



UNMIL

Near verbatim transcript of the press conference given by Under-Secretary -General for Peacekeeping Operations Hervé Ladsous with the UNMIL-Officer-In Charge and Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Consolidation of Democratic Governance, Mr. Antonio Vigilante, and the Chief of Public Information and UNMIL Spokesperson, Mr. Russell Geekie.

Thursday, 11 September 2014 at 16:45 hrs. UNMIL Headquarters. Pan African Plaza Sinkor, Monrovia.

Hervé Ladsous Under-Secretary-General Peacekeeping Operations

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for being here to touch base and exchange information and impressions. As Mr. Geekie said, I came here in the context of this terrible Ebola epidemic to talk with the Government and talk with our colleagues in UNMIL about how best we can support the necessary and indispensable action against this terrible disease. I believe you know the figures. As of the day before yesterday, there were over 1,250 people dead, 2,300 reported cases. But we know that the actual numbers are definitely higher and that as days pass they rise exponentially.

As you know, UNMIL has stood on the side of Liberia and its people through good times and bad times and now it is – everyone recognizes – a particularly bad. One has to recognize that a peacekeeping mission is not a public health operator. This is not what we are trained for; this is now what is intended for us to do. But at the same time, we are there to support the country as it has worked to solve the root causes of a very long crisis. It is true that we, the international community, have invested a lot over the years in bringing back peace and security to Liberia – and more generally to countries in the region, in West Africa. And it is even truer that we don't want to; in anyway, make more fragile the results of that patient work.

When I say that we are not a public health operator, I also say that we are there to support mitigation of this public health crisis – which we support fully, both as the peacekeeping segment of the United Nations and as the United Nations as a whole. You have seen the very public positions, the very proactive positions taken by the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-Moon, in the recent weeks. You have seen the orders that he gave to the whole system to mobilize in a comprehensive way, in strategic way, but also in concrete ways to support the efforts to stem this epidemic.

You have seen also that the Secretary-General will convene, during the opening of the General Assembly of the United Nations in a fortnight or so, a major meeting in New York to discuss the issue and its solutions. This is during the opening of the General Assembly, when world leaders are congregated in New York in very, very large numbers and at the highest level. So I think this is extremely important.

Even though the epidemic is of unprecedented proportions we know actually what to do. We know, and we support actively the World Health Organization in developing its work. But this, to be achieved requires massive support from the International Community. And indeed this will be one of the purposes of that high-level meeting in New York – to muster yet further support. Support politically,



UNMIL

support financially, support in terms of expertise, of personnel. We really owe it to this country and its neighbors, who are equally affected. We are fully committed. Indeed in the longer run, we have to continue our work.

I would like to commend the leadership shown by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Landgren, and her deputy, Mr. Vigilante, to make it so that the whole UN system works as one, musters all its tools, all its means and helps all the member states and all the international organizations that want to help, to come together and deliver as one, wherever possible.

We are not, as a peacekeeping operation, leaving Liberia. We are not going to leave it. We are here to stay the course and to help the people of Liberia and its neighbors to get through this terrible crisis. I know that the 8,000 people who work within UNMIL, be they military, be they police, be they civilians, will continue to spare no effort towards that goal and I want to commend them also deeply.

My coming here was also a display of our solidarity. Those of us working in New York stand by our colleagues here, as we stand at the sides of Liberian people and the country itself. Thank you.

Question and Answer

Russell Geekie – Chief UNMIL Public Information/Spokesperson

Ladies and gentlemen, as you know, Mr. Ladsous met earlier today with the President as well as with Ministers of Justice, Internal Affairs and Foreign Affairs. He would be welcome to take questions on those meeting and also to talk about how UN Peacekeeping is supporting the fight against Ebola. We have time for about two sets of two or three questions. Introduce yourselves and your media organizations and please stick to questions and not statements. Thank you.

Q: Abraham Morris (IN PROFILE DAILY)

I am Abraham Morris and I write for the *IN PROFILE DAILY* newspaper. Sir, you met the President and other stakeholders in the Liberian government today. Do you care to tell us some of the issues discussed and what is the way forward to this Ebola crisis?

A: Ladsous Under-Secretary-General Peacekeeping Operations

I came first to state our solidarity. Our will to stay the course, to do all that we can within our competences of course and to exchange ideas and projects about how to concretely and practically do the job. There are a number of initiatives on the way. By the way, you might know that Dr. Nabarro, who is now the United Nations System Coordinator for the action against Ebola will be arriving in Monrovia tonight and of course there are number of things that are being done from a technical and medical point of view and, as I said, we are very much in support of all this. When I say support, I mean active support – all that UNMIL can do to effectively help make progress in defeating the epidemic.



UNMIL

Q: Frank Lobeo – Liberia Broadcasting System (LBS)

Good afternoon, my name is Frank Lobeo and I come from the Liberia Broadcasting System. I have some concerns. One is that quite recently we have been seeing the deployment of the American-trained AFL soldiers mounting some areas working along with the police in combating and fighting this Ebola thing. My question is that is when will UNMIL peacekeepers work along with the AFL soldiers so that we can see them in those areas combating Ebola and see them go deep in the country? Thank you very much.

A: Hervé Ladsous Under-Secretary-General Peacekeeping Operations

Well I would say, Sir, that Liberia is a sovereign country. It has its security institutions and it is the duty of these Liberian security institutions to do their jobs. Our job is to observe and monitor them and report when necessary and generally of course make sure that the lives and safety of civilians are not put in danger. But let me say again that the responsibility is for the Liberian institutions in the primary instance.

Q: Allen Cooper AFPTV

In the wake of the Ebola crises, we have seen that ebola treatment units – ETUs –that have workers from WHO seem to be insecure. For instance, patients leave the units and come out and runaway because there is not enough security. You have just said that UNMIL is not leaving. So, are we going to see security forces from UNMIL at the various ETUs as they increase across the country?

A: Hervé Ladsous Under-Secretary-General Peacekeeping Operations

No. Again, this is not our primary responsibility. That responsibility lies very much with the Government and its various institutions. But what we can do, of course, is help. We are not saying only UNMIL but the UN system as a whole; and that in particular, is the role of the WHO to make it happen to help the Government of Liberia in putting together institutions that can actually do the job in conditions that are in line with all the standards of medical competence and of safety for the patients.

Q: Lucia Dohr, LBS

Since the completion of the first two of UNMIL military draw down in June, the mission no longer has a fixed military personnel in seven of Liberia's 15 counties. Four of these have no presence of UNMIL armed security response capacity. How will UNMIL help these counties with the medical support in terms of Ebola?

A: Hervé Ladsous Under-Secretary-General Peacekeeping Operations

It is true that we have pulled out from some counties and I think this is a fact. You may know that the Security Council had a discussion the day before yesterday in New York around the suggestion made by the Secretary-General that no change be brought for the next few months in terms of either the mandate or size of the mission, which in itself is something because, as you may know, a few months ago the focus was on a new reduction in the size of UNMIL.



UNMIL

So I think a new reduction is not going happen in the coming months subject to the formal decision that the security will make in the next few days, but the debate the day before yesterday in New York was quite clear on this. This is not the expectation of the member states of the Council. So, of course now, we have to know look at practicalities. But of course it's also a matter of looking at the empowerment of various parts of the country and various communities so see how best they can take ownership also of whatever effects them with the support of various components of the international community and as available, as possible, we shall of course should be ready to contribute in terms of logistics, in terms of all the support, of communication. There are plenty of things that even if we don't have a physical presence in this or that county, yet, nevertheless we can do. After all, your UNMIL Radio is the radio has the largest coverage in the country so we can do reach out – outreach you say – and that also helps and that's only an example amongst many.

[Note: The UNMIL Spokesperson later clarified that UNMIL has a civilian presence in all 15 counties.]

Q: Elise Zoker Bloomberg

Giving the seriousness of Ebola in Liberia, the escalation, are you under pressure – I mean the UN from countries contributing troops – in terms of the safety of soldiers?

A: Hervé Ladsous Under-Secretary-General Peacekeeping Operations

I would say, Sir, that of course, as in all UN peacekeeping missions, we do rely very much and we rely only on those contributions – on those countries. We do not have a standing army or police capacity of our own. So it is true that we have called on contributing member states to stay the course. To continue their presence within UNMIL and, for instance, we've had several meetings in NY of troop and police contributing countries to achieve precisely that. I encourage them to stay with us; and continue the necessary work.

Q: Evelyn Kpadeh Women's Radio

I heard you say earlier that indeed the disease is unprecedented which everyone has said. I want to know from you, upon your return the Secretary-General will be convening the General Assembly and this is a matter that requires swiftness the level that it has reached. So in what due course will Liberia really see the intervention of the UN upon your return and the General Assembly?

A: Hervé Ladsous Under-Secretary-General Peacekeeping Operations

I would say, Madam, that you are already seeing it, the mobilization of the International community. The Secretary-General established last week a platform which is tasked with empowering and pushing the whole UN system. I am not talking only of the United Nations. I am talking of all the agencies and programmes that belong to that family and making them work together. David Nabarro is in charge of coordinating all that effort. You will probably be able to ask him what practical things he intends to do. But let me assure you that the Secretary-General gave us all very, very strong instructions; and that everybody takes that very much at heart. I think the signal has been one of the strongest ones that I have experienced personally in recent years.



UNMIL

Q: Stephens Kollie *Front Page Africa* newspaper

The World Health Organization has said about \$600 Million is needed to fight the deadly Ebola virus. What is the UN doing to raise this money as quickly as possible?

A: Hervé Ladsous Under-Secretary-General Peacekeeping Operations

I think this sum of money is an estimate which brings together all sorts of possible contributions. Contributions from the UN system, of course, but we don't have huge resources. Our resources are those put at our disposition by the member states. But there are also the contributions that various member states or international organizations have announced, ranging from the United States to the European Union and lately, and I think this is to be noted because it is very important, the contribution of the African Union. So all this put together, I think, yes, very much so, it is achievable and it will make a needed difference.

Q: Bill Diggs *INSIGHT* newspaper

Mr. Ladsous there has been continual aid coming to Liberia since the outbreak of the virus in the country but yet we see that the mortality rate keeps going up. From your meetings today, were you able to understand what is been done wrong that is causing the mortality to go up instead of decrease and secondly, does this situation has any bearing on the peace and stability of this nation? Thank you

A: Hervé Ladsous Under-Secretary-General Peacekeeping Operations

I have difficulty in responding to your first question, Sir, because I am not an epidemiologist. I am a diplomat and maybe somewhat a politician so I am not qualified to really go into that.

Certainly, when medical or public health issue of that magnitude is having such extreme consequences and I quoted some figures and we don't know what's going to happen in the next week or so. But it is evident that this exerts considerable strain on the social fabric of the country and this is where of course we have to be very much aware that when you see the very severe reduction in the number of airlines or shipping companies coming to Liberia and the Secretary-General called very much for attention on this. When you see the livelihood of many people is being compromised because either the bread winners of one family are dying or are dead. When you see that jobs are lost, then of course the risk on internal security and more generally in peace and security here and in the region is a risk that we cannot afford. If you may remember, my first point, the international community through us has invested billions of dollars and considerable number of human lives over the years in helping Liberia out of its long problems, very terrible problems. We don't want to see that squandered and going down the drain. This is why we are putting a lot of thought and work on seeing what is it that we can do to avoid that risk from materializing.

Russell Geekie Chief of Public Information/Spokesperson

Thank you very much ladies and gentlemen. That's all we have time for today. Thank you Mr. Ladsous and thank you, Mr. Vigilante.
