

Press Conference: Opening Remarks by Head of UNSMIS General Gaye

Damascus, 30 July 2012

Good Afternoon ladies and gentlemen,

Today I had my first meeting with our counterparts from the Syrian Government. It was a good opportunity for me to discuss UNSMIS activities in the coming 20 days. I stressed the need for all sides to end the bloodshed – Syrians killing Syrians – and for all sides to commit to political dialogue.

I explained to the Government that our activities will be focused around the mandated task of Resolution 2059. We will be monitoring the level of violence and the use of heavy weapons in Syria. We will also be assessing if there is readiness and, if possible, progress for local confidence-building measures and national dialogue. This of course hinges on UNSMIS being provided the space, security and access to fulfill its mandate.

Yesterday, I conducted my first field visit as the Head of the UN Supervision Mission ad interim. I went to Homs and ar-Rastan to assess the situation related to violence and the use of heavy weapons. I also met with the Governor and members of the Free Syrian Army to try to gage their readiness for local engagement and dialogue.

During my visit to Homs, I was personally able to witness heavy shelling, from artillery and mortars, ongoing in the neighbourhoods of the city

Ar-Rastan was heavily damaged by an intensive shelling campaign and fierce fighting. There were damaged tanks left on the side of the streets; public infrastructure, such as bridges, was destroyed; and homes on the main roads inside the town were largely damaged. I did see families, women and children in some inner neighbourhoods of the town, in addition to a few shops open, selling food.

Before I end, I want to say that I am deeply concerned about the ongoing violence from both sides in Aleppo. My observers there have reported an upsurge in the violence, with helicopters, tanks and artillery being used. I call on the Parties, again as stated by the Joint Special Envoy, to exercise restraint and avoid further bloodshed. It is imperative that both sides respect international humanitarian law and protect civilians.

I feel that there is a need to shift from this mindset of confrontation and militarization to a mindset of dialogue first of all at the local level and then soon the national dialogue that has been promoted by the six-point plan.

Thank you. I will now take a few questions.