**Press Conferences**

**Deputy Secretary-General’s press conference on Rights up Front Action Plan**

**New York, 19 December 2013**

DSG:  There is a connection between the two subjects today and I will mainly brief you on the Rights Up Front initiative, but perhaps should pick up where Farhan ended and, of course, tell you how deeply concerned the Secretary-General and I and our colleagues about the current situation in South Sudan.  Our base in Akobo, Jonglei State was attacked and we have reports that lives are lost.  We don’t have the details of that yet.  And, of course, the Secretary-General and I both condemn this attack in the strongest terms.  I welcome reports this morning that President Salva Kiir is willing to enter into talks and deplore the call by some from the [Riek] Machar camp to topple the Government.  In fact we have reports also about a willingness to go into dialogue from that side.

And the main point for me here to make is, of course, that this is a political crisis and urgently needs to be dealt with through political dialogue.  Violence is spreading and could spread even further and we need all South Sudanese leaders and political personalities now to immediately appeal to calm and call on their supporters to suspend hostilities.  Political dialogue is the only way to prevent further escalation.

We have received reports of people killed and injured and are in the process of verifying.  But I just want to recall that the UNMISS, the peacekeeping force mandate, includes the protection of civilians, of course.  And we take that mandate very seriously, particularly in this situation when, clearly, civilians are in danger.  And we will do our best to protect them in the compounds and bases where they are now housed.  And we will try to also make sure that they have provision of basic relief.  We are, as you understand, closely in contact with our Special Representative Hilde Johnson and remain also in constant contact with the Government.  President Kiir and the Secretary-General talked yesterday and we also reached out to others with influence on these issues to send very strong messages of dialogue and political reconciliation.  If this gets out of control, we may enter a situation where what we are working with on the Rights Up Front will be having another concrete example and we hope we will not be seeing that.

As you notice, we have worked in the last months to bring in this element of Rights Up Front in the Central African Republic situation where we hope to see that period of stabilization, although it is a very fluid and fragile situation.  But we hope very much that everybody will now do what they can to prevent the atrocities that already are occurring to become mass atrocities.  That is what this project is all about.

Let me give you a little background then.  By the way, there is a two and a half page summary of the programme with the six points action plan etc. that you will see, which in precise form describes what we aim to do.   But the background is, of course…while I could have a lecture here with you, but I won’t.  The background is the UN Charter; the background is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the background is what happened in Rwanda in 1994; what happened in Srebrenica in 1995; and the Summit document which I, as chair of the present General Assembly, gavelled 16 September 2005 where ‘responsibility to protect’ was adopted.

Unfortunately, we have seen tens of thousands of people killed since Srebrenica and in Rwanda.  In several situations we have seen millions of people displaced because of atrocities or risks of mass atrocities since then.  And when the Secretary-General got the report from the Internal Review Panel on UN Action in Sri Lanka - where Charles Petrie was the main author of that report – he asked me to take this work forward with the intention of making a very serious effort to react more systematically when we see human rights violations that could risk turning into mass atrocities.

We set up an inter-departmental and inter-agency working group which worked very well.  I was impressed by the quality of the work.  It was led in the Secretariat by Ambassador Michael Keating who is a very experienced UN hand, serving in Afghanistan and so forth, and many other posts.  And they worked in a very good way and gave me first the report in the early summer and I worked a little bit on that report and delivered it to the Secretary-General on 11 July.  And then he asked me also to pursue the implementation of these ideas and then be prepared to report to the Member States and other interested, including civil society and media.  And the latest part of this was my appearance the day before yesterday – the 17th – and we had a meeting with around 70, 75 Member States present – we had 18 interventions from Member States, all of them positive.  One was also positive, but asked some questions of how we are supposed to work later on.  I was very much encouraged and my team was very much encouraged by the reaction from Member States on giving human rights this role in terms of early warning.

The elements - I would simplify it by saying it’s mainly three points.  One is to make human rights awareness and knowledge permeate the UN system.  You know the formula we took up and adopted in 2005 – there is no peace without development, there is no development without peace, so none of the above with the respect for human rights.  Well, if that is the case, then we have to also bring in that human rights dimension into both the work on peace and security and development.  So it’s a matter of training and mentoring and putting this into the lifeblood of our UN staff – the human rights dimension.

Going back again to basically the Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and then putting it into the context of the relationship between peace, security, development and human rights.  That element has very much one dimension because if you analyse, as we have done, conflicts in the last 50 years or so, you will find to a shocking and surprising degree that they practically always start with human rights violations.

Well, if human rights violations is the beginning of something that can turn into mass atrocities and lead up to major operations on our side – political or peacekeeping – then you ask yourself, why shouldn’t we then be more firm and react at that stage when the human rights violations risk becoming mass atrocities?

So that’s the first element of finding ways of passing on to Member States, both through direct contacts, it could be also with more quiet diplomacy, it could be contact with Security Council when they should act on threats to international peace and security.  It means that, of course, we should take advantage of something which is called ‘horizon scanning’ in the Security Council.  And we are also willing to go the General Assembly and report on the work on these issues in different forms and I offered that in my presentation to Member States [on] Tuesday.  That the first element, human rights violations as an early warning signal.

The second element is, of course, protection of civilians – we are talking about right now.  Actually protection of civilians becomes an issue when we fail to take the early warning signals on human rights as seriously as we should.  Because, if we do not do it, then it turns out that you need protection of civilians when the fighting goes on and when the atrocities take place.  So it’s actually the same job but on a later stage.  And we can not promise, of course, that we will be able to stop all conflicts at that early stage – let us be realistic.

So we also have to be prepared to be better at protecting civilians when we have failed to act effectively on the first stage.  And that means that we will want to work very closely with both the human rights community and the humanitarian community, and we see no contradiction between the human rights prevention work and the protection of civilians.   All of this is actually prevention.  I think this is a more concrete form of really trying to deal with problems and conflicts early on and not wait until the last minute.  This is the whole spirit behind this work.

The third element is an internal issue which has to do with how we are organized and how are we prepared to deal with situations when they turn into the risk of becoming mass atrocities.  Well then you have to make sure that we have the reporting, that we have the type of people who can do the work on the ground on human rights and on the political side.  And that, we came to the conclusion, as you may recall in the IRP Report on Sri Lanka, that we had a systemic failure of the UN system as a whole and that we need to show greater flexibility and come up with speedier action.  And that is the third element.

I think that these are the basic issues.  Then there is a pretty precise document, perhaps more precise than my presentation, in the back where you can see we try to summarize six action points and you can pick it up when you leave or you can go down and pick it up and look at it while you think about questions to me.

I am encouraged by this work.  I am encouraged by the sense of unity in the UN team on these issues, the seriousness and purpose when I’ve briefed, not only Member States, but also the different parts of the UN family – the Chief Executive Board meetings, the senior advisers meeting.  I’ve received a very solidly positive response and it is an attempt for us to take seriously the need for prevention by launching this programme, this initiative, Right Up Front.

It’s far too long for an introduction.  I tend to be professorial.  Thank you.

Q:  Good morning, and thank you for the briefing, Mr. Deputy Secretary-General. Thank you on behalf of the UN Correspondents’ Association for giving the briefing.

On Rights Up Front, the plan – the six points, as you describe it, is to avoid major human rights crises and yet speed of action is probably the biggest problem for the United Nations, generally speaking.  In Central African Republic, especially with Ambassador [Samantha] Power’s visit and some of the firsthand news we have seen, there has clearly been early warning and there has been action, but the 90-day period, it may be a long time before the Secretary-General delivers his report. Is there any thoughts that you have about accelerating processes, both for Central African Republic and in South Sudan, or in any of the Rights Up Front programmes? Thank you.

DSG:  Let’s stick to Central African Republic. Very serious warning signals were sent by the Secretary-General in his report that was delivered to the Security Council. Earlier we had had briefings where also early warning signals were sent, not least by Zainab Bangura, who came back from a visit to the Central African Republic at the beginning of this year, and who sent warning signals. We also heard from Member States warning signals, not least France, of course. But the report of the Secretary-General was very serious and we raised the level of alarm very high, I would say, and as you may recall, I briefed the Security Council also, and spoke very clearly that we had to act as quickly as possible. The Security Council acted quickly at that stage by deciding first of all to give support to the French troops - now 1,600 - to go to the Central African Republic, but also other states - the United States one of them – offered to help with air transport of African troops, and in fact 600 Burundians have now arrived in Bangui, the capital, to strengthen the African force, which in the end, if this situation calls for it, would increase to 6,000. The present number is at around 3,200.

We have said from the beginning that we would prefer a peacekeeping operation, but the Council has come to the decision and we have also been in consultation with the African Union that we should try to handle the situation with its present setup of French troops, at the request of the Government and with the support of the Security Council, and the strengthening of the African Union force.

We follow developments very closely. But the planning is of course going on. We have been asked to deliver this report within 90 days - the beginning of February, I think it will be, but if the Council wants us to speed up the work on that, we are willing to do so.  We follow this development now day by day, hour by hour; we were having a crisis meeting yesterday, actually in the Rights Up Front format.  Our job now is to do everything we can to make sure that these atrocities, which certainly have taken place, will not turn into mass atrocities. And we are mobilizing our own resources, but also in very close contact with Member States, and neighbouring states and of course the African Union, and ECCAS, the sub-regional organization.

Q: Let me ask you a very quick and concise question. You mention that the Rights Up Front Action Plan is based on the UN Charter, based on the International Declaration of Human Rights - what would make it so different and what are its chances actually in succeeding? Thank you.

DSG: I think the chances of succeeding come from the frustration that we all feel whenever we use the term “never again”.  We have come to a point now… I am particularly influenced, and the SG also, by Syria. When you see these massive violations of human rights, and this humanitarian plight, which is almost unbelievable right now, I think there is a common understanding that we have to act earlier. The reasons are so strong, it is not only a moral obligation, and a human solidarity aspect, it is also a question of these operations that we then have to do. If we don’t do it, after the mass atrocities, we have to set up, draw up a peacekeeping operation, a political mission, we have huge humanitarian programmes, there is reconciliation effort needed. All this costs us an enormous number of lives, money, bad nights’ sleep, good reputation of organizations.  I was struck by the positive reaction from all corners of the world at that meeting with Member States on Tuesday – two days ago - there was not one who was critical against the Mission.

We talk about prevention all the time. Now is the time to really talk about prevention in concrete terms, and if we have proved that human rights violations that first time, of something that could turn into mass atrocities, then logic tells you that you have some type of process. What we do will vary from case to case.  Member States have a responsibility. We have a responsibility in the Secretariat. The connection between us is important. Will we use public pressure? Will we use private channels, quiet diplomacy? It will vary. Will the Security Council ask us to come and brief on the horizon scanning? We are willing do so. We will give the information. This is the very important part. We will give the information that the Security Council will need, and if the General Assembly is interested, we willing to go to them also. And I offered to brief them as much as they would like.

So, that is the most operational aspect. Then of course, to take a similar approach and practical steps when you have protection of civilian needs, and for our own flexibility so that we really can deliver, which you will see in that paper at the back of the room.

Q:  I wanted to be sure to ask, to try to figure out what the UN is actually learning from its systemic failure in Sri Lanka. I have heard Ivan Simonovic say that the UN stayed silent in order to keep access in the country, but in fact in late 2008 the UN left Kilinochchi and other parts of the north, essentially having no presence there.  So, I am wondering: why, if you can say more, why did the UN stay silent, and even today, I mean this month, there was a protest in Trincomalee, there was a crackdown by the Government - and I am wondering was it raised with Gotabaya Rajapaksa when you met with him? What is the ongoing role of the UN in Sri Lanka?

And on South Sudan, can you confirm that the UN has asked Uganda to mediate between the two sides? They have given a readout of a call, and I wondered if the UN has reached out to Riek Machar and if not, is the UN too close to the Government in South Sudan to reach out to its opponents?  Thank you.

DSG: When it comes to what happened in the last phase of the horrible conflict in Sri Lanka in 2009, I want to refer to reports that were made at that time and to Charles Petrie’s report. When he talked about systemic failure, he meant not only the Secretariat, but also Member States. There was a responsibility not least from the Security Council’s side. And we decided to accept those observations on the failures; I will not go further into that because we saw as our major task to take this very seriously and to take it one step further and draw lessons from Sri Lanka, but also Rwanda reports, military reports of the past, and say ‘how can we be more concrete?’ and really, make a serious attempt to make sure that we send a message to Member States that we now have to increase the level of attention on situations that will arise in the future, out of this frustration of saying “never again”. Just the fact that you say “never again” and have done so a number of times shows that we have failed, we continue to fail. So actually, this is a pretty forward-looking… we haven’t spent more time than the earlier inquiries on what happened in Sri Lanka. We have said we accept those reports and then: ‘what can we do to make sure that we do it better if it happens again?’

Q:  Thank you. It seems to me, almost all of these conflicts are either ethnic conflicts, or minority conflicts. In its most basic form, I like to get back, get down to basic levels, in most basic form people who have some fear of “the other”. You have had the Charter, which you have cited, for 68 years; you have had the Universal Declaration for 65 years, and yet things like Rwanda and Srebrenica happen. Should there not be some kind of international standard for how minorities or minority ethnic groups or “the other” are treated?

DSG: I forgot to answer your question on the South Sudan. I know of no requests from the United Nations side to Uganda. I know that President [Yoweri] Museveni plays a very important role. The Secretary-General and President Museveni have talked and I am sure that President Museveni, like other African leaders with influence on the Government of Sudan and other political personalities in Sudan will use their influence in the direction that I just pointed to.  But, I know of no request for mediation. Our own Special Representative will do her best to be in contact with of course the Government primarily, but also if possible, with the other side. We are certainly only interested in one thing, and that is to stop this very dangerous crisis to turn into an even deeper crisis.

[DSG takes copy of UN Charter from his pocket] It’s in my pocket, you know.  You have Chapter VI – Pacific Settlement of Disputes – diplomatic poetry – beautiful language – peaceful. Article 33 – “the parties to any dispute shall first of all seek a solution by negotiation, inquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, resort to regional agencies, or arrangements or other peaceful means of their own choice.”

This is what diplomacy is all about. And if we do this more systematically, including living up to Rights Up Front, then we will avoid having to go to the very important Chapter VII.  I would say that Chapter VI is not very effective if you don’t have Chapter VII.  I remember when I was mediating in the Darfur conflict, it was very effective to tell the parties when they have difficulty accepting certain ideas that you simply say, ‘Well, I have to report to the Security Council’ and then they knew there was a possibility of whatever sanctions or whatever step they would like to take.  So, this is a first instance. Then it comes to a protection of minorities, and that is, of course, a huge issue in today’s world. I can’t develop this, but it goes into basic rules of universality of human rights, the basic issue of every human being’s equal value. We saw it in the discussion of the High-Level Panel on Migration and Development - how migrants’ rights are being disputed. We had a discussion about indigenous populations, where you have similar discrimination. You have discrimination of women in both country situations and generically. You have children’s rights – there is so much we have to do to make sure that we live up to everybody’s equal value.

We must come back to these basic values. And they must be embraced by all. If we start to slip on this and divide humanity and people into ‘us and them’ and give a quality brand on one and another quality on another group, that is where you have discrimination, you have in the end horrible phenomena coming out – ethnic cleansing, of course, and other horrors. So we have to watch out. There is a tendency, there is a strange tendency in some cases to identify those groups as the problems of development and problems of security. So that is a very deep and important challenge for the United Nations to constantly stand up for everybody’s equal value.

Q:  I have been following the UN for over four decades, and one of the things that struck me throughout is that UN reports do not look into the reality of situations that involve massive human rights. They do not look at who is profiting from the system. Very seldom do parties involved in human rights violations do it just for the pleasure of it; they are usually doing it for power or for profit. In fact, there is a term ‘commercial war’ which came to be used from the ‘80s on in Africa, where wars and massive human rights violations resulted from the struggle for control of resources. But this aspect of it is completely missing in all UN reports. In fact, in the action plan that you just mentioned, there is no indication that the reports will look at who is profiting from it.

DSG: I would dispute that. If you look at the report of the Secretary-General on the Central African Republic, you could even look at the report on Mali in October last year when we started to think along these lines, I think there is a stronger clarity than you think that has been the case in the past.

And in the Rights Up Front initiative, there are two specific points out of the six that related to this, which is a signal to the system from our side. One is the second point: that we will do better at meeting our core responsibility to provide Member States with the information they need in order to respond to human rights violations.  So we will spare no efforts to give all the relevant information. We hope also that we will be able to have more human rights monitoring out there in the field. But we are, of course, still this is just the beginning of the stage. We have said this is still budget-neutral. But of course in the future, if we have more human rights monitoring, we will come to a question of resources, and that of course is another reason why we of course want to keep very close contact with the Member States. But we are not there yet.

That is the second point. The sixth point is: underpinning all these activities will be better information management on threats and risks to population, both for planning operational activities, where we of course play a very important role, and to sharing with Member States. So I hope you will see a qualitatively higher level of information, if you think the difference has been too drastic.  But I would say that I am telling everybody that I deal with that we have to be very clear and give very comprehensive information, if we expect the Member States to draw the conclusions.

Q:  As you know, there is no bilateral security agreement between the United States and Afghanistan, and the United States is threatening to withdraw all its troops from Afghanistan next year. Should that happen, the level of security will go down considerably. In that situation, is the United Nations prepared to protect its operations in Afghanistan, and down the road are you looking for a security role in that country?

DSG: First of all, I cannot speculate in what will happen on the BSA – the Bilateral Security Agreement which is being negotiated between the Governments of Afghanistan and the United States. We will follow this development very closely and see what conclusion will be drawn, and whether such an agreement will come about and when. It has ramifications, certainly, serious ramifications.

We will of course hope to see security preserved in Afghanistan, primarily by the strengthening of Afghan capacity – military police and so forth – and there has been tremendous improvement in that respect, and training being done.

It will also be depending on the political developments, whether reconciliation efforts will pick up speed between the Taliban and the Government of Afghanistan. That is of course a very important component in what kind of security is being needed.

But I think most observers would conclude that there is a need for an international presence. The United Nations will continue to be there. I cannot say in what form. We see our role mainly in other areas. We will see our role in human rights monitoring, in building up institutions, in aid coordination, where are clearly requested by Member States to play a role.  We will, if we are asked, also try to play a role in the area of reconciliation.  But when it comes to basic security it will be dependent on the situation on the ground, and of course, the decisions taken by major, other international actors – the United States is one - but there are several others who are waiting on that decision. So, we will follow this situation very closely and we will of course - the United Nations will be in Afghanistan after 2014 in some form and that form will be decided upon after we have the clarity from the BSA and other security discussions.

Q:  Mr. Eliasson, concretely, how do you go about deciding when there is a crisis?  For example, you can’t keep track of the problems of every country.  You can keep track of them, but not necessarily bring them to everyone’s attention. The CAR did not just happen when France began to bang the table and say look at this place. Was the UN too late in raising the issue, because the violations certainly have been going on a bit longer than we’ve heard about them?  And if they’re not public through the press and other forms then they sort of disappear.

DSG: Yes, this is the dilemma. We all know that the earlier we act, the less problems will we have and, above all, will the civilian population have later on.  The problem is, of course, very often interfering at that early stage is seen by many as interference in internal affairs. But we will be true to our ambition to get more and better information early on and present that information as early as possible. We would like to see, of course, early action, but I must admit that in certain situations, we have late action and late warning, not early warning.  But we still have to get in those situations, because the next stage is so horrifying. The next stage, if the Central African Republic turns into mass atrocities, or with ethnic and religious dimensions, then you will have another level.  So we have to make sure that we stabilize the situation here.  It’s a reality.  I know this is a very difficult issue.  It will require an awareness of the need for prevention of all levels. I may even say that you in the media could have an interesting role.  I don’t know whether any of one of you have succeeded – have you ever succeeded to get a headline in the media, in the press, that the disaster did not occur?  I challenge you on that. If you do it, let me know, because we seem to not want to see the disaster coming, some psychological mechanism tells us that it must not happen.  But I think we must have our eyes open, and make sure that we at least provide the information for the key actors to act.  And also - as I have myself thought about often, looking back at Rwanda - the need also to have international eyes and ears in evolving situations which could have a pacifying influence.  That’s not only us, it’s also civil society and others who are out there in the field   I have been in the field so much in the past and I know how important it is to show your interest, whether it is from the side of the media, civil society or the United Nations.

Q: Thank you. I got here ten minutes late, so I am not sure if you have commented already.  But there are reports of an attack in Jonglei in South Sudan on a UN base.  Is this a game changer for the UN’s role in South Sudan, does this increase the need for intervention or for withdrawal?  What can happen now?

DSG: Well, you missed my comment.  I think you could stay behind, you will get Farhan’s presentation of the facts and my comment which simply boils down to a strong reaction against the attack, the strong commitment to do what we can for the protection of civilians in our compounds and the camps and, of course, a strong appeal for political dialogue to the Government of Sudan and also to Riek Machar and his camp. This is urgent to go in that dialogue, and that all who can influence that situation should exercise their responsibility and send that message to our friends in South Sudan

Thank you very much. I hope you have good holidays and I am returning to Sweden where I have a role to play as Santa Claus with my family on Tuesday and my thanks to all of you for your very important work.  You were celebrated last night from the Secretary-General to Stevie Wonder to Mike Douglas and some others.  And Pam, Madam President, congratulations - such a fantastic event, and I hope you got the message  how important your role is.  Actually what we were talking about here also and that you exercise your role with the independence that you should have and deserve and we do what we can. So, nobody can do everything, but everybody can do something.  Isn’t that a good Christmas greeting? Thank you very much.