

Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General

NOON BRIEFINGS

The following is a near-verbatim transcript of today's noon briefing by Stéphane Dujarric, Spokesman for the Secretary-General.

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****Children and Armed Conflict**

And as you will have seen, it is our understanding that Member States this morning received the Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict. In his report this year, the Secretary-General highlights the recent global trends regarding the impact of armed conflict on children during the 2014 calendar year. And as you will read in the report, 2014 saw unprecedented challenges for the protection of tens of millions of children growing up in countries impacted by conflict.

This is especially true in several situations affected by major crises, namely, in Central African Republic, Iraq, Israel and State of Palestine, Nigeria, South Sudan, and the Syrian Arab Republic — which were exposed to the most egregious violations. This added to existing violations against children in protracted conflicts, such as in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Somalia. Most recently, the security situation in Yemen deteriorated further with reports, in April 2015, of significant numbers of child casualties.

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****Questions and Answers**

Question: Steph, can you tell us why the Secretary-General decided to take Israel and Hamas off the annex list of parties in the children in armed conflict report?

Spokesman: The report is... obviously, the Secretary-General's report, I don't think anyone was taken on or off. The report is the result of a consultative process within the house. Obviously, it was a difficult decision to take. The Secretary-General took that decision. But, I think what's important to note is that the report that was shared today is much more than a list. It has a large... large report outlining issues raised the shocking treatment of children and the suffering of children that we're seeing throughout conflict zones including what happened in Gaza and other parts of the State of Palestine. I think in the body of that report, the Secretary-General expresses his deep alarm at the extent of grave violations, unprecedented and unacceptable. So, I think I would just... I would encourage everyone to not focus so much on the list, but on the report as a whole. And the report, as I said, is much more... much more than the list.

Question: But, a follow-up. The list is titled list of parties that recruit or use children for among other things... I'm sorry, the title of the list is... or the title of the annex is a list of parties that do these various offences which include attacking schools and/or hospitals. And by the UN's own accounts, Israel attacked 7 UN schools and killed 44 people. How can you not include them on that list?

Spokesman: Again, you know, I think if you look at the body of the report, it clearly details what we saw in Gaza over the summer, the shocking nature of what we saw in Gaza and outlines it in very direct terms, which I think helps bring light to the plight of the children, plight to the suffering, and again, I would urge you to look at the body of the report which is much more than just a list. Abdel Hamid.

Question: Yes, follow-up Stéphane: Hamas during the campaign and summer by firing rockets killed one Israeli child which is confirmed. But, there are 540 Palestinian children have been slaughtered during the bombing. How could any human being not see that bigger picture of killing so many children and yet under pressure the [Secretary-General] took the Israeli name out of the list? I know for sure there was so much pressure on the [Secretary-General].

Spokesman: You know, I hear your statement, Abdel Hamid. I think the Secretary-General did exactly what you said. He brought to light the events in Gaza and the number of children that were killed. It's there for everyone to read in black and white in the report. I think it can leave no question to what the Secretary-General's position is and what the United Nations position is on this very subject. You know, Member States have never been shy in expressing their opinion to the Secretary-General, but what should be in or out of the report... whether it's this report, this year or in the previous years, whether it's a report on all sorts of other issues that the Secretary-General reports on to the Security Council. Ultimately, it's the Secretary-General's report, he stands by it. I would also, you know, encourage you to look at the observations included in the report about the issues raised where certain parties said that it was never their intent to harm children. And I think what we're focusing on is not so much on the intent, but on the cause and the impact on children. George and then Benny.

Question: Has this report been generally released, and is it available to us? And if so, where?

Spokesman: Yes, I think we can figure out how to make it available to you. Mr. Avni.

Question: Since the word "pressure" is the meme here, is it fair to say there were pressures on the Secretary-General from both sides, one side wanted it to list Israel, the other side wanted to not list Israel?

Spokesman: I think, you know, you read the media as much as I do, Benny, probably a bit more. As I told Abdel Hamid, Member States, NGOs [non-governmental organizations], people around here are not shy about expressing their opinion to the Secretary-General about what he should do or should not do, what words he should use in a report, what he should include in a report. We've seen it this year. We've seen it in previous years and I'm sure we'll continue to see it. You know, and I think also... and if you look at the report... and I'll quote the observations from the Secretary-General where he says, "I would like to put all parties to the conflict on notice that those that engage in military action that result in numerous grave violations against children will, regardless of intent, find themselves under continued scrutiny of the United Nations, including in future reports related to children in armed conflict." I think one of the major aims of these reports is to increase the accountability by shedding light on possible violations of international law, international humanitarian law, and bring light to the plight of children in armed conflict.

Correspondent: So, pressures from both sides worked.

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