



Hervé Ladsous
Under-Secretary-General
Department of Peacekeeping Operations
Press Conference, 22 October 2012

Near verbatim transcript

Spokesperson Nesirky: Welcome to the briefing. We are pleased to be joined by the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Mr. Hervé Ladsous. Welcome back. Mr Ladsous is here to brief you on the challenges and trends there are in UN Peacekeeping as well as on the situation in Mali and on peacekeeping related aspects of the latest Security Council Resolution on that particular topic. So, first of all will turn to Mr Ladsous for some introductory remarks followed by questions for which we have about half an hour in total. So, please, welcome back.

Opening Remarks:

Thank you very much and good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. I thought it would be useful to have a new contact with you after summer, which was already a long time ago, in view of all that is happening. And in view of the fact that next week we'll see the opening of the Fourth Committee of the General Assembly, which I will of course brief on our activities and it will be followed by the C34, the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations. So, this is a good opportunity to tell you, share with you some thoughts, both about operational issues that we face now and more generally about emerging trends in peacekeeping.

So, as Martin suggested, maybe a couple of words about Mali.

As you know there was a very important meeting in Bamako last Friday, which was attended by the Deputy Secretary-General, who was heading a team from the United Nations to meet with our various partners, of course the Malian authorities but also our partners in Africa, the ECOWAS and the African Union. So, as you saw, I think there was a very large degree of consensus that we, the international community, have to pursue a political solution addressing the two challenges. That is to say the restoration of the constitutional order and the political process in Mali and, second, helping that country to regain sovereignty of its whole territory, that is to say of course in the North.



I think there was agreement on that but also on the fact that at some stage a military solution, a military element of solution, will have to be somewhere in the picture. And this we have been working on for quite some time already. It has been since last spring that I sent the first military planners from DPKO to the headquarters of ECOWAS in Abuja. I had myself several meetings in the region with leaders of the ECOWAS and we continued this by sending, at the end of last week, the same team back to Abuja. And now there is going to be another meeting in Bamako this time, over the weekend, the beginning of next week, to refine the concept of operations with all those who are willing to contribute. Clearly, it demonstrates the fact that the United Nations stands ready to assist the Malian authorities in finding sustainable solutions to this crisis. But, again, the solution has to be first and foremost political, with possibly the use of military means to help sustain it.

On Syria, which is also an area of much concern as you know to all of us, the focus right now is clearly on the efforts of Joint Special Envoy Brahimi to help Syria both achieve a cessation of violence and ultimately bring about a political process that would meet the aspirations, the legitimate aspirations, of the people of Syria. And of course addressing the humanitarian crisis that directly now affects several million Syrians. You will remember that the Security Council decided the withdrawal of UNSMIS last August because simply it was obvious that the conditions on the ground did not allow the mission to operate effectively. But of course, depending on changes on the ground and on the decisions of the Security Council, we stand ready to assist further.

One topic we have been following very closely has been Sudan and South Sudan. You would remember that in April this year the two countries were very, terribly close to open war and fortunately all-out conflict has been avoided and a total of nine agreements were signed by the two partners on the 27th of September, which was of course saluted by the whole international community. Now that these agreements have been signed and, furthermore, ratified by both parliaments last week, it is now a matter for implementation. It is also a matter for looking very closely at those issues that have not been solved, notably Abyei and other elements.

But I think now there is clearly a chance that those two countries might stand together as viable neighbours, living in stability. That is an important achievement



for which we need to commend the African Union, the Chair of the African Union High Level Panel, former president Thabo Mbeki. They have been doing very solid work, not easy work, but I think this progress is something that is terribly important.

I would like to mention in connection with Sudan, the issue of course, the very grave humanitarian issue in the two areas, South Kordofan and Blue Nile Province, where the tri-partite proposal put out by the African Union, the Arab League and the United Nations has been moving except that it's not implemented because the fighting goes on. There is no ceasefire and of course the international community needs to continue pressing because the humanitarian crisis in those two states is very, very severe indeed.

Still in Africa, I would mention the Democratic Republic of Congo, where a very dangerous situation has continued developing with the rebel group known as M-23 and which I believe yesterday was named the Revolutionary Army of Congo, something like that. These people are really destabilizing this whole part of the DRC and actually destabilizing the region, and it is very important that all external support to the M-23 cease and that a regional dialogue can develop.

Now, the regional dialogue has been taken up by the International Conference of the Region of the Great Lakes, which has come up with these two ideas: for the first one starting to be implemented, for the second which still needs a bit more work.

The first idea is a Joint Verification Mechanism on the border. And indeed numbers of military officers are deployed now in and around Goma to monitor what is happening on the border.

The second idea, which is still being worked upon but we expect some results in the next few days, would be the establishment of an International Neutral Force to work alongside MONUSCO on pacifying this whole part of the Kivus. But we are not quite there yet.

In the meantime of course there are 260,000 more IDPs in the region, 60,000 refugees in neighbouring countries, terrible suffering by civilians. This is totally unacceptable. MONUSCO is working very hard to implement its mandate to protect civilians and support security, but clearly there is a limit to what they can do in the face of such violence.



Maybe a few words just about the current trends in peacekeeping. For the first time now in some time we are going to close - at the end of the year - the mission in Timor-Leste. I think it is important that the life cycle of a mission can play out completely. I think one has to commend the leadership and the people of that country, where I will travel next month, for having completed tremendous achievements in terms of restructuring the State's institutions, its police, being able to carry on now with their own means.

One of the concepts that we are implementing is the concept of right-sizing of missions. I have made a policy now that, very regularly, at least once every two years, we shall review all the *dispositifs* of our missions to stick to the situation on the ground. This is what we are doing in Darfur. Darfur where we are still facing some violence but a reduction of the mission is I think something reasonable. We will be doing the same in Haiti. We will be doing the same in Liberia. I think we have to make sure that we are configured in every situation in an optimal way based on the needs on the ground.

So there is this trend towards right-sizing of our missions, of course subject to decisions of the Security Council. But we have to be increasingly flexible, increasingly nimble, especially in the context that we all know of financial constraints. We have to be responsible in our management of resources that states, Member States, put at our disposal. In other words, we have to be driven not by the numbers but by the very precise needs that we face and we must continue to be versatile and creative in the implementation of our mandates.

Let me say finally that peacekeeping is above all a partnership, a global partnership between the Security Council, between our Member States and the Secretariat. And collectively we have to continue focusing on meeting the demands and pressing the needs, and do that, as I said, in a creative way.

It does come at a cost. I would simply flag that so far this year very sadly we have lost 73 peacekeepers, who died from various causes in the service of peace. This is not a small figure and it is very sad of course to acknowledge that they have paid the ultimate price for this service.

Nevertheless, I think where we can show some results I think it is something heart-warming.



So maybe I will complete it here and be ready to take questions.

Spokesperson Nesirky: Barbara.

Question (Barbara Plett, BBC): About cholera, in 2011 the UN report by the panel of experts did say that the inadequate toilets in the Nepalese camp could have led to the cholera bacteria; that ultimately the outbreak wasn't the fault of any group or individual and the disease could have been spread by many factors.

We have a story today quoting a doctor who was on that panel, Doctor Daniele Lantagne, who has seen further evidence since then and she says now she knows for sure that the strain of cholera in Haiti is an exact match to the strain of cholera in Nepal. And that she has changed her views since she co-authored that report, which in effect said no one was to blame. She says now it is most likely that the UN is to blame and that the cholera was spread by someone infected by this Nepalese strain. So, I just wanted to get your reaction to that and do you believe that the Nepalese soldiers are to blame for this epidemic?

USG Ladsous: Let me say first thank you for asking the question, that I have indeed seen these latest comments by Doctor Lantagne. But I cannot really comment on the substance of these comments. As you know, the Secretary-General had commissioned an independent panel of experts, which concluded that it was not possible to say conclusively how all this happened.

What I would like to highlight at this stage is that the issues of hygiene, of clean water, are central to the actions of MINUSTAH and in general the United Nations Country Team in Haiti. They do a huge amount of work along with the Government, civil society, the local communities, first to help mitigate the impact of cholera but also to treat and support those who are affected and build safe water systems. Lots of efforts both in terms of what we call QIPs, Quick Impact Projects, on the ground establishing at least small water treatment projects but also trying to improve globally the situation and I think several million Haitians are already benefitting from these efforts.

Question (Barbara Plett, BBC): What happens with this new information, with this new evidence that the doctors are talking about. Does the UN respond to this at some point? Where does it go?



USG Ladsous: Well, I'm not a scientist you know, so *[interruption/inaudible]*. Well, it has to be looked at, of course. But I suppose, well, possibly the panel of experts. I don't know. It came up this morning, really so I would not be able to say more on this.

Question (Kristen Saloomey, Al Jazeera): In the doctors' report they have recommended changes to how the UN handles its deployments trying to prevent things from happening. Have any of those recommendations been enacted, do you know?

USG Ladsous: Well, as I said the UN are very much involved in helping develop everything connected with water, clean water, and treatment of this. It is an issue of public health. But it is something where the infrastructure is so, in some cases non-existent, and has to be developed throughout the country and this is what are colleagues are doing there.

Question (Kristen Saloomey, Al Jazeera): Sorry, I was distracted by Haiti but I really wanted to ask you about Congo. Given what you have mentioned about M23's increasing activities in Eastern Congo, are you worried? First of all, what are your concerns about that for the peacekeeping operation there? Is it possible that they could try to take Goma for example? Or exert more...it looks like they are trying to spread their influence in that area. If it comes down to them attacking or coming into conflict with Government forces there, what would be the peacekeeping response? What are your concerns and what would the possible response be to an escalation?

USG Ladsous: The concerns are very big indeed because, let's face it M23 - which by all claims is about 1,500 people - they are solidly ensconced in an area called Rusthuru, which is about 80 or 100km north of Goma.

What do they do there? Everything. They have established a de-facto administration. They are receiving taxes and levies on all who go through that area. They certainly mistreat people. Civilians flee because they get killed. Women flee because otherwise they get raped. Children also are recruited as child soldiers on a large scale and treated as slaves, including sex slaves in some cases. This is absolutely unacceptable. It is a violation of the sovereignty of a Member State of the United Nations and clearly the issue of support from abroad has to be tackled



and this is where the verification mechanism now enlarged to all countries in the region comes in to actually monitor what happens, report and deter.

Now are they going to move anywhere? Certainly they have to be followed very closely. At one stage three weeks ago they seemed to be moving north but that stopped and there is of course considerable caution to the exercise making it so that they do not move south towards Goma, because Goma is a very large city as you know and that would be extremely bad if they were to go in there.

So, MONUSCO is taking the most robust position it can in view of its mandate. They are in support of the armed forces of the DRC, when these armed forces are there but quite often they are not. And of course for the protection of civilians they do not hesitate using all equipment including attack helicopters to deter those unspeakable acts to happen. So, as robust as they can, as I said. I was shown last time I was there a few weeks ago ample evidence that, yes, they are as proactive as they can be.

Question (Journalist not identified): My question is about Mali. Did you have a chance to talk already to the new UN Envoy, Mr Romano Prodi, and what is his perception and his involvement in the new mission for Mali?

USG Ladsous: Well, I think the presence of Mr Romano Prodi at the meeting in Bamako last Friday was very much welcome by all participants. I think it's very good that such a respected and experienced political figure accepted this very difficult mission about not only Mali by the way, it's also about Sahel in the wider sense. So, yes he is going to be very much involved. I think he is travelling now for the next few days in the region then he will come shortly to New York so that we can consult, including of course on the more military aspect that we are working on presently.

Question (Journalist not identified): *Inaudible*

USG Ladsous: I believe so. I'm not sure the announcement has been made but certainly it is in his attention and it makes sense.

Question (Column Lynch, Washington Post): On the DRC, I believe you were talking about possible establishment – you were looking at establishing - some sort of neutral force in support of MONUSCO. Can you flesh that out a little bit if...are



you talking about...are the Europeans prepared to come in? This could present a situation where you can have outsiders engaging in robust peacekeeping, where they could be fighting a national army like Rwanda and Uganda. So if you can give us some sense of what you were talking about, what would they do and will they be fighting forces or are they monitors?

USG Ladsous: Well right now there is a military assessment team that is meeting in Goma so we have to wait for their recommendations. I think the idea of the ICGLR was of a force, a neutral force, that is to say with the involvement of no country which is a neighbour to the DRC and which could alongside MONUSCO go for very focused operations on the ground. Now of course the devil is in the details and we would have to look very closely at the composition of that force, at its command and control mechanisms, how to coordinate with MONUSCO and agree on the very specific objectives and what would be needed to do. This is precisely what is going on and I am expecting that by the end of this week we will know more.

Question (Column Lynch, Washington Post): *(Inaudible)* Is this an EU?

USG Ladsous: No, it was mainly countries from the membership of ICGLR but not eastern neighbours of the Congo.

Question (Karim, RFI): I would like to know if the information you have from the ground on DRC matches the information of the group of experts, specifically on the support from Rwanda and Uganda to the M23? And also do you see a possibility of a change in the MONUSCO mandate to fight in a better way the M23 rebellion?

USG Ladsous: On the report of the group of experts, it will come out in November, so I would rather prefer to have it officially than leaked elements before I would comment.

The mandate of MONUSCO, it is a matter of debate, whether indeed it is, and I think it is, one of the strongest mandates in terms of the focus on the protection of civilians. But do remember it is a peacekeeping mission. So we are not at liberty to launch any sort of offensive action at any time. This has to be coordinated first and foremost with the armed forces of Congo, as I said when they are there, which is not always the case. But clearly, when there is the strong case of civilians being killed, mistreated, then there is no hesitation. I gave very specific orders, that attack helicopters go in with whatever means are necessary to save civilians.



Now your question is whether that mandate may be strengthened. That is of course for the Security Council to decide. I believe, let me say again, it is probably the strongest mandate in the whole apparatus of peacekeeping missions right now.

Question (Matthew Lee, Inner City Press): A question about Sudan. You said that you are right-sizing the Darfur force, but it seems like five peacekeepers have been killed there this month – first four at the beginning of the month and then a South African recently. And at least it seems that the attack was done with anti-tank guns and other very serious weaponry. What steps is UNAMID going to take to protect the peacekeepers? And also the peacekeepers that you have in Kadugli in Southern Kordofan, I wanted to know do they have any at least observing mandate? Can they, if they become aware of fighting or attacks on Kadugli? I heard that you mentioned in the Council in the South Sudan, Sudan briefing, you mentioned stuff about Kadugli, is that as DPKO or simply passing it on from others?

USG Ladsous: Mister, I told you already that I would answer your questions when you stop making insulting insinuations about me. Thank you.

Question (Matthew Lee, Inner City Press): What is insulting about these questions? Peacekeepers are dead. Can you answer the question?

Spokesperson Nesirky: Moving on. Evelyn?

Question (Evelyn Leopold, AP): On Mali, what is Algeria's position? Some experts believe that ECOWAS can't really proceed without Algeria's approval and the two countries have a long border and if Algeria takes some of these Al-Qaida affiliates in to Mali, would they come back if Algeria didn't use them (*inaudible*)?

USG Ladsous: I think you are very right. Probably no sustainable solution can be brought to the situation in Mali without the concurrence and the support of all the countries in the region. That is true of Algeria. It is true of Mauritania. It is true certainly of Niger, possibly Chad. I think this is the whole spirit of the way it has been handled, first and foremost by ECOWAS, of which Mali is a member, but also the surrounding - '*pays du champ*' is the expression. Yes, you cannot hope to achieve anything durable without the concurrence and cooperation of all.

Question (Telal Al-Haj, Al Arabiya TV): (*inaudible*) Your office has been contacting troop contributing countries for a possible establishment of a force for



Syria. There was a report in *The Telegraph*, I'm sure you've seen it, which has been denied by Lakhdar Brahimi's spokesman, that 3,000 soldiers, a force, was going to be set up for a peacekeeping operation. Is there such sounding of TCCs? And what are your efforts if you care to share them with us? Where does the 3,000 number come from? Is it false or is it true?

USG Ladsous: I think the figure is completely theoretical. I would confirm that of course we are giving a lot of thought as to what would happen, if and when a political solution or at least a cease-fire would emerge. This is why I said in my opening remarks right now the focus is really on Lakhdar Brahimi's efforts to achieve a ceasefire, whether temporary or more durable. Then of course if such a thing did indeed happen, which is to be strongly desired because it's a shocking fact that everyday a 150–200 civilians are being killed and it has become almost part of the background noise, you know, which is simply unacceptable. So, of course subject to what the Security Council might decide eventually, we are giving thought to what we could do to contribute, in the framework of a solution to provide security, possibly to protect civilians. There are a number of hypotheses but I think at this stage one can only say that it would certainly be premature to mention a figure because it would depend on the situation and on the tasks.

Question (Telal Al-Haj, Al Arabiya TV): Just to follow up. If the Security Council tomorrow authorized you to have a peacekeeping force in Syria, are you ready? Do you have the elements in place to set up such a force? And would it have to be preceded by a cease-fire and a monitoring mission before you send in peacekeepers?

USG Ladsous: I would say that your question is too theoretical at this stage. But I would certainly confirm that we are getting ourselves ready to act if it becomes necessary and the mandate is given.

Question (Nazar Abboud, Almayadeen TV/Al-akhbar Daily-Lebanon): Yesterday's events that took place in Beirut and between Beirut and the South, we understand that some militants have cut off the coastal road leading to the south. Did you consider or did you discuss this matter with the Lebanese authorities with regards to UNIFIL's free movement into the south?

USG Ladsous: Well, clearly we are watching the developments in Lebanon very closely. We do have UNIFIL south of the Litani River and they are carrying on with



their duties, which have to do with security in the area, working with the Lebanese armed forces, and so far the work has been able to proceed correctly.

Question (Journalist not identified): My question actually relates to Lebanon but a different aspect of it. Do you have a comment on whether UNIFIL should have a role in trying to deter the launching of drones from Lebanon into Israel? The Hezbollah leader has said that there will be more such incursions, one has occurred already. Iran has also threatened them. Is this something that UNIFIL has a role in trying to deter, or at least monitor and report on?

USG Ladsous: Well, I think that if UNIFIL personnel were to witness such actions, which would not be of a legal or legitimate nature, then they would of course report immediately on this but so far I am not aware this has been the case.

Spokesperson Nesirky: Ok, thank you very much indeed. Mr Ladsous thank you for coming.

USG Ladsous: Thank you.

ENDS