scuttle the talks as well. Do you share that concern? Also, when you condemn provocation in the Temple Mount? Which side is provoking? Can you tell us?

SG: I had discussed this matter with President [Mahmoud] Abbas and Prime Minister [Rami] Hamdallah of the State of Palestine. I know that the Security Council is still considering a draft resolution proposed by Jordan and also the State of Palestine. At the same time, as Secretary-General, this is what the Member States should decide. My concern is that at this time both parties first agree to sit down together and discuss all pending issues. They have identified already what are the real root causes, underlying issues. They know the problems so I'm really urging them to do that without further loss of time. But I'm not in a position to disclose all the very sensitive discussions which I had.

Q: And my question on whose provocation?

SG: In the holy site? I have already said that in Jerusalem, while in Jerusalem, I have strongly condemned all these provocations and I'm repeating again today.

Q: Two follow ups on what you said, Secretary-General, one on Yemen and one on Syria. On Yemen, the report of your Envoy indicated that there are fingers and interference by Iran in Yemen. Are you making a demarche with Iran? Are you planning to do something to see about halting the downslide of Yemen?

And on Syria, your Envoy [on Syria] has been very critical, as he should be, on what's going on in Kobane against ISIS [Da'ish], but he didn't say anything similar to what you just said about what goes on in Syria, with the barrel bombs etc. Why is he taking so long doing nothing and the first thing that he had said was only one sided, criticizing one side and then absolving another? Can you address both points please, Yemen and Syria?

SG: On Yemen, I think I have already answered. I'm not going to talk about all these regional dynamics, including Iran. This should be left to Yemenis who have already agreed through a very important agreement a few days ago. These should be implemented through national dialogue which they have been doing.

On Syria, I have expressed very serious concerns on many, many occasions that this cannot be left this way. The international community should show their strong unity and solidarity to fight back this ISIL and international terrorism. A lot of civilian population's lives are at risk, therefore I support what my Special Envoy, [Staffan] de Mistura, has announced and I also issued my own statement. I am asking and reaching out to many European and other countries who have means and capacity to show their solidarity and take action.

Q: My question is about the other side of what you said. My question is about what you said about the continued barrel bombs by the Syrian government, this is what you mentioned earlier, but this has been dismissed by your Envoy de Mistura, we haven't heard him speak about that. Can you highlight why are you excusing that Syrian government from this continued....?

SG: I have been condemning this use of barrel bombs and I think my Special Envoy will continue to follow the situation and whenever necessary he will also say his views and his positions.

Thank you very much. Thank you.

(Later, off camera)

SG: I would welcome any initiative taken by Mr. Bono or some other leaders around the world to join this campaign, to mobilize funds, mobilize awareness, to take urgent action all together and to show solidarity.