



United Nations

Secretary-General

SG/SM/13622

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

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

Following is a transcript of UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's press conference held in New York today, 6 June:

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

It is a great pleasure to see you this morning, and thanks for your participation. I have been travelling heavily and wanted to brief you before departing for South America later this week, on Friday. As you know, I returned from Rome on Friday, where leaders gathered to mark the 150th anniversary of Italian unification.

Apart from my meetings with President [Giorgio] Napolitano, Prime Minister [Silvio] Berlusconi and others, I also met with the President of the Palestinian National Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, who briefed me on his thoughts and plans for Palestinian reconciliation and Palestinian statehood. For my part, I emphasized the imperative that both sides, Israel and the Palestinian Authority, return to the negotiating table.

Let me also say a few words about my prior visits to Africa and France for the G-8 (Group of Eight) Summit Meeting. During the Africa swing, I attended the inauguration ceremony of President Alassane Ouattara of Côte d'Ivoire — where the United Nations stood firm on democratic principle and in defence of human rights.

I also devoted considerable attention to the new "Every Woman, Every Child" initiative — an integral element of our global strategy for women's and children's health. Our challenge is to turn the \$40 billion which have been pledged during last year's Millennium Development Goals Summit Meeting into concrete delivery on the ground. And with the passage of a landmark health bill, the Government of Nigeria is poised to do just that.

As you may know, I have established the Accountability Commission lead by President Jakaya Kikwete of [United Republic of] Tanzania and Prime Minister Stephen Harper of Canada who have been meeting to ensure that this \$40 billion support should come and should be delivered exactly to those people who are in need.

During my visit to both Nigeria and Ethiopia, I was impressed by how effectively the United Nations system is working as one — alongside governments, non-governmental organizations, businesses and foundations to scale-up our work for women and children, in particular, and the Millennium Development Goals in general.

Let me also note that issues of global health will be the focus of this week's General Assembly High-Level Meeting on HIV/AIDS, beginning tomorrow. For only the second time in [the] history of the UN Security Council, the Security Council is also taking up the issue — further highlighting its importance.

At the G-8 discussions in Deauville, France, Libya figured large. My Special Envoy, Abdullah al-Khatib, will travel to Tripoli again tomorrow. He will visit both Tripoli and Benghazi and will then attend the Contact Group meeting in the United Arab Emirates on 9 June. He then returns to New York to brief the Security Council on 14 June.

As for Syria, we previously noted the Government's declaration of an amnesty and call for dialogue. Unfortunately, that has been overtaken by recent events. I am especially concerned by reports of children killed or tortured. Such matters must be investigated thoroughly and their perpetrators brought to justice. Once again, we call on the Syrian Government to respect the rights of its people.

Regarding the weekend's shootings along the Golan Heights: let me emphasize — the parties concerned share responsibility for preventing needless civilian deaths.

Regarding Bahrain, as you know, I met last Friday with Crown Prince Salman Al-Khalifa and his Foreign Minister. We welcomed the Government's decision to lift the state-of-emergency and the King's call for national dialogue. Here, too, I emphasized that any such agreement must be inclusive and responsive to the aspirations of the Bahraini people that should also lead to genuine and meaningful dialogue.

A final word on the debate over nuclear safety: every State has the right to decide its own national energy policies. That said, the Fukushima incident underscores the enormous importance of nuclear safety and disaster-risk reduction. It demands a collective and global response — which is why I will convene a High-Level Meeting on Nuclear Safety and Security on 22 September in New York.

You have asked me often about my intentions for the future. This morning, I sent a letter to the membership of the General Assembly and the Security Council, offering, humbly, myself for consideration for a second term as Secretary-General of the United Nations.

It has been an enormous privilege to lead this great Organization. If supported by the Members States, I would be deeply honoured to serve once more.

Throughout my time in office, I have sought to be a bridge-builder — among the Member States, within the United Nations system and among a rich diversity of global partners. Finding common ground is central to delivering results.

Looking back, these four and a half years have marked a period of extraordinary challenge — for the United Nations and the international community. And we can be proud of what we have accomplished together: we have raised climate change to the top of the global agenda; we have responded quickly and effectively to a series of devastating humanitarian emergencies — in Myanmar, Haiti, Pakistan and elsewhere; [and] we have saved many lives and sown the seeds of peace in Sudan, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the

Congo and Côte d'Ivoire. They must be nurtured carefully.

Amid the worst economic crisis in [generations], we kept the world's focus firmly on the needs of the most vulnerable. Most recently, during the dramatic events of the "Arab spring," we spoke out — firmly and without ambiguity. Listen to the voices of your people, we told the region's rulers, respect their aspirations, act boldly, now, before it is too late. Let me say it again: this is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to advance freedom and democracy. The United Nations will support these efforts to the maximum.

Throughout all these remarkable developments, amid all these crises, the United Nations has been at the forefront. At a time of unprecedented global change, the world increasingly looks to us, the United Nations, to lead on the great collective issues of the day. That is our challenge as we now look ahead.

In recent years, we have begun to make real progress on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. We must maintain that critical momentum.

We must redouble our efforts to deliver on the Millennium Development Goals. For hundreds of millions of the world's people, development means hope. We cannot fall short. And beyond that, we face the "50-50-50" challenge. By the year 2050, the world's population will reach 9 billion — 50 per cent more [than] a decade ago. By that time, the world must cut global greenhouse gas emissions by 50 per cent.

We are changing the face of the United Nations, quite literally, and we will continue to do so. We have moved decisively to create UN Women. We must carry that drive forward. Along the way, we have appointed more women to senior posts than ever in United Nations history — a 45 per cent increase at the highest levels.

From the very beginning, from our first day in office, we have worked persistently and resolutely for a "Stronger UN for a Better World." This effort to make the United Nations more transparent, accountable, efficient and results-oriented has found expression in new measures — financial disclosure, performance compacts, the Global Field Support Strategy, more modern information management. Most recently, we established a change management team to lead the effort to adapt our business practices to the best possible standards.

All this is important work — difficult and inspiring. It demands commitment and passion — not only from the Secretary-General, but everyone who has been called to this mission. Let me pay credit where it is most due: our success has largely been thanks to the extraordinary talents and dedication of our United Nations staff, who strive each and every day to make the world a better place.

There is only one solution to the generational challenges of tomorrow. That is to begin our work today: by standing for democracy, advancing human rights and international justice, feeding the hungry and raising people from poverty, keeping our planet environmentally healthy, promoting sustainable development.

In the months to come, in close partnership with the Member States and our entire United Nations family, I look forward to sharing my thoughts on our common agenda for the future

and hearing theirs.

One thing we can say with confidence: for an organization as vital and indispensable as the United Nations, the one constant is unity amid change. Only by working together, all nations and the broader United Nations family as one, can we advance the noble goals of this great Organization. Only by working together can we deliver on the high expectations of the world's people.

Thank you very much for your attention.

Question: Mr. Secretary-General, good morning. Welcome back. With your lecture this morning, you answered my first question already. Then, on behalf of the United Nations Correspondents Association, all the congratulations for the future and for an easy re-election. And I give my privilege to Bill for the real question. And congratulations again on behalf of all of us.

Secretary-General: Thank you very much.

Question: Also, congratulations, Mr. Secretary-General on what's expected to be an easy confirmation, two things relating to your second term: one, you said, I believe, when you took over your first term, was that your two top priorities were getting a climate change deal and peace in Darfur. Now, neither has been achieved. You might say no one could blame you necessarily for those. But don't you think you should be held accountable for the fact that both of those goals haven't been achieved? Also, secondly, with as much specificity as possible, would you define your priorities for your second term?

Secretary-General: The negotiation to agree on a globally acceptable, comprehensive climate change agreement is still in the process of negotiation. That requires the collective will of world leaders. That is why I have convened twice a summit meeting in the United Nations and I have been participating in many UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) negotiations myself. And I have exerted all my efforts, first by visiting all the places around the world, whenever and wherever I could see and observe the negative consequences of the impact of climate change. That kind of experience and my voices based on my real experience really has resonated widely and deeply. That is why we are really now able to bring this agenda to the top of the world's attention. We will continue. We have made good progress, starting in Bali by adopting the Bali Road Map, going through Copenhagen. And in Cancún last year, we set quite a good framework. We have to build upon this Cancún agreement in Durban this year. I have already been speaking with the world leaders, particularly President [Jacob] Zuma of South Africa, and I'll do my best. I will spare no efforts if I am re-elected as Secretary-General. This is the most important priority for human beings.

Beyond climate change, the United Nations, as you are already aware, is now putting its highest focus on sustainable development. Rio+20 next year will be very important, crucially important for humanity. We have to make Rio+20 a success, covering all the issues, starting from climate change, water scarcity, energy scarcity, and food security issues and global health issues. We have to link all these dots in a more comprehensive, broad way. That's my vision for climate change and sustainable development.

On Darfur, as I said from day one, Darfur will be one of my top priorities, as African challenges will be. It's continuing. We have been able to deploy the largest number of United Nations peacekeepers in Darfur. By doing that, we have been able to save thousands of human lives, which might have cost if not for these United Nations peacekeeping operations. Of course, the situation is still very volatile there. With the independence of South Sudan just a month or a little more ahead, on 9 July, we are going to observe another independent State, maybe another United Nations Member State soon. We have to address all these Sudanese affairs, including the situation in Abyei and Darfur, comprehensively. That will continue. I'm sorry to tell you that all these major challenges are now in process. But we will try to accelerate [progress]. I'm proud that I have really made some accelerated impact on this Darfur process. The All [Darfur] Stakeholders' Meeting in Doha recently has made a good progress. As I have already made some comments, I welcome the outcome of the All Darfur Stakeholders' Conference as the basis for reaching a permanent ceasefire and an inclusive peace settlement and sustainable peace and stability in Darfur. In the regard, I am thankful to the Emir of Qatar for his initiative and his leadership, and also to the joint African Union-United Nations mediator, Mr. [Djibril] Bassolé on that. I call on the parties to end hostilities without delay. That is the best way to resolve these issues. Thank you very much.

Question: Secretary-General, also I join my voice to congratulate you and wish you a very powerful second term. You have said about the Arab Spring, a little earlier, you said that you spoke firmly and without any ambiguity. And that is true when it came to Tunisia, when it came to Egypt, when it came particularly to Libya. But you have not been as firm, or as unambiguous, when it has come to both Yemen and Syria. Are you now, beyond your statements that come out, are you now willing to say, for example, to the President, Ali Abdullah Saleh, of Yemen, that he should not return to Sana'a? And are you willing to explain or call on President Bashar al-Assad to step down, as you've done with other Presidents, being firm and without ambiguity?

Secretary-General: With my due respect to you, I don't agree that I was not firm enough as I've been to other situations. I have been speaking quite firmly with President Saleh of Yemen and also President Assad of Syria. In fact, you name any country, I have been speaking with almost all the leaders in the region, whether there were demonstrations or not. Because, wherever I saw some potentiality of such aspirations moving out, then I have discussed this matter, so that they would take necessary measures, and listening more attentively to the aspirations of their people. That is why you have seen in some areas still they have been trying to manage the situation.

On Yemen, the situation is deeply worrisome and particularly changed, with President Saleh leaving the country for medical treatment. I have seen all these reports and the reactions of common people, people on the street. We will monitor first of all. My view has remained the same all the time. This confrontation should stop and all Yemenis should work toward diffusing tensions. And they have their own domestic programmes. As you know, the GCC [Gulf Cooperation Council]-brokered deal has been on the table. It was almost on the verge of agreement. I hope that, on the basis of previous negotiations and dialogue, I hope we will be able to see the early resolution, the harmonious resolution of this situation in Yemen.

Question: Just a tiny follow up. So can you pronounce yourself on whether you say

President Ali Abdullah Saleh should stay out of the country, and can you also answer the question related to President Bashar al-Assad of Syria, because you did not go into that?

Secretary-General: That will have to be determined by the people of both Yemen and Syria. That has been my consistent message. My message to the leaders in the region has been consistent: that the leaders have a very important responsibility to reflect the will of their own people and listen carefully, more attentively to their will and aspirations.

Question: Mr. Secretary-General, your second term is virtually assured, because there is no opposition and the Security Council and the General Assembly are likely to meet this month. I wonder if you could tell us — we know you met with the Asian Group this morning — are you planning to go and meet with all the other regional groups in the coming days? But that was just as my way of saying: welcome to a second five-year term. My question was really about the North-South confrontation in Sudan. There was a report from the United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) that warned that the invasion by the Sudanese military into Abyei and the town of Abyei could lead to ethnic cleansing if the tens of thousands of residents of Abyei were not able to return. I wonder how concerned you are about this and how concerned you have let your feelings be, and what you think can be done to try and smooth things out before 9 July.

Secretary-General: Thank you very much for your very kind words, and in fact, I would like to really thank all of you who have spoken previously, congratulating me about my decision to run for this second term. And I would like, with due respect, to be more respectful to the decision of the Member States of the United Nations. It is up to the Member States who will determine my decision to run for the second term. Before that, I will not take anything for granted. That's my style. I do my best up to last minute. There is no such [thing as] "taken for granted". I will meet with the African Group this afternoon, and I will meet the Ambassadors of Eastern European Group tomorrow morning. And by tomorrow afternoon, I will be meeting with all GRULAC [Group of Latin American and Caribbean States] members, ambassadors and also the Western European and Other Group. By that time, I will have met 192 Member States altogether, explaining my vision and my priorities. And I will humbly seek their support as members of the United Nations. They have the prerogative to make a decision. And I really appreciate your very sympathetic understanding and support for me. I will do my best.

On the South-North Sudanese relationship, I am very troubled that still this issue is on our table, on our agenda. As I said, South Sudan is going to be an independent State on 9 July. Before that, I hoped, and we sincerely hoped, that all these pending issues should have been resolved with the very successful national referendum, [in] January this year, we hoped that all this euphoria and excitement could have let both [North and] Southern Sudan resolve all the pending issues: the status of Abyei, the demarcation of their borders and sharing their wealth coming from oil, and citizens consultations and security and citizenship. There are still many pending issues. I sincerely hope that they should engage seriously in dialogue before 9 July. The situation in Abyei was totally unacceptable, and though the calm has been restored at this time, there is always the possibility of renewed hostilities. And I am also in the process of discussing with, consulting with the Security Council members about the status and future of our UNMIS, the United Nations Mission in the Sudan. As you know, the Sudanese Government has formally informed me of their

desire to terminate this Sudanese mission. And I have also requested the members of the Security Council to consider my proposal to establish a United Nations mission in Sudan, in view of the new South Sudan. We hope that, with the active involvement of the United Nations peacekeeping operations [that] are there, and also with the active support and flexibility of the parties concerned, this South-North Sudan will be harmoniously resolved as soon as possible.

Question: But are you concerned about ethnic cleansing?

Secretary-General: I am not in a position at this time — let us not talk about all this, what would be ethnic cleansing, etcetera. We are doing our best efforts. Now, it is far too early to claim that ethnic cleansing is taking place. What we have to do is to prevent such things. World leaders have pledged, never again, never again, this ethnic cleansing or massacre or genocide. And that's why we have been very seriously discussing the responsibility to protect. We have at this time no evidence that Misseriya militias who definitely came to Abyei to loot, actually came to settle. However, there is a human rights report by UNMIS pointing out, if conditions for the returns of the displaced Ngok Dinka residents are not created, this could lead to some very unfortunate situations; what you are worried about, ethnic cleansing. But this issue has been brought to the attention of officials of the Government of Sudan, who have indicated that they will create the conditions for IDPs [internally displaced persons] to return. So, we are doing our best efforts to prevent such things.

Question: Thank you very much, Secretary-General. Yasuhiri Sakomoto, Kyodo News, Japan. Firstly, the North Korea nuclear issue has been in stalemate for a long time. What do you intend to do for a possible breakthrough? Secondly, another thing is that United Nations reform has been a big agenda, and many Member States are calling for a more transparent United Nations. What specifically do you intend to do for a more transparent and more rational Secretariat budget and expenditure? Thank you very much.

Secretary-General: The situation on the Korean peninsula has been also a continuous source of concern. You have seen two very tragic incidents which happened on the Korean peninsula. And the nuclear issue of the [Democratic People's Republic of Korea] has always been on the agenda of the international community. I appreciate the member countries of the six-party talks, particularly the People's Republic of China, who has been trying to take initiative to reduce the tension on the Korean peninsula. And I also appreciate the United States, who has been also trying to work out the denuclearization policies of both [the Republic of Korea] and [the Democratic People's Republic of Korea]. I believe that six-party talks should be resumed as soon as possible to discuss more seriously with an accelerated pace for the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. That's what the international community wants. There are many resolutions taken by the Security Council; these resolutions should also be fully implemented. And at the same time, this bilateral relationship between [the Republic of Korea] and [the Democratic People's Republic of Korea] should also be promoted, so that they can expand political space where they can engage in a dialogue for mutual cooperation and exchanges.

And on United Nations reform, as I said in my remarks, I have established a dedicated Change Management team, led by an Assistant Secretary-General, Atul Khare. He will be supported by some of the dedicated staff who will work until the end of December this year.

Of course, from day one, making this Organization a more effective and efficient and transparent, accountable one has been my top priority in the administration dimension. And I have achieved significant progress. We have made the United Nations standing on the highest level of ethics; we have made our work performance more transparent and accountable. All the senior managers above the rank of Assistant Secretary-General are now obliged to declare their assets, financial assets publicly. And they are obliged to identify their policy priorities or management priorities on various issues under their jurisdiction. And they are now under review every year. In April every year, this Performance Review Board meets and discusses and evaluates their performance — of senior advisors. So it's a totally new situation. This Organization is much more accountable. You have not seen those systems, which I have introduced, during the last six decades. And I am going to do more. There are still many more areas to make improvement.

Question: Right. Mr. Secretary-General, you have been outspoken on the Arab Spring, and your statements have been ahead of the Security Council and other United Nations bodies. Could you explain why? And, as a result, you have been criticized for not being as outspoken on some Asian issues, particularly Sri Lanka and perhaps even China?

Secretary-General: Human rights are universally recognized values. And this is one of the three pillars of the United Nations Charter. And thus it has been always placed on the top priority together with peace and security, and development. All these three pillars have been given equal attention and policy priorities. That's what I have been doing. You have seen all the different cases of abuses of human rights; fundamental principles of human rights; I have been speaking out. There are some different cases where again the background and dimensions of United Nations involvement has been sometimes different. I have been speaking out to the cases of Sri Lanka; I have established this panel of experts and I have issued this panel's report. The Member States are now in the possession of all this, aware of all this report. And the situation, like the human rights you are mentioning in China, I have been speaking with them constantly about improvement; the necessity of improvement of human rights in China. I will continue to discuss this matter wherever it happens.

Question: Why did you speak so forcefully on the Middle East in the... since early this year?

Secretary-General: In the course of Arab Spring, you have seen many casualties and many arrests and detentions and abuses of human rights. And I have been speaking out again to all the leaders; directly speaking to them. And one area is women's status in the Middle East. That, I am also going to speak out. And, in fact, whenever I spoke with the leaders in the Arab [region], I have advised them, strongly urged them to take into account the conditions and status of women. When they were taking about democratization based on the will of the people, they have to include women's challenges and women's concerns. That, I am going to do more.

Question: Okay, sure; first a follow-up on Sri Lanka and then this thing about reform. You commissioned that panel of experts report; then you said that you couldn't do any investigation unless an intergovernmental body orders you to. Ms. [Navi] Pillay has said

that such a body should be set up. Do you follow in that? And what steps have you taken on this idea that you would review the United Nations own performance in the final stages of the conflict? Even your Chief of Staff has been described in a still-murky incident of the killing of surrendering fighters. So I was wondering: have you taken any steps in the 40 days since you said that to do that? And on reform, this idea that five years should be the maximum service for your senior officials — I think this was announced in 2007 by Mr. [Vijay] Nambiar. Are you going to be implementing that going forward? The Chief of Staff, Mr. [Robert] Orr — there seems to be a number of people who have been here that long. Is that going to be implemented?

Secretary-General: You must have read all the recommendations of the panel's report. Most of the recommendations of the panel's report concern steps which the Sri Lankan Government needs to take. Beyond what I can do within the United Nations to review its actions during the final stage of conflict, much will depend on the Government of Sri Lanka and the Member States who have been studying this report. Addressing the issue of accountability will be an essential step towards lasting peace and stability in the country. And I will continue to discuss this matter with the Sri Lankan leadership so that they will implement fully the recommendations in this panel's report. First and foremost, proper action is needed to be taken by the Sri Lankan Government. That's what the international community really wants. Again, another one is that I am still awaiting the response of the Sri Lankan Government. I am checking almost every day, every week so that they will send their response as soon as possible. That can give me further review on their response. And on reform, I think I have explained extensively, but if you are interested, we can sit down together and I can explain more on the United Nations reform.

Question: Another one on reform. Do you think there should be another candidate? All this call for democracy in the Arab world... I understand, you announced for the second term, that's all to the good. Do you think the United Nations should have a process — almost like the IMF [International Monetary Fund] has now — in which they have a time for the solicitation of other candidates, a process for interviews and then a vote? Or do you think that's not necessary here?

Secretary-General: That's what Member States will have to decide. Member States have been discussing this matter extensively for quite a long time, as a way of revitalizing the role of the General Assembly. That's why I am reaching out to all Member States and I am also meeting the Forum of Small States, which has more than 100 Member States. So, as I said, there is no such "taken for granted". I am just humbly submitting my desire to serve this Organization. It's up to Member States who will make the decision.

Question: Mr. Secretary-General, congratulations on your nomination, uncontested. Second, I just want to follow up on Yemen first. Ali Abdullah Saleh, the President of Yemen, is in Saudi Arabia for treatment. Many countries, powers in the area — the United States, according to reports, is trying to pressurize him to step down. Would you call upon him, from this podium, to accept the GCC [Gulf Cooperation Council] initiative and step down to save more shedding of blood, especially now that the truce has broke down after a few hours in Yemen? My question is really on Sudan: your Under-Secretary[-General] for Peacekeeping Operations has at least twice given the permission for an indicted criminal to use United Nations assets, namely the helicopters. Did you endorse these decisions for Ahmed Haroun to use United Nations helicopters to be transported? And would you

continue this practice or is it case by case, and what's the reason for such decisions?

Secretary-General: I have been stating my position in the course of the last few weeks about the development of the situation in Yemen, so I will not repeat it. My position has always been clearly stated. And I sincerely hoped that the GCC-brokered deal would have been signed by President Saleh but he refused it and he is now, according to reports, in Saudi Arabia.

Question: Do you call upon him to step down? That's the question.

Secretary-General: It's up to the people, and if he really cares for the future of his people and country, I hope by now he should make good judgment of his own. On this use of United Nations helicopters by Mr. Haroun, that was done, as we have already explained, on a very specific and special case. It is not routinely provided that these helicopters or military assets are provided to those people who are indicted. There are legal implications — we are fully aware. But to [have] this national referendum smoothly conducted, at the time, our position was that his participation at the time was absolutely necessary, critically necessary, and because of the distance and time factor, I understand that this asset was provide for him but on an exceptional basis.

Question: Will it happen again?

Secretary-General: It happened on an exceptional basis.

Question: I would just like to tell the Secretary-General that people from Africa, and especially Nigeria, are very excited about your last visit. So I have a question on that and then a second question but let me give you the second question first: do you think that the level of political and religious violence that has been reported in Nigeria, do you think it comes to something that the International Criminal Court should investigate, which is what the Prosecutor has said? That's my first question. My second question is about your second term: the media in Nigeria this weekend said that the Nigerian President is going to be participating in a Security Council meeting to consider your desire to get a second term. Are you aware that that meeting is going to be going on and do you expect a response this week regarding the letter you send to the Security Council and General Assembly?

Secretary-General: For this investigation by the International Criminal Court into any crimes or violations of human right laws in Nigeria during the post-election [period], that is something to be decided by the Prosecutor of the Court. I understand that there were such things; I have expressed my serious concern about all this violence, which has taken place, directly to President [Goodluck] Jonathan of Nigeria before and during my visit to Nigeria. And I have also met members of the Electoral Commission, the President and members of the Electoral Commission, and I have advised them and strongly urged them to address all the complaints, electoral complaints, to be dealt with in a fair [manner] and through judiciary processes. On your second question, I understand that President Jonathan is coming to participate in the High-Level United Nations General Assembly session on HIV/AIDS, and also, he is going to participate in the Security Council open debate tomorrow on HIV. And I highly appreciate his strong commitment, such a strong commitment at the leaders' level, to see the end of this HIV pandemic. And we need to have such strong political will. I suspect that, as many African leaders and other leaders are going to participate in the high-level

session of the General Assembly, it may provide a natural occasion for them to discuss my candidature — but that's up to Member States to decide.

Question: Thank you Mr. Secretary-General. The panel you established on *Mavi Marmara* has not made any decision yet and there are new flotillas under way to break the siege of Gaza. The Palestinians are looking for an independent State. Perhaps in September, they will come to the General Assembly. What's your position on all these?

Secretary-General: This panel is still discussing the incident which happened during the time of the flotilla last year. They will bring me their recommendations and their findings some time in July. We will have to set an exact date — they are still working very, very hard. About the possible flotillas, it is true that I have written letters to the leaders of some Mediterranean States [from] where the flotillas may sail. I do not have any information on any possible flotilla, but I believe that, at this time, it is very important to avoid any unnecessary confrontation. We have seen such tragic deaths of nine people during the flotilla incident last year. There are some land routes, possible land routes — there are some other areas. So wherever it is possible, when there are some other routes, then I would hope that these allowed routes should be used. That is my sincere hope, as a hope to avoid any potential confrontation.

Question: And on Palestinian statehood?

Secretary-General: I have discussed at length with President Abbas of the Palestinian National Authority, and this is up to the Member States again to decide. But at this time, what is very important is that I emphasized the imperative of both the Palestinians and the Israelis to enter into negotiation, genuine and meaningful negotiation, so that they can discuss and realize this two-State vision where Israelis and Palestinians can live side-by-side in peace and security. That is the vision which is supported by the international community, supported by the Quartet principals. Therefore, I urged him to engage in serious dialogue — that is what I have been urging to the Israeli leadership, President [Shimon] Peres and Prime Minister [Benjamin] Netanyahu many times.

Question: Mr. Secretary-General, since mine is the last question, my congratulations and best wishes to you also. My question is about the difference of your approach as far as civilian casualties are concerned. Yes sir, you did speak out unambiguously and strongly when there were civilian casualties in some of the Middle East countries, but you seem to be severely restrained when it comes to these atrocities that are committed by powerful States, such as the United States and its allies in Asia, the Middle East and Europe. I am talking about the civilian casualties in Afghanistan and drone attacks in Pakistan.

Secretary-General: You have seen me speaking out about these casualties of civilians in Afghanistan and elsewhere, standing together with President [Hamid] Karzai in Afghanistan and elsewhere, and I have spoken out many times that all these military operations which are conducted in accordance with the United Nations Security Council resolutions, or which are conducted in other frameworks, should [be done] with maximum care to prevent any unnecessary civilian casualties, to prevent any damage to civilian property. I have also spoken to NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] Secretary General [Anders Fogh] Rasmussen on several occasions. This is what I believe in — the

fundamental principle of saving human lives — and I will continue to do so. You will see me always committed to that.

Question: On the incident yesterday in the Golan Heights, there are many options open to a Government to control crowds, amongst them, water cannon, rubber bullets, or even trying to, with riot police, arrest people. Do you believe that it was the correct decision to use live ammunition? They have other options. And a follow-up to Iftikhar's Israel question: Now that you are going to get a second term, do you expect to use that opportunity to more universally apply human rights to P5 countries? Human Rights Watch and others have criticized you for not criticizing P5 countries because you wanted a second term. Now that you are assured of one, will you be more outspoken against them?

Secretary-General: First of all, I would like to make it quite clear that, when it comes to universal human rights, there is no distinction or difference. I will make the same priority issue on that.

On your first question, it is quite troubling that we had seen so many casualties yesterday. I have followed, with deep concern, the events in the area of separation on the occupied Syrian Golan, including all the reports of efforts to cross the Israeli technical fence and the unconfirmed number of civilian casualties from live IDF [Israeli Defense Force] fire. UNDOF [UN Disengagement Observer Force] is seeking to confirm facts and help calm the continuing volatile situation in the area. First of all, I regret the loss of life and I extend my sincere condolences to those victims and families and the people of the countries concerned. The events of yesterday on the Golan put a long-held ceasefire in jeopardy. I called for maximum restraint on all sides and strict observance of international humanitarian routine to ensure protection of civilians.

Thank you very much for your support and your attention.

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