

Transcript of the press conference by Hervé Ladsous, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations and Lieutenant General Babacar Gaye, Head of UN Supervision Mission in Syria

Damascus, 25 July 2012

Spokesperson: We are going to have a few comments by Mr. Ladsous followed by General Gaye and then two questions.

Hervé Ladsous: Good morning everyone, I think I said already yesterday on my arrival that the purpose of my visit here to Damascus was two-fold:

First, is to introduce the new leadership of the Supervision Mission of the United Nations in Syria. The new leader is here he is Lieutenant General Babacar Gaye who will also say a few words to you.

The second purpose is to assess the situation and to discuss with the various interlocutors, here in the Syria, the situation both in the country and the situation in the United Nations.

I had some meetings this morning with government officials where indeed we did that. I highlighted the fact that the resolution of the Security Council, voted upon last Friday, does highlight the fact that for the Council to reconsider its decision to renew the mandate of UNSMIS for a final period of 30 days there needs to be very specific and sustainable progress on the level of violence which should decrease substantially and on the use of heavy weapons. So, this is what we have to bear in mind.

In the meantime UNSMIS in a reduced format, as you know, about half of the military observers have been for the time being sent back to their countries. So the mission operates on a reduced basis, reduced in numbers, reduced in team sites in the provinces and does what it can. We, of course, have to take into account the security situation which in many places is extremely delicate.

So, this is where we are. I will have other meetings with other actors and we shall continue to discuss the situation which remains of utmost concern to the United Nations, to the Secretary General and to the Security Council. We will try to work towards contributing to a political solution which would help alleviate all the suffering.

I thank you and give the floor to Lieutenant General Gaye.

General Babacar Gaye: Thank you sir.

Good afternoon. As stated by Mr. Ladsous my name is Lieutenant General Babacar Gaye. I have the privilege to lead UNSMIS during this mandate.

My first thoughts are with the Syrian population. I know it is Ramadan time so I would like to say to them Ramadan Kareem first of all.

I take charge of this mission along with my colleagues particularly with my deputy Margaret Carey in a very difficult situation.

During our last trip in Damascus along with the USG (Mr. Ladsous) we witnessed some decrease in the violence. But unfortunately since then, we had to suspend our activities because the UNMOS (the United Nations Military Observers) were at risk. We are back with the hope that wisdom will prevail; that there will be in this tunnel some light and that we can seize and obtain less violence.

We have 30 days, and today we have 27 days to go so every opportunity will be seized to alleviate the suffering of the population.

This is our main concern.

Thank you.

Spokesperson: OK, we are going to take two questions

Q: Will the UN take part in transitional government negotiations as per the Geneva Agreement?

Mr. Ladsous: Of course the communiqué adopted by the action group in Geneva stands. It was accepted by all participants. This is the political process, which I mentioned earlier, to which we are trying to bring our contribution by facilitating a change in atmospherics which will give progress and impetus to this path. We are not acting directly on this. We are acting on the environment and the key for that is a reduction in the level of violence in the country.

Q: Do you have any grounds to be optimistic whatsoever that either side of the civil war is listening to the UN?

Mr. Ladsous: I think diplomats have to be optimistic and that's no joke, I think we have to hope. We have to hope that the whole process gains traction, that the vicious circle of violence can cease, and that some political solution and first and foremost some political dialogue can get started.

Q: But the situation on the ground is the violence is increasing.

Mr. Ladsous: It is not decreasing definitely.

Thank you very much.