

**Transcript of the press conference by  
Mr. Jan Eliasson, United Nations Deputy Secretary-General  
Geneva, 25 October 2012**

**DSG:** Je vais commencer en français, si vous permettez, mais je vais continuer en anglais et vous pouvez poser les questions en anglais ou en français. C'est pour moi un grand plaisir de rentrer à Genève ; c'est un peu avec nostalgie parce que la première fois que j'ai passé des mois ici c'était pendant la guerre, après la guerre entre Iran et Iraq. Moi, j'étais l'envoyé spécial de l'ONU et j'ai négocié ici dans ce bâtiment pendant des mois à cette époque-là assez dramatique. La deuxième fois c'était quand j'étais le Sous-secrétaire général pour les affaires humanitaires aux Nations Unies et j'ai fait la navette entre New York et Genève pendant deux ans, de 1992 jusqu'à 1994. La troisième fois, c'était à l'introduction du Conseil des Droits de l'Homme ici à Genève. Moi, j'étais Président de l'Assemblée générale à New York et la première réunion c'était en juin 2006. Ce sont les trois occasions et c'est vraiment un plaisir de rentrer ici chez vous.

I will make a short introduction about my tasks in the UN now. I am very honoured to be the Deputy Secretary-General appointed by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. I have three main tasks and I will say something briefly about each of them. My first task is the area of political affairs, including humanitarian affairs; the second area is development and the third area is the rule of law. On the first area, I will make a few comments on Syria and on Mali; in the second case I just came back from Bamako over the week-end.

On Syria: of course we all have our eyes on the tragedy in Syria and we pin our hopes now on the ceasefire that hopefully can take place. Well, now the Eid al-Adha will begin; it's a holiday of pilgrimage but it's also a holiday of peace and reconciliation and I would very much hope that the parties will seize this opportunity to reduce the level of violence and create a climate in which political progress can be made. This proposal was first introduced by the Secretary-General when the Foreign Minister of Syria visited New York just a couple of weeks ago. And since then Lakhdar Brahimi, our Joint Mediator for the United Nations and the Arab League has pursued the issue both with the parties on the ground and with the countries involved, both in the Security Council and in the region.

We very much hope that this first step towards the reduction of violence and the beginning of the political progress will be taken because we see very great dangers, both vis-à-vis the Syrian people and the future of the nation of Syria, and of course also for the security and stability of the region. We already see very dangerous signs of the conflict spreading: we have seen border incidents between Turkey and Syria and we have seen of course dramatic developments in Lebanon, and there is also a risk that other neighbouring countries will be affected.

So we hope that the Security Council and the countries in the region will accept the responsibility now to influence the parties to agree to the ceasefire and then of course by that encourage the political process which is so necessary. I myself was mediating in several conflicts, know that when the tensions rise and when there is an escalation of hostilities it's very difficult to achieve political progress; but when the reduction of violence is there, you create an

environment in which the mediator can make progress and that's what the Secretary General and Lakhdar Brahimi and we all hope for.

So let's hope that we have good news coming from Syria, of ending of the artillery shootings in the cities, and then of course corresponding measures taken by the opposition groups. And in that new atmosphere, maybe we can make some progress in this horrible tragedy.

I move on to Mali. I spent part of last week, until the week-end in Bamako. I find it interesting that the meeting on Mali took place in Mali. There have been far too many situations, not least in Africa, that have been discussed in other capitals or in other places, but I think it's a good sign that this matter was discussed in the country itself with the Mali authorities and with the Mali people watching us closely.

We were the African Union, ECOWAS, the sub-regional organization, and the United Nations, and I noted a unique sense of common purpose among the African Union, ECOWAS and the United Nations. A unique purpose in supporting the Mali authorities to establish constitutional order and of course to establish national unity, to achieve respect of territorial integrity after the takeover of the North by extremist and terrorist elements. The support was expressed in different ways: support to a political process and of course support to planning for a possible military mission in the end. On the first point there is a hope that there are groups in the North of Mali who would want to distance themselves from the extremist and terrorist groups and by that, isolate those groups. We hope that such a process is going on. The second element is an element which is related to the Security Council Resolution 2071 which was adopted in New York on 12 October, which authorizes the United Nations to help in the political process but also to help in the planning for a possible military mission. We are to report to the Security Council 45 days from 12 October - it's probably around 35 days now - so we are in the midst of doing that planning, but in the meantime we hope of course also for some progress in the political arena.

You cannot discuss Mali without putting it in the larger context of the whole situation of the Sahel region, where you have 18 million people at risk, 1 million children at grave risk of malnutrition and hunger, starvation, and the fact that we need to see the situation in its totality. Therefore the Secretary-General has appointed Romano Prodi, the former President of the Commission of the European Union and also former Prime Minister of Italy, to serve as Special Envoy for the Sahel. And I was very glad to have at my side, leading the UN delegation, Romano Prodi. He will of course have as his task to not only be in contact with the Mali people and Mali authorities, but also with the countries in the region who certainly are affected by the crisis in Mali and might be affected even more so in the future.

I was also there with Said Djinnit who is our Special Representative for West Africa, and we have a strong team now working both on the political front and on the military planning. Then it is of course up to the Security Council to decide when they have received the report of the Secretary-General in about 35 days whether a military operation will be needed. It's a very important situation, a situation that has ramifications not only for Mali but also for the region obviously. There is a grave humanitarian aspect to the situation, also if there were to be a military operation, and of course you do not know what ramifications these developments will

have on neighbouring states. So it certainly is logical that the Security Council is involved in an issue which has such important security ramifications for the region and the world.

I often raise my glass. Not to toast you but to demonstrate the importance of water. This glass of water is a luxury for 784 million people in the world; 2.5 billion people don't have sanitation, which is a euphemism for toilets. 37 per cent of humanity lives without toilets and this is the reason why 3,000 children, approximately, die every day under the age of five because of diarrhoea, dysentery, dehydration and cholera, and I have seen them die in front of my own eyes. This is something we, it is a shame I think, we need to make sure that we make serious progress on, particularly, sanitation and maternal health.

Apart from trying to achieve the Millennium Development Goals we have to start to define the goals after 2015. And I am sure it will require work on poverty eradication. But I am also sure that we have to take into account the need to look at sustainability. We have finite resources and a planet in danger of climate change which is so obvious to us that, for the first time in history, we really have to take an existential look at the need for sustainability. But there is also a need to take the rights perspective, human rights and the rule of law, and, of course, the aspects related to good governance, which is good institutions and good infrastructure.

This is a huge task ahead of us where we are working on different tracks in the United Nations. One is a panel that the Secretary-General has set up, a high level panel on the post-2015 development and one member is actually in the group, Ms. Amina Mohammed, here on my left who just now nods to you and is a member of that group who will report to the Secretary-General and myself in June next year, latest in June. We also have a government group that is going to start soon in New York working on sustainable development and we hope of course that in the next year or two we will have serious work on setting the direction for development in the future. But we take into account not only poverty eradication but also sustainability, rights and good governance.

My last point briefly is the rule of law. There was a very important meeting in New York on 24 September, where all Member States, and among them 44 Heads of Government, signed or accepted, adopted, a declaration on rule of law where it was established that not only international norms that are necessary for rule of law inside nations but also the need to set up institutions for fighting corruption, reconciliation processes, correction facilities of the right order, judicial organs that work, reconciliation processes, all of these things that are necessary to maintain peace, not only in post-conflict situations but also to build a decent society. That this document was accepted is very relevant for the United Nations because it will affect both the work on peace, development and human rights. For peace it will stabilize peace efforts, for development it will make it possible to have institutions that encourage development, and of course for human rights you have the institutions that are necessary to bring about real achievement in that area.

The final formula that I would like to repeat to you is a formula that I was very proud as President of the General Assembly to gavel and that is the agenda for the United Nations in my view, and the reason for us to toil in this organization, work hard in this organization, hopefully for you to get it to keep your interest in this organization. It is simply this formula: there is no

peace without development, there is no development without peace and there is neither lasting peace nor sustainable development without respect of human rights and the rule of law.

So that would be my far too long introduction for members of the media but I hope you can bear with me and I will take questions in French, English, Swedish, German and Spanish.

Thank you.

**Q:** Thank you. On behalf of the UN press association, firstly I would like to thank you for this press conference and then I would like to ask you a question about Syria. If we now see a cease fire, what makes you think that it will actually hold? Because, as you know, it has been broken before so what chances do you see for it actually holding, and if violence breaks out again, what difference can the United Nations actually make as there is no unity in the Security Council and so far you have been obliged, basically, to stand by and watch things getting worse while you are giving humanitarian aid. So what difference can the UN make if violence takes off again? Thank you.

**DSG:** Well, we have no guarantees that a possible ceasefire will hold. We regretfully have no observer still in Syria. We had observers but that mandate expired some time ago. So the ceasefire builds on trust that both sides will cease the fighting and that they will realize that this is an obligation and that the one that breaks against the obligation certainly will be noted. We hope that they both realize the importance of a pause in the fighting, and by this they can prove that they desire a solution, a peaceful solution, to the benefit of the Syrian people. Ceasefire has its major significance in the symbolic quieting, silencing of the guns, and letting the Syrian people finally have silence around themselves for the possibilities to see what the fighting has done but the most important thing is that it could, possibly, create an environment in which a political process is possible. This is the moment when then Lakhdar Brahimi could possibly make a move in the political arena.

Well, if the violence erupts again we will feel the same frustration that we have felt for some time about the lack of unity in the Security Council. If the Security Council is not unified it translates itself to weakness for the Secretary-General and his representatives. If we have strong resolutions, supported by the Member States, we have muscle power, so to speak, to really translate that to action on the ground. So I can only appeal again to the Security Council to show unity and come up with a formula that can bring about the end of the violence. There is also an obligation of countries in the region to act accordingly, to use their influence, not only those who are members of the Security Council, but also vis-à-vis the region, vis-à-vis the country, both vis-à-vis the government and the opposition groups that you either choose an escalation of hostilities, or you choose a de-escalation, reducing of violence, and I think there could be no doubt what you would think the United Nations would prefer as alternative. So there rests a very serious responsibility on the Security Council to come up with a unified position as soon as possible; and also a responsibility on countries in the region to exercise their influence over both the government and the parties, and the opposition.

**Q:** My question is on Latin America basically, American hemisphere. First, on the issue of reconciliation as you mentioned, do you think 20 years after dictatorships in Latin America, it is

time, for example, for Brazil to abolish the amnesty law that was created at that time? By the way, your government received many of the refugees that at that time were coming to Brazil from Argentina and other countries. Do you think this is the time to basically, get over with this and do the reconciliation that would be necessary? And secondly, on Haiti, how is the, let's say international financial crisis or the lack of resources affecting your work in Haiti at the moment? Thank you.

**DSG:** I can only speak in general terms about reconciliation in Latin America. I have worked a long time with Latin America back in the 70s and 80s, when we received refugees from Chile, Argentina, several countries, Uruguay, who were living under military dictatorship and of course, it's a great relief to have seen those sad periods behind us. I can only say that any effort to achieve reconciliation, to bring people together is to be welcomed. We hope very much now that negotiations on Colombia in Oslo will be successful and we hope that the positive trends that have been so obvious over the years will continue. There is a factor that affects all world politics right now, and that is the serious economic situation, which shows itself also on the social and political arena. I would hope very much that the resistance to such problems would be high in Latin America and that democracy is strongly founded in the societies and in public opinion.

On Haiti, I cannot recall that the economic difficulties are particularly obvious; of course there was an enormous show of solidarity with the Haitian people after the horrible earthquake. The work continues with successes in some areas and some problems in other areas, particularly in housing, but it is important that solidarity with the Haitian people continues and I hope that the programmes that are underway will be continually funded.

**Q:** Thank you for your presentation. I have two questions regarding your third area, the rule of law, which is very important. The first one is related to the Syrian issue and the positioning of the UN, which needs to be very clear. So as you know, 10 days ago in Akçakale, five Turkish civilians were killed. The UN condemned the attacks, denounced the violation of international law on territorial integrity, this was done. However, the statement did not consider the attack as an armed attack, which is important because it does not trigger the right of self-defence; and Turkey answered to those attacks killing Syrian soldiers. So, I would like to know, did Turkey use its right of self-defence and had the right to attack the Syrian soldiers or is this a breach of international law? And if it is a breach of international law, why did the UN not condemn the Turkish answer? That is my first question. My second question is on the... peut être que je peux vous la poser en français pour varier un petit peu. Elle concerne les relations turco-israéliennes. Israël a tenté une nouvelle négociation avec la Turquie, la Turquie a refusé. Ma question concerne le Rapport Palmer. Un an après le Rapport Palmer, un rapport sur lequel ne s'est pas réellement exprimé le Secrétaire général M. Ban Ki-moon, ce rapport qui viole le droit international, le blocus de Gaza, le droit de légitime défense qui n'existe pas dans la haute mer, ce rapport qui devait amorcer une négociation a finalement détérioré considérablement les relations turco-israéliennes : est-ce que un an plus tard vous regrettez ce rapport en tant que Secrétaire général adjoint ?

**DSG:** Thank you very much. You are right, there was a statement of condemnation of the attack, not only by the Secretary-General but also by the Security Council, and they were similarly phrased. There was no condemnation of the immediate Turkish response. The question about the

right to self-defence touches very much on the principle of proportionality. If there is an attack across a border, it is almost automatically accepted that an immediate response is possible, according to international law but it has to be in line with proportionality and that is why the continued fighting, the continued attacks is such a great problem. There is no conclusion on our side whether proportionality is broken or not, it is very hard to measure and to guide. But our statement is meant to stop the risk of increasing violence and the escalation of that conflict into an international conflict but there is no ruling on whether this is legal, or illegal. But basically you have the right to self-defence if you accept the principle of proportionality in your response.

Well, this was before I started in the UN, so I must say I haven't really read that whole [Palmer] report. I understand that it has been given different interpretations and I take your view that it didn't help but I have really no comment of my own. I hope that the issues will be resolved in direct contact, direct talks between Turkey and Israel, but it would be improper for me to comment on something that I haven't read and I hope you can understand that I haven't been able to read every report from the period before I started.

**Q :** Deux questions aussi. D'abord sur la Syrie. Vous avez l'espoir que la trêve va être vraiment une trêve, mais on sait tous que lundi et mardi...on n'est pas très optimiste que cela va durer longtemps et que le conflit va continuer. Les agences humanitaires de l'ONU se préparent déjà pour que le conflit continue jusqu'à juin 2013, c'est ce que OCHA nous a dit cela fait deux jours. Vous êtes chargé des affaires politiques. Est-ce que vous vous organisez aussi, et comment, pour que le conflit dure tout 2013, et quoi faire pour ne pas rester les bras croisés à rien faire pendant que le conflit continue ? Et deuxièmement, sur les MDGs, il manque trois ans maintenant. A nouveau la même question : qu'est-ce qu'on peut faire, parce que les pays en développement ils essaient de se développer et je crois qu'ils font ce qu'ils peuvent et les pays riches, on est tous soumis à une crise atroce, ce qui n'aide pas le développement. Alors, est-ce que vous croyez que l'on va rester là où on est ou on a encore l'espoir que l'on va en améliorer quelques uns ou un, concrètement ?

**DSG:** We certainly do not plan for this horror to continue until 2013. We will do everything we can to contribute to an ending of the fighting and the suffering. The plan is to as soon as possible achieve a reduction of violence so that we can start a political process and that political process would of course be built on a complete ceasefire and a political process leading up to transition, which is what was concluded in the Geneva meeting on the 30<sup>th</sup> of June. That's our work plan. In the meantime, we are doing our very, very best - and I want to commend my colleagues in the humanitarian area, and the NGOs involved and the Red Cross, ICRC, in what they are doing to help people in very dire circumstances right now. Hundreds of thousands of people are in grave danger. We have refugee flows across the borders. Winter is approaching in Syria, and those winters are harsh. There are problems with the electricity grids. We see huge humanitarian problems ahead of us. It's already serious but it could become even worse. My colleagues in OCHA, led by Valerie Amos, and the different other actors in the field -I am just now, in twenty minutes, going to meet Peter Maurer at the ICRC and this will be one of the subjects to discuss - we will do everything we can to reduce the suffering but of course we want to go to the root cause, namely the fighting and the war, and solving the political crisis in Syria. So I hope we will not see this nightmare continue into 2013 and I hope everybody else realizes that it's so dangerous not only for the people of Syria but for the region and the world.

As for the MDGs, the reason I repeat this very strongly, is that it's a reminder. When we start to talk about post-2015, we must remind ourselves that we have three years and two months to go to achieve what we had promised in 2000. Some progress is made and I commend those who have helped that progress be possible but we need to do much more and I particularly point to these two areas: maternal health and sanitation. And we hope that in spite of the fact that we have financial difficulties - official development assistance is going down somewhat- that we still will be able to show solidarity with those who are suffering so chronically and so desperately and that we should realize that these enormous inequalities are not only unfair, they are also dangerous. If we don't do it out of compassion, we should do out of enlightened self-interest, because we are affected by whatever happens in any part of the world these days. We are interconnected and so therefore we have an interest in the welfare and the well-being of our fellow human beings wherever they are.

**Q:** I have two very small questions. My first question is what is the UN comment on the incident in Sudan, two days ago, the bombardment on one factory of arms in an urban region? As you know, Sudan announced that Israel is responsible for this attack but Israel does not mention anything. What does the UN comment on that? My second question is: from your experience, do you believe really that a ceasefire in Syria could be reachable with no conditions, no observers, no commitment, nothing? Do you really believe in that?

**Q:** Est-ce que vous ne pensez pas que les Nations Unies devraient trouver une nouvelle solution pour pouvoir intervenir dans les conflits dans le monde ? On a vu la question Syrienne, ou le manque d'unité dans le Conseil de sécurité bloque la possibilité d'intervention et on voit une dégradation de la situation depuis 18 mois. Même chose pour le Mali. L'Afrique de l'Ouest a demandé une intervention et une aide de la part des Nations Unies et ça traîne également. On s'achemine aussi vers une prolongation du conflit puisque le Mali vient d'être réintégré dans l'Union Africaine et que la situation n'est pourtant pas résolue. Je vous remercie.

**Q:** J'ai une question qui va être plus ou moins un follow-up à ma collègue. J'aimerais savoir, vous qui avez l'expérience de la médiation de conflit : quand on a une situation comme en Syrie où il y a une multiplication des acteurs non-étatiques, comme ce qui s'est passé en Somalie par exemple, est-ce que l'ONU en tant qu'institution a les armes aujourd'hui pour trouver une solution ? Simplement parce que c'est une organisation interétatique, internationale, comment vous faites ? Le Conseil de Sécurité n'est-il pas, si on peut dire...out of ...

**Q:** My question is in the same sense as my colleagues. What is the role of the UN in these situations like Syria? Is it "wait and see"? Do you see a reform of the Security Council or something can be done?

**DSG:** I think questions 1, 3 and 4 are in the same category. I think we simply have to believe it, in the possibility of reducing violence. I agree: it's a great deficiency that we don't have observers on the ground, that we don't have exact conditions made, that we don't have commitments from all the parties. We have vague indications of consideration. I hope today we will receive confirmation from the government and hopefully from the opposition forces that they will respect it. The only hope is that the Syrian people are most probably very tired,

exhausted, of this fighting and that those who break the truce would be seen as those who stop this process which could indeed lead to a political process. So I agree, that's a faint hope. But what else can we do? The United Nations stands for peaceful settlement of disputes. Chapter VI of the UN Charter, that I always carry in the pocket. And my favourite Chapter is "Pacific Settlement of Disputes". That's what we have to strive for. But I know, and I recognize, that we are weakened if we do not have a strong Security Council resolution. But this is what the Secretary-General suggested a couple of weeks ago. The idea has caught momentum and I hope that in the end it will prove possible. But it is a hope, I admit. Lakhdar Brahimi used the phrase last weekend: "microscopic hope". I notice that he has taken away the "microscopic" and there is hope that we could achieve something concrete. But it not the truce in itself, it's the sign of reduction of violence which opens up for a mediator to do the work that he or she would want to pursue.

You are right: it's more difficult when you deal with several parties. I was a mediator in Darfur and I spent more time trying to gather and collect the different movements than discussions between the government and the movements. So, this is a problem in Syria, that there are so many parties on the opposition side that there is no clear entity that we can deal with. But we have no difficulty dealing in principle with non-state actors. I have been involved in conflicts since the early 1990s and unfortunately, the civil wars were the rule of the day in the early 1990s in the Balkans and in Africa, and we were used to dealing with the non-state actors. It was a fact of life: if you wanted to have peace, you had to deal with both sides, and the governments had to accept that.

But I also want to say that the role of the mediator is more limited than I would hope and I am sure Lakhdar Brahimi would hope because you have to have a minimum of political will to achieve any result. The mediator is like a person bringing horses to a water hole. You drag them and pull them and bring them to the water hole but has anyone in this room been able to force a horse to drink water? You have to have a minimum of political will. And the question is: is that political will among the Syrian parties? And is that political will in the members of the Security Council and the neighbouring states? That's the question. So the mediator is very much a function of the collective political will.

Now the basic problems, I have difficulties talking about because it has to do with the responsibilities of the Security Council to act in situation where threats exist against international peace and security. If you think about it carefully, if you define the word "threat", it is actually before the conflict erupts. And of course that is the ideal situation, that in this world, we would act early and not wait for the last moments of crisis. And that in fact, we should move in the direction of acting early, before the house is on full fire. I would hope that is possible. But is often considered interference in internal affairs if you act on threats to international peace and security. When it comes to the veto, it's a fact of life, it's a Charter-based right. And I can only hope that the veto is used a little as possible and only in situations when the Security Council cannot in any way find other methods to solve the issues. But it is a privilege to have that right, for those who are in the Security Council. To have that right, to act on threats on threats to international peace and security, is not only a duty, it's also a privilege. And a privilege that should be seen as a privilege given by all other Member States. And that's why I hope that the

Security Council would act more and more in the direction of finding negotiated solutions and insist on them by unanimity, as much as possible.

We are where we are and I come back to the question on Mali and on Syria. There was unity on Mali in terms of planning for a political process and in terms of planning for a military operation if necessary. Actually, there was no dissenting voice, so on that issue, it was complete unity. There was also complete unity on the Sudan-South Sudan situation in the Security Council, so I shall not be in general critical. There have been many important steps taken forward to unity on issues again like Mali, and South Sudan-Sudan but on Syria we don't have that unity.

As to the incident in Sudan, I am not fully informed. I just got the news this morning and I have no report from the field so I cannot pronounce myself about the background. I'll have to know more before I comment on it.

I'll be back. Thank you very much.