



Press Conference

Department of Public Information • News and Media Division • New York

PRESS CONFERENCE BY SECURITY COUNCIL PRESIDENT ON WORK PROGRAMME FOR SEPTEMBER

September would see the Security Council hold a high-level debate on small arms and their role in fostering conflict, Gary Quinlan, Permanent Representative of Australia, said at Headquarters today as he assumed that organ's rotating presidency for the month.

He said the role of small arms in conflict had long been debated in the Council as it had an impact across the scope of the 15-member body's work. However, it had never passed a resolution on the topic, he noted, stressing his hope that such a text — as well as improved coherence across the United Nations system on the topic of small arms — would emerge from the upcoming debate, planned for 26 September.

Among other topics on the Council's agenda, he said, were reviews of progress on several key peacekeeping and other missions, including those in Guinea-Bissau, Somalia, Sierra Leone and Liberia, the latter case being the only expected mandate renewal. The Council would also undertake its quarterly review of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF), in addition to its monthly briefing by the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Roberterry.

Several other situations were included as footnotes on the Council's agenda, he said, explaining that meetings on the Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali and Syria could be called at any time. On Syria, he said Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman had briefed the Council this morning on his recent visit to the Middle East, where his main focus had been on seeking support for a political solution, as well as exploring support for the proposed "Geneva II" conference on Syria.

Asked about the chances of the Council holding a meeting on Syria, he noted that the stalemate among the five permanent Council members had been widely reported. "The reality is, everybody is quite transfixed about what to do," he said, adding that all members agreed that the alleged use of chemical weapons was atrocious and unacceptable. However, discussions had "gone nowhere" because States had not shifted their positions.

He went on to emphasize the need for a re-energized diplomatic effort, adding that the focus in that respect had shifted to the upcoming Group of 20 (G20) meeting in Saint Petersburg on 5-6 September. Indeed, "most of us have concluded that, just for the moment, it would not be productive or useful to have a Security Council discussion of this in a more formal way, because it leads nowhere".

To a related question about President Vladimir Putin of the Russian Federation having said he would consider supporting Security Council action if more "definitive proof" of violations could be found against the Syrian Government, Mr. Quinlan replied that "if this is an idea, it should clearly be discussed" on the margins of the G20 meeting.

Asked whether there was significant momentum among key players on holding the proposed Geneva II conference, he said the urgent need for such a conference had been one of the few major points of agreement during informal Council discussions on Syria. It was clear that a professed commitment existed, but the question now was how to deliver quickly on that commitment.

As for whether the Council would do anything to improve the flow of humanitarian supplies into Syria, he said “all members of the Council made reference to concerns on the broad humanitarian front”. With more than 2 million official refugees outside the country, a third of its population internally displaced and millions going hungry every day, the Council had been trying to find ways to help improve the access and delivery systems of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, he said, describing that effort as a “work in progress”.

To a question about the United Nations Mission to Investigate Allegations of the Use of Chemical Weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic, he said that, while there was a great sense of urgency about completing the report, the United Nations was committed to ensuring the scientific integrity of the process. The report would be made available to the Council as soon as it was completed, he said, stressing that he did not know whether it would be made available to others.

On the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mr. Quinlan said the United Nations peacekeeping operation there had taken a “forward-leaning role” in securing conflict-affected areas under its new, civilian-protection-oriented mandate. There was currently a lull in military activities, and a major drive was under way to re-energize diplomatic efforts.

While the Democratic Republic of the Congo was listed in the Council agenda’s footnotes, there was an expectation that members would, in fact, meet to discuss the situation, Mr. Quinlan said in response to another question. Indeed, the new, robust role of the United Nations Stabilization Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO) in protecting civilians was a “historic and compelling” topic for every Council member.

Asked whether the Australian election scheduled for next Saturday had complicated planning for his country’s Council presidency, he said it had meant “a bit of uncertainty” at the planning level, particularly with regard to who would attend the General Assembly’s high-level debate. However, everyone involved was aware of the Council’s agenda so that whichever candidate was elected could “hit the ground running”.

When asked about the most recent development in the inspection of a Democratic People’s Republic of Korea ship detained in Panama — and how, more generally, sanctions regimes could better deal with potential violations — he said a panel of experts had visited the site and were preparing a report for the relevant committee. However, improving the work of the sanctions regimes was an “ongoing challenge”, and not as much progress was being made as there should be.

Asked whether Mr. Feltman’s recent visit to Iran had found any noteworthy “new approaches” to foreign policy on the part of the new leadership there, Mr. Quinlan stressed the need to respect the confidentiality of that discussion. Nevertheless, Mr. Feltman had been in “listening mode” and had sensed a new interest in talking, he said, while declining to speculate on where that might lead.

As for whether Australia, as Chair the sanctions committee on Iran and other countries, would raise the issue of potential Syria-related violations, Mr. Quinlan said he would not address the question of Syria in his upcoming 90-day report. There had been no substantial discussion of that issue in the sanctions committee, but a number of entities had been listed in respect of Al-Qaida operations in Syria, he added.

The President, asked how he would feel if force was used against Syria without Council authorization, said the question brought up several difficult and complex issues, including what was “legal” and what was “legitimate”. There were also differences of view on the moral and legal obligations relating to the “responsibility to protect” civilians and other matters. It was possible that the differing views of Security Council members would not change, he said. Moreover, while the Council would always be defined by its failures, “it still has a tremendous number of successes” that could not be overlooked.

* * * * *