

Press Conference by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon at United Nations Headquarters

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Secretary-General

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Following is a transcript of UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's press conference, held in New York on 25 January:

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

This is the first press conference of my second term. I'm glad to be with you today and look forward to building on our good relations with the UN press corps, and I count on your support.

As you know, I just briefed the General Assembly on my action agenda for 2012 and beyond, for the coming five years. I won't repeat the details. You have the speech and the agenda before you. We are also posting it on the Web, with links to UN Facebook and Twitter.

Let me step back briefly and explain the thinking behind the agenda. In addition to the core business of the United Nations, I wanted our team to look deeply at the world and our work today. I wanted to identify areas where opportunity and need come together like never before.

These are times of austerity. Yet, these are also times of promise. More people are becoming engaged; more people are empowered to make a real difference. If we dedicate our energies and mobilize the UN system, we can move the needle for generations to come. We can create the future we want.

In September, we identified five imperatives – five generational opportunities for change: sustainable development; preventing conflicts and disasters, human rights abuses and development setbacks; building a safer and more secure world, including by standing strong on fundamental principles of democracy and human rights; supporting nations in transition; [and] working with and for women and young people.

Today, I laid out a road map for delivering. What's new? There are too many initiatives to list, but let me highlight five.

First, we have an unprecedented opportunity to wipe out deaths from five of the world's biggest killers. With focused engagement by the UN and its global partners, we can eliminate deaths from malaria, polio, paediatric HIV infections, and maternal and neonatal tetanus. We are also close to ending deaths from measles once and for all.

Second, sustainable development. As we look to this year's "Rio+20" summit, we will forge consensus on a new generation of sustainable development goals, building on the Millennium Development Goals.

Third, these are anxious times for families around the world. Earlier this week, the ILO announced that the world will need 600 million new jobs over the next decade for sustainable growth. We need to mobilize the international system like never before to expand economic opportunity. We need a new social contract.

Our agenda starts with economic empowerment for women and expanded opportunities for young people. I will appoint a new Special Representative for youth to engage young people and spearhead our efforts.

Fourth, we push on prevention. Prevention saves billions of dollars and millions of lives. The UN is the world's fire brigade in responding to disasters and keeping the peace. Our action agenda will place prevention at the very centre of our work, from development to peace and security to protecting human rights and advancing democracy.

Fifth, we will work with Member States to declare a new environmental frontier, an Antarctic nature preserve. Over the last half century, the southern ice cap has been melting. Pollution is threatening species. The Antarctic is an essential ecosystem, like nowhere else on Earth. We have a chance to save it and we must come together to do so.

We can do this, and more, through the power of partnerships and a stronger UN. Today, I announced that we will create a UN partnership facility. We need to mobilize the formidable resources of the private sector, civil society, philanthropists and academia behind a broader range of the UN agenda. I also announced that the UN will launch a new generation of the UN “Delivering as One”, focused on managing for results and improved accountability.

Let me turn now to current events.

This morning saw the conclusion of the latest round of Cyprus talks at Greentree. We still have far to go. But we will spare no effort. I will not repeat what I said this morning.

On Syria, I am encouraged by the Arab League’s initiative to seek a political solution to the crisis and welcome their decision to seek the support of the Security Council.

Regarding Somalia, this is a landmark day: our special envoy, Mr. Augustine Mahiga, has formally moved his office — UNPOS — the UN Political Office in Somalia — to Mogadishu — an important expression of confidence and commitment for the country’s future.

On Libya, my Special Representative, Ian [Martin], and High Commissioner Navi Pillay briefed the Security Council this morning. As you know, our political mission, UNSMIL, is working to support Libyan authorities in a number of areas: elections, public security, rule of law and transitional justice.

Let me conclude by noting that today marks the one-year anniversary of Tahrir Square. On this important day, I want to congratulate the people of Egypt on their peaceful transition to democracy and their determination to push for continuing change. Yesterday, Field Marshall Tantawi announced a partial lifting of the state of emergency. I encourage the transitional authorities to pursue the peaceful and early handover of power to civilian government, to uphold human rights, to release political detainees and accelerate the pace of reform.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today I leave for the World Economic Forum at Davos. This year, the main debate will be on topics that are front and centre of the work of the United Nations — the social contract, social issues, social justice. I look forward to hearing fresh ideas. I will take part in

sessions on sustainable energy for all, women's and children's health, and seizing the opportunity presented by the upcoming Rio+20 conference on sustainable development, and I will have a number of bilaterals with leaders participating in the Davos Forum.

On 29 January, I will be in Addis Ababa for the African Union Summit, where we will focus on further deepening the vital strategic partnership between the United Nations and the African Union on many challenges, including Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia and other regional issues.

Then, I will visit the Middle East — Jordan, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory. My visit comes at an important moment. As you know, Israelis and Palestinian negotiators began preparatory talks in Amman, in line with the most recent statement by the Quartet. I will be there to encourage both sides to re-engage in earnest and create a positive atmosphere for moving forward.

Ladies and Gentlemen, before concluding, and before receiving your questions, I would like to make a short statement on senior appointments on my team.

In keeping with the plans announced on 5 December 2011, for the anticipated changes in the senior posts of managers, I would like to make an additional announcement, in addition to what my Chef de Cabinet had already announced at that time.

First, I would like to inform you that the Deputy Secretary-General, Mrs. Asha-Rose Migiro, and my Chef de Cabinet, Mr. Vijay Nambiar, expressed their wish to step down, so as to allow me to compose a new team of senior managers for the second term.

I wish to express my deep gratitude and appreciation to Deputy Secretary-General Migiro and Mr. Nambiar for their unfailing support, wise counsel and dedication in handling the many challenges that have faced the Organization during my first term. To ensure continuity up to the Rio+20 preparations, and smooth transition of my team, DSG Migiro will stay in office until the end of June this year. Mr. Nambiar will move to serve as my Special Adviser on Myanmar at an appropriate time, following the transition in my Executive Office.

Second, I intend to seek nominations for the Under-Secretary-General position of the Department of Management to supplement my own search efforts. I am grateful to Ms. Angela Kane for her dedication and commitment to improving the management of the work of the United Nations and its reform agenda. My special thanks go to her and her team at the Department of Management for their hard work to get through the difficult, yet successful, budget process late last year.

Third, two Under-Secretaries-General — my Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, and Special Adviser for Prevention of Genocide — will relinquish their duties mid this year. I intend to carefully review the needs of these offices, with a view to taking stock of the achievements made so far and to suggest a way forward to scale up and harness institutional synergy with the related offices. I pay tribute to the tireless efforts and unrelenting commitment of both Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy and Mr. Francis Deng to furtherance of these important mandates of the Organization.

The search and appointment process has started to fill various senior positions, including those announced. Nine USG positions, at DPA, DESA, DM, DGACM, DPI, ODA, OSA — Office of the Special Adviser for Africa — ECA, ECE, and five Assistant Secretary-General positions at the funds and programmes like the UNDP and UNFPA. They will proceed in a transparent and competitive manner, based on merit, while taking geographical and gender balance into account.

We will keep you informed of the progress in the composition of the new senior management team. I thank you very much for your attention, and now I am happy to take questions.

Question: Mr. Secretary-General, on behalf of the United Nations Correspondents Association, welcome to this first press conference and all the best for your second mandate. And my question is this, the situation in Syria is very serious, and are you planning to go to Damascus in a [inaudible] mission to prevent the risk of a civil war?

Secretary-General: I highly commend and appreciate the efforts of League of Arab States, and I have been constantly keeping touch with the Secretary General, [Nabil] ElAraby. Even the day before yesterday, I had extensive discussions on what course of action League of Arab States is going to take, and how the United Nations can help their efforts. As I said earlier, I am encouraged by the way the League of Arab States is going to resolve this issue through political solutions, and also try to support the United Nations Security Council's efforts. And I will very closely coordinate and evaluate all the situations regarding the situation in Syria. But my message has always been consistent — all the violence must stop to protect the human rights and human lives there. And the leader should listen carefully always and take decisive action to reform this situation. Thank you.

Question: Mr. Secretary-General, my question to you is about Myanmar. We have seen a lot of change going on there in the last several months, and in the past, some of your critics perhaps have said that, oh, you are a silent diplomat, silent diplomacy; to what extent do you think your interventions personally, your good offices, your trips there, Dr.

Gambari, Mr. Nambiar's efforts and the UN as a whole have led to the changes that we are seeing there? Do you think it has played a major role or not? And do you think these changes are going in the right direction?

Secretary-General: I think the United Nations basically has been playing a very key role in furthering the democratization process of Myanmar, and I am very pleased and encouraged by what the current Myanmar authorities, led by President Thein Sein, has been leading, including the releasing of political prisoners. I visited Myanmar myself twice, my Special Advisers, previous and current Advisers, have visited many times. Those roles, I believe, were laying foundations for other international partners to engage. I have been chairing this Group of Friends on Myanmar many times during the last five years on the basis that I could strengthen the international community's engagement and support for democratization process in Myanmar. Of course, you know, this is the result of consolidated engagement of all the partners. But I am proud to tell you that, whether it has been quiet diplomacy or public diplomacy, I think we have been employing those two approaches all the time, continuously with patience. And I have been engaging in direct talks with the leaders of Myanmar all the time, and I am also planning to visit in the near future Myanmar to have further discussions with the Myanmar authorities.

Question: Mr. Secretary, in your speech this morning, you said you wanted to extend the reach and give new dimension to the International Criminal Court. Can you be more specific on that and tell us what it will entail and what can be done?

Secretary-General: I have been one of the strong supporters and believers in putting an end to impunity through the International Criminal Court and other regional tribunals. The United Nations during the last five years has been able to see much progress in firmly establishing the rule of law and also putting an end to the culture of impunity. We have been very vocal and very strong; and I, for the first time, participated in this Review Conference of the ICC, which was held in Uganda. And I have been participating in the Assembly of State Parties to the ICC. I have been very closely coordinating with the ICC. But this is not only ICC, but all other regional special tribunals. I will continue to do that. What I said this morning was in a general and principled statement, which I will continue. But for any detailed matters, I will always have a very close coordination and discussions with those people concerned.

Question: Mr. Secretary-General, thank you very much. You mentioned in all of your five-year agenda talks this morning and earlier with the GA, the revitalization of the non-proliferation agenda. And then you said something very interesting, "get to work". Who were you referring to, and what agencies? And when you said regional agencies, are you looking at strengthening any of the proposed regional nuclear-[weapon]-free zones.

Secretary-General: This realizing of a world free of nuclear weapons and ensuring that there will be no proliferation of nuclear materials and weapons, this is one of the top priorities not only of the United Nations, but humankind. The whole world has been working to realize that world. While we have seen some progress, we have not reached them. [At the] UN, this Conference on Disarmament is the only single body who is authorized and who are mandated to address these issues. Unfortunately, during the last 12 years, the Conference on Disarmament has not been able to perform their role, mandate. That is why I have addressed the CD several times already during the last five years. And I have been speaking very strongly. Even two days ago I delivered my statement that, if the CD continues like this way, they may lose their relevance. And I have been really trying to let them get back to work. They have not been able to agree even a programme of work. There was, upon my urging three years ago, they agreed to a programme of work. But nothing has been discussed, nothing has been implemented. This is a very worrisome situation. I know there is division of positions among Member States, and at the same time I understand that there is seriousness and urgency felt by many Member States on the work of CD. I sincerely hope again and urge them to accelerate their work.

Question: Your Excellency, in view of the current dangerous level of confrontation between the West and Iran over its nuclear programme, don't you think that the international community should try some innovative ways of dealing with this issue other than applying economic sanctions and threatening with military strikes? Since its thirty-fifth session, the General Assembly has invariably reached the consensus that the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region of the Middle East would greatly enhance international peace and security. Last November, you, Sir, announced that this year, Finland would host an international conference on a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East. What are your expectations of a possible outcome of the proposed conference? Would it be able to defuse increased tensions in the Persian Gulf and facilitate denuclearization of the region?

Secretary-General: You raised many issues. Let me go one by one. First, the Iranian nuclear development programme, I have been speaking with Iranian leaders many times directly and through my public statements that the onus is on the Iranian side to prove that their nuclear development programme is genuinely for peaceful purposes. And I am concerned by the most recent report of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) indicating that their programme has something to be related with the military dimension. That they have to prove that their nuclear programme is for peaceful purposes. And they should fully cooperate with the IAEA. And I have been urging these members of E3+3 and Iran to engage in a dialogue. There is no alternative to the peaceful resolution of this. This is one thing. At the same time, I have been urging the concerned parties to first of all to try to defuse the tension. These rhetorics are not helpful. And this is a very important area for international trade and commerce, the Strait of Hormuz. So the free passage of any ships in open seas should be respected and protected in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Law of the Sea.

Now, about this nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East, this is again the mandate which I have been given by the most recent Review Conference of NPT, and as you now, I have already appointed a Finnish diplomat as facilitator. He has been very closely and actively engaging with the concerned parties, and we are really looking forward to this international conference as mandated by this NPT Review Conference during this year, at a later part of this year. But I am not able to provide you any detailed information at this time, but one firm principle is that we will hold an international conference to discuss the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East this year.

Question: Secretary-General, how seriously do you take the in-fighting in Libya, the most recent example being the fighting over Bani Walid? Do you think that it is just the growing pains that could be expected, or do you think there is a threat of a much more long-term instability? And secondly, on Libya, do you think that there is a role for a UN Security Council investigation into civilian casualties of NATO bombings?

Secretary-General: The lessons which we have learned these days, maybe in the past through all these situations, is that democracy is not easy. People were excited, they were full of hope and expectation — not only in Libya, but in Egypt, Tunisia and elsewhere where we have seen this surge of expectation through the “Arab Spring”. Sometimes, we may need to be patient. That is why I have placed helping the countries in transition as one of my five generational opportunities, because all these situations come only once in a generation. So I believe that we have to seize this opportunity, helping them to establish the rule of law, based on inclusivity of dialogue and reconciliation. That will be very important. I am concerned by what we have been experiencing in Libya — internal fighting. The current Government is trying to establish rule of law through reconciliation and also managing the proliferation of small weapons which have been prevalent in the society, in close cooperation with UNSMIL — the United Nations Support Mission in Libya. That is what I said earlier, and Ian Martin has briefed the Security Council. On your last question, I understand that NATO authorities have also mentioned to the issue of how to address the accountability of the civilian casualties in the course of military operations in Libya. But I am waiting for all their consultations.

Question: Thank you, Mr. Secretary-General, for this press conference. I haven’t had the privilege of asking you a question for the past two years, despite the fact that I have sought it actively, but I am sure Martin will look into that question. Mr. Secretary-General, you have laid out a vision, an action plan for the next five years — a road map — as you indicated. I would like to go back to the road plan of the past five years of your mandate. Could you indicate for us the area in which you achieved most success, and about which you feel proud, and an area about which you remain still disappointed?

Secretary-General: It is very difficult to find the beginning and end in all these current crises — whether it is a man made political crisis, or nature-made. I believe I can tell you that we have made climate change one of the most important top global agenda [items]. Now, we are trying to broaden the scope of our approaching global challenges through the vision of sustainable development. That is why I put sustainable development on the top of my list, including climate change. Climate change is a very important entry point of addressing sustainable development. I will not repeat all, there we can address the food crisis, which we have been suffering too much. Water scarcity and energy shortages and gender empowerment.

The second, of which I am proud to have made some contribution, is gender empowerment. Again, the Member States have met in the first World Conference on Women in 1995 in Beijing. They made a very good plan of action to realize 50-50 gender empowerment by 2005. That was before I became Secretary-General. I promised and pledged that I would try to change this one. During the last five years, not only have I changed the dynamics within the UN system — which you will agree that there are significant changes in the UN — I have been speaking with world leaders and urging them to change all these unacceptable situations. A lot of countries are now changing through their political will, through legislation, if necessary sometimes by giving some quotas. This will take a long time, but I think we have seen dramatic changes and awareness of the world's people, that without gender empowerment, without establishing this fundamental principle of gender equality, we will not be able to realise all these good visions. Those are two things which I can tell you at this time.

Question: Disappointments?

Secretary-General: Normally, I was advised, and I am not going to [use] the words frustration or disappointment. I have been expressing concerns many times, but if a Secretary-General is frustrated, then what about other people? So let us have a strong commitment and hope and determined will before you say you are frustrated or disappointed. That is my policy.

Question: Mr. Secretary-General, I am going to return to Sudan. Is there an overall strategy? Is anyone in charge from the UN? The Security Council doesn't even have a Sudan working group [inaudible]. You have turmoil in Darfur [inaudible]. Is there a strategy? Is anyone pulling this together?

Secretary-General: The UN, together with the African Union, had been the central driving force in addressing the Sudan situation since the last five years. As you may remember, from day, one I said Darfur and Sudan will be one of my top priorities. And we have been working very hard. Unfortunately, the crisis is still continuing. Even with the independence of South Sudan and even with a successful referendum which was

conducted in January of last year, the relationship between south and north Sudan has not been smooth. They have not been engaging in implementing the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, including the status of Abyei, and sharing the national wealth, particularly oil. This is something they should have done much earlier, before the independence of South Sudan, but now that there are two independent States, they have to address these issues. We have [peacekeeping] missions there – UNMISS, we used to have UNMIS, and we have UNAMID. And we have now UNISFA. The whole efforts and investments have been centred on these issues. Unfortunately, we have not been able to see perfect peace and stability. That is why I am really heavily engaging with the African leaders during my AU summit meeting. The UN will continue to do that. The former President Mbeki of South Africa, he has been leading the AU High Level Implementation Panel — this has been playing a very important role with my Special Envoys and Special Representatives and peacekeeping operations. But at this time, we need the full support of Member States.

In addition to, in fact, the parties concerned, their direct engagement, the full support of the Member States. When UN peacekeeping operations need some critical asset, these critical assets should be provided. South Sudan is a huge country, without much infrastructure. This country is known as 20 per cent bigger than France. Just a simple, very challenging example is that there are only 60 kilometres of paved road in such a huge country. There are not many roads for peacekeepers to move, except by being transported by air assets, so we really need air assets. Now, UNMISS is now employing some commercial helicopters — 24 commercial helicopters — and I had to really beg to those neighbouring developing countries to provide us with helicopters. Without helicopters, how can you transport these soldiers to prevent the expected, anticipated crisis? We were aware of this crisis looming. We really wanted to take all these preventive measures, but without critical assets, it is just impossible in a country where there is no infrastructure. I really again urge and appeal to Member States to provide the necessary assets.

Question: First, I would like to congratulate you on a very excellently articulated five-year action agenda, and judging from your last statement, just what you said about South Sudan, I hope that you are not going to be frustrated about the situation. However, I would like to ask about Nigeria. I wanted to know why the UN Secretariat has not been calling the Boko Haram attacks in Nigeria a terrorist attack. The Nigerian Government has said it is terrorist, the United States Government has called it a terrorist attack, but I notice from your statements and the statements of your Spokesperson, that you don't call it a terrorist attack, even after the UN building was attacked in August. Is there any reason why the UN is restraining from describing these Boko Haram attacks as terrorist attacks?

Secretary-General: I have on many occasions strongly condemned these terrorist attacks by Boko Haram, including that time of the attack against the UN House last year. The Nigerian Government should also mobilize full possible forces to address these Boko Haram terrorist attacks, and the UN will coordinate with the concerned parties, international organizations and regional organizations to address all these issues. As I said this morning to the General Assembly, I proposed that we need to have a single coordinated counter-terrorism mechanism combining the currently existing functions. This is what I have been supported by several Member States already, for my proposal to strengthen this capacity. As you know, we have established a counter-terrorism centre in Saudi Arabia. I am going to visit Saudi Arabia to convene the first advisory meeting sometime early this year. So, our commitment and determined will to fight against terrorism will be further strengthened and will continue.

Question: Mr. Secretary-General, now you have invested heavily, personally, in this Cyprus problem, for a solution in Cyprus, and you have spent a lot of time for the past few days in Greentree with the leaders. Are you disappointed that there is no concrete solution, at least for this stage here in New York? That is my first question. And in relation to that, what do you think about the isolation on the Turkish side, because without lifting the isolation there, it is basically not a fair situation where they can't export anything, import anything, they can't travel. We are in the twenty-first century, and you know, they are isolated very heavily. What do you say on that?

Secretary-General: As I am in the position to facilitate their negotiations, this Cypriot-led, Cypriot-owned process, I should not speak much about the detailed information of what had been discussed between the two leaders and myself also, for confidentiality. Confidentiality is a very important element to help this process move. That is what I have been emphasizing to the two leaders — please keep confidentiality.

At this time, through five rounds of such negotiations, facilitated by myself directly, I think they have come quite close, but still, the major, what we call the core issues — like the election of the executive, who will become the President and Vice-President, and what the relationship will be, the rotation period, how these leaders should be elected — this is one of the most important core issues which they have not agreed yet. A lot of proposals have been put on the table. And there again is a very complex issue of property. One positive thing is that they are going to exchange necessary data within two weeks on the properties located both in the south and the north, so that they will find some mechanisms, guidelines, on how to handle these properties. Whether it should be compensated or reinstated or different issues. And then, citizenship. There has been an increase in population on both sides. To whom and how many people should be given citizenship of a united federal Cyprus? I think these issues can also be handled through exchanging data, necessary statistics. Upon my suggestion, both sides, both communities, have conducted censuses recently. The United Nations monitored the census which was conducted in the Turkish Cypriot [community].

Therefore, I have been urging them to engage in a give-and-take process [in a] bold and decisive manner. As you said, there is an issue of isolation and difficulties for the people, citizens. The Turkish Cypriots are suffering from all these hardships. The sooner they agree, I think the sooner people will be able to enjoy the social and economic opportunities. That is my goal and my vision. And I think I have had good discussions in a very friendly manner. The exchange of discussions and views between the two leaders have always been very cordial and friendly, and mutually respecting, so let us hope that they will continue the remaining tasks until the end of March. Then my Special Adviser will assess the situation. If his assessment is positive, then consistent with the relevant Security Council resolutions and following consultations with both parties, I intend to call an international conference.

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