

16 January 2018

Secretary-General's press conference - full transcript

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you very much for your presence. It is very good to see all of you and let me start by wishing you all a very happy and healthy new year.

I have just spoken to the Member States about the year ahead.

Last year, on my first day as Secretary-General, I issued an appeal for peace and called for a surge in diplomacy to end the crises that were causing so much suffering.

On the first day of this year, I issued a red alert.

At the beginning of 2018, we must recognize the many ways in which the international community is [failing] and falling short.

It is my duty as Secretary-General to tell the Member States where this is happening -- and to suggest ways out of our predicament.

I am sounding an alarm about protracted conflicts and the spread of terrorism.

We face a Gordian knot in the Middle East and potential nuclear catastrophe on the Korean Peninsula.

Climate change is moving faster than we are.

Inequality and nationalism are on the rise, while trust and solidarity are on the decline.

In the face of today's challenges, the world needs bold leadership.

We need less hatred, more dialogue and deeper international cooperation.

With unity in 2018, we can make this a pivotal year that sets the world on a better course.

Later this month, I will join African leaders for the African Union Summit in Addis Ababa.

One of my main goals as Secretary-General has been to strengthen ties with the AU, a key strategic partner across our agenda. Our relationship with the African Union is one of shared interests and mutual respect.

This year, I will continue to advocate for strong international support for Africa's Agenda 2063 and for Africa's peace and security efforts, including through clear mandates and adequate, predictable financing. Africans are changing the narrative on their continent, and this represents a gain for the entire world. Last year, we signed a new platform of cooperation for peace and security and I will be very happy to sign, during the summit in Addis Ababa, our new joint platform for cooperation in relation to development, including the alignment of the Agenda 2030 with the Agenda 2063 of the African Union.

In February, I will visit the Republic of Korea for the opening ceremony of the Winter Olympic Games in Pyeongchang. I hope the Olympic spirit of friendship among nations will spread across the region and beyond.

Finally, let me share some news about our efforts to ensure gender equality at the United Nations. With yesterday's announcement of a new Special Adviser on Africa, we have achieved a milestone. For the first time in history, we have full parity in the top leadership of the United Nations, the 44-member Senior Management Group. We will continue to do more to empower women and uphold our core commitment to equality and gender parity.

I look to seeing you many times in the year ahead in this room, at the stakeout and in other settings, probably not as much as you would wish but I will do my best. And at a time of troubling crackdowns on the independence of the media, I want to express that I will continue to defend freedom and safety of the press both in public and through diplomatic engagement.

Thank you again for the work you do to illuminate ours, and I will be of course very happy to answer your questions.

**Questions and Answers

Spokesman: Thank you. Sherwin.

Question: Sherwin Bryce-Pease, South African Broadcasting. And, Secretary-General, welcome back to our favourite room at the United Nations, and we certainly look forward to engaging you throughout 2018. And good luck with the 12 points.

In your remarks to the General Assembly earlier, you said that the world had gone in reverse, that racism, nationalism and xenophobia were on the rise. You'll also be aware of the recent derogatory comments attributed to the United States' President as it relates to immigration from Africa and Haiti.

You'll also be aware, sir, of the statement from the Africa Group of ambassadors here at the United Nations and the African Union condemning what it called "outrageous racist and xenophobic remarks." Do you support their call for a retraction and an apology from the United States President?

Secretary-General: Well, as far as I understand, the United States President has denied that he has said that. Our position is very clear. We need to have relations of mutual respect with all peoples in the world, and in particular, migration is a positive aspect. And migrants contribute not only to the welfare of their countries of origin but to the welfare of the countries where they are a part of the development process. The respect for migrants and the respect for diversity, ethnic diversity, religious diversity, is a fundamental pillar of the United Nations, and it will be a fundamental pillar of the action of the Secretary-General.

Spokesman: Thank you. James.

Question: James Bays from Al Jazeera. You and your predecessor have repeatedly said there's no military solution in Syria. And yet right now we have Turkey readying itself for possible military action. We have the US planning a new Kurdish border security force, and we have the Syrian Government, backed by the Russians, actively pursuing a military solution with the bombardment in Idleb and eastern Ghouta and the same Syrian Government, when it goes to Geneva, not engaging fully with the political process. With that backdrop, how do you reinvigorate the peace efforts? And is Sochi part of that?

Secretary-General: I think that that backdrop only shows how important it is to reinvigorate the Geneva process, and to reinvigorate the Geneva process, we are making all efforts in order to make sure that both Government and opposition give positive contributions to make the process move forward.

We were in Riyadh, and I believe Riyadh II was a very important moment to bring the different strands of the opposition together and to have the opposition participating constructively.

We have been... as you know, the positions we have assumed in relation with the last Geneva meeting where, in our opinion, the Government was not delivering on what was necessary. So, a new meeting [will be] convened [in] Geneva or probably to another location close to Geneva. And we hope that this time it will be possible to have constructive dialogue between Government and opposition.

Our position in relation to Sochi is still dependant on how things will develop in between. We believe that what you said only proves that, after all these years, if so many are still betting on military operations, it is clear that there is no military solution.

Spokesman: Ali, go ahead.

Question: Thank you, Mr Secretary-General. Ali Barada from Asharq al-Awsat and from France 24. A follow-up to James' question. Do you see that there is a significant role that should be played by Bashar al-Assad in the solution planned for Syria? And are you happy about the work that has been done by your Special Envoy, Staffan de Mistura, and why? Thank you.

Secretary-General: I am happy with the work Staffan de Mistura has done. I think it's really almost a miracle that he was able to stay the course and make this process move forward with all the difficulties and all the problems and all the obstacles that we have witnessed, and we have asked both Government and opposition to put no preconditions for the discussion. And so I'm not going to put myself a precondition in relation to the presidency of Syria.

It is essential for the two parties to come and discuss without preconditions. And, of course, obviously, the questions of governance, the questions of elections, and the questions of constitution are very important. And each one is entitled to have each one's position, but what, for us, is more important at the present moment is to make sure that the meaningful dialogue starts between Government and opposition without preconditions.

Question: [Off mic] towards a transition?

Secretary-General: Sorry?

Question: Towards a transition, as called by Security Council resolution 2254...?

Secretary-General: Every aspect of the resolution is on the table: constitution, elections and transition. We have tried to organise the debate in a way to allow it to move forward, but none of these aspects is out of the table.

Spokesman: Carole.

Question: Mr Secretary-General, Carole Landry from Agence France Presse. I wanted to ask you about North Korea. Do you think that war is avoidable in 2018 with North Korea? And you mentioned small signs of hope, and some people are dismissive that sending musicians and figure skaters to the south is going to make a real difference. And while you're at the Winter Olympics, will there be an opportunity for diplomacy? Thank you.

Secretary-General: Well, I believe war is avoidable. What I'm worried is that I'm not yet sure that peace is guaranteed, and that is why we are so strongly engaged. As you know, I've sent my Under-Secretary[-General] of Political Affairs to Pyongyang. Today, I was very happy when the ambassador, the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea, said that his visit has

contributed to the restart of the dialogue between the two Koreas. I think there some signals of hope.

What I believe is extremely important is to take profit of these signals of hope to make sure that a serious process leading to the peaceful denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula takes place. I think there is a window of opportunity. That window of opportunity will, in my opinion, hopefully, make the war avoidable. But it is important that we don't miss the opportunities that those windows can provide.

Spokesman: Edie. Microphone, please.

Correspondent: Sorry.

Spokesman: It's on. It's on. It's on.

Question: Edith Lederer from the Associated Press. Thank you very much. Mr. Secretary-General, first, a quick follow-up to Carole's... Landry's question on North Korea. Is the UN playing or offering to play any role in bringing the opposing parties together?

And my question is about US budget cuts. The Trump Administration's been in the White House for a year, as you have been here at the UN. They arrived talking about budget cuts, and they are most recently talking about dramatic cuts to UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees), the agency for Palestinian refugees. How concerned are you that the US, as the biggest contributor to the UN, will make further devastating cuts to... not only to UN agencies and funds but to the UN budget? And how has this threat of funding cuts affected your first year and your dealings with the Trump Administration?

Secretary-General: First of all, in relation to the Korean Peninsula, since the beginning, I have said that we were available for all possible initiatives that the parties would want. And our objective is to make sure that those that are more relevant in this process are able to seriously talk to each other and to seriously find a way for the denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula. And one of the messages that was very clearly conveyed by [Jeffrey] Feltman in Pyongyang was our belief that direct talks between those that are the key interlocutors in this process are absolutely essential.

We know the limitations of what we can do, but we are totally committed to contribute to the key actors to be able to engage in the kind of talks that can allow for the problem to be solved in line with the resolutions of the Security Council.

Now, in relation to budget cuts... just a moment. In relation to budget cuts, first, there were no budget cuts in relation to the regular budget of the United Nations. We kept a very strong dialogue with both administration and with Congress, and I have to say that the ambassador, Permanent Representative of the United States, was extremely helpful in this process. And even if, as you know, the budget is not yet entirely approved, but what is agreed and the figures that are agreed in the Senate and House of Representatives allow for the regular budget to be funded, and there were no cuts in relation to the regular budget. There are arrears, indeed, but arrears are a traditional aspect of the relationship between the United States and the UN.

In relation to peacekeeping, there is a problem in the sense that the Senate has approved the funding of 25 per cent, which doesn't correspond exactly to the quota. And we are, of course, hoping that the United States with the other Member States will be able to find ways to overcome this. It's not a catastrophic situation. It is a... I would say, specific problem that I hope will be... will have a solution in the dialogue among Member States.

Different is the situation of UNRWA. In UNRWA, I am very concerned. And I strongly hope that, in the end, it will be possible for the United States to maintain the funding of UNRWA in which the US has a very important share. I am... first of all, UNRWA is not a Palestinian institution. UNRWA is a UN institution created by...

Spokesman: General Assembly.

Secretary-General: ... '48 if I... Sorry?... '48 by a UN resolution and UNRWA is providing vital services to the Palestinian refugee population, both in the occupied territories and in Jordan, in Syria, and in Lebanon. Those services are of extreme importance, not only for the well-being of these populations, and there is a serious humanitarian concern here, but also, in my opinion and the opinion that is shared by most international observers, including some Israeli ones, it is an important factor of stability.

So, if UNRWA will not be in a position to provide the vital services and the emergency forms of support that UNRWA has been providing, this will create a very, very serious problem. And we'll do everything we can to avoid the situation to occur.

In relation to other agencies, it is necessary to say that US has even in some aspects increased its funding. It's a different pattern from case to case. I would say, obviously, that the question that now is for us, the major concern is UNRWA.

Spokesman: Celia, all the way in the back.

Question: Thank you, Celia Mendoza from VOA Latin America. You just came back from Colombia, and during your visit, Secretary-General, you had spoken about sending more aid for Colombia and their help of migrants coming from Venezuela. Can you spend a little bit of what could be the plan and if you are thinking about doing something from the United Nations to help those migrants in the other countries they're coming to, but also in Venezuela? We know there has been a report about hunger and about the lack of medicines in Venezuela and what the United Nations could do to help those people that right now are facing the struggles of not having access to medical service or to not having access to food in Venezuela.

Secretary-General: As you know, the United Nations can only work in government... in countries at the request or with the support of governments of the countries. The Colombia Government has asked UN agencies and specifically UNHCR (United Nations Refugee Agency) and IOM (International Organization for Migration) have been active in the frontier areas in different forms of support in assistance to Venezuelans that cross the border.

There are several UN agencies that are now cooperating also in relation to different aspects of health and others in Venezuela itself, and in all parts of the world, we are doing the same. So, it's nothing exceptional. It's the normal way for us to operate in situations where there are massive movements of population. And we'll go on at the disposal of all governments to support governments that receive an influx of large groups of people. In some situations in the world, it's refugees. In others, [there] are people moving for other reasons, but we are always ready to support countries in helping not only the people that come but the communities, especially when those communities are poor and, in the case of Colombia, in areas where there is still a security concern.

Spokesman: Michelle.

Question: Thank you, Secretary-General. Michelle Nichols from Reuters. I'd like to ask you about Myanmar. Today Myanmar and Bangladesh announced a deal to return all the Rohingya refugees within two years. What concerns might you have about this deal? Have you also

spoken with Aung San Suu Kyi about the detention of the two Reuters reporters? And what is your message to her about their arrest? And also, when do you plan to announce who will be your Myanmar Special Adviser? Have you decided who that will be? And, if so, who is it?

Secretary-General: I did not speak personally to Aung San Suu Kyi on the arrests. We had a very clear position and very clear contacts in the sense that we wanted those journalists to be liberated.

In relation to the agreement, usually, this is dealt with in trilateral agreements between the two states concerned and UNHCR. UNHCR was not involved directly in the management of the agreement even if they were consulted. And we believe it would be very important to have UNHCR fully involved in the operation to guarantee that the operation abides by international standards.

What is it that is essential on this is to make sure that the return is voluntary; it's in safety and dignity and that people are allowed to come back to their places of origin, which means that the huge effort of investment, because there is a lot of reconstruction to be done, and a huge effort of reconciliation is needed to allow it to take place properly.

The worst would be to move these people from camps in Bangladesh to camps in Myanmar, keeping an artificial situation for a long time and not allowing for them to regain their normal lives. We'll be, of course, ready to do everything possible, to support a movement taking place, as I said, based on voluntariness, safety, dignity, and in respect to international standards.

Spokesman: Phoenix TV. Sorry.

Secretary-General: Sorry? [Cross talk]

Correspondent: [Off mic, inaudible] ..the Special Adviser?

Secretary-General: It will be soon.

Spokesman: Go ahead.

Question: Thank you. I'm from China Central Television. My question is about climate change. It's estimation that climate change is one of your priority for 2018, and you said earlier that some large economies, including China, are strongly committed in leadership in climate action, and the Chinese President Xi Jinping also said in his New Year speech that China will honour its promises encountering global climate change. In this regard, do you think in what way the United Nations and China can work together?

Secretary-General: Well, I think, first of all, we welcome the strong commitment of China in relation to climate action, and China is, of course, crucial because of the dimension of its economy. It's important for us to recognise that the commitments made in Paris, in general, are not necessarily being fully met and the commitments made in Paris are not enough to make sure that the increase of temperature will stay below 1.5 or even 2 degrees, which means we need an enhanced ambition.

We are not yet winning this race. Climate change is still winning this race, and that is why I've been asking for an enhanced ambition, and I think the China role in this enhanced ambition is crucial. And I count a lot on the dialogue and cooperation that was established with the Chinese Government in this regard.

Spokesman: Ibtisam.

Question: Thank you. My name is Ibtisam Azem from al-Araby al-Jadeed Newspaper. I want to go back to the Palestine question. What would you say to millions of Palestinians that they have a problem since 70 years? Why would they put their faith in the international community since Israelis creating facts on the ground? Why would they... what would you say to them first? And the second question, why would they put any faith in... and trust in the UN and international community? Thank you.

Secretary-General: Well, what we say is very clear, that we understand the suffering and predicament and sometimes the frustration, but we are committed and we will remain committed to push for the two-state solution. We are committed and we remain committed to oppose any unilateral action that undermines the two-state solution, and you know the positions I have repeatedly taken in relation to the settlements. We don't have the power to solve all problems, but my belief is that, when we know what the solution is, we need to stay the course and fight for that solution.

I have one experience in my life, and that experience was in relation to East Timor. For many decades, many people thought that East Timor had no solution. In the end, there was a solution. So, we should never lose hope. I understand how difficult the situation is today. Our commitment and our resolve remains the same, and we'll do everything possible for the two-state solution not to be undermined and in the end, for it to become a reality.

Spokesman: Talal.

Question: Thank you, Secretary-General, for this conference. My name is Talal Al-Haj, from Al-Arabiya. My question is relating to the reports submitted by the Panel of Experts in... or relating... Resolution 2140 on Yemen. The Panel of Expert gave the resolution... their report on the 9th of this month to the Member States, and in it, they argue that, after examining the remnants of the missiles, UAVs (unmanned aerial vehicles) and military equipments in Saudi Arabia, fired by the Houthis, they found that they are of Iranian make. Now, the result of the panel finds that Iran is in noncompliance with the programme... with paragraph 14, Resolution 2216, and it failed to take necessary measures to prevent... to direct or indirectly... directly or indirectly supply sale and transfer of the missiles and UAVs to the Houthis.

We... we have discussed this point before, and you acknowledged the right of Saudi Arabia to protect itself. What can be done to convince the Iranian Government to stop supplying... after this is a UN document that find that they are in noncompliance, to stop supplying the Houthis with such advanced missiles that are shot against even the Royal Palace in Saudi Arabia and haphazardly can kill many civilians? [Off mic] What can be done to prevent [inaudible]...?

Secretary-General: We have clearly established since the beginning that there is an arms embargo, that the arms embargo needs to be fully respected, that even more attacks with missiles to cities are totally unacceptable. And we will do everything possible through diplomatic engagement, which is what we can do to avoid these kind of things to go on happening.

Question: [Off mic, inaudible] United Nations Verification and Inspection Mechanism (UNVIM) is doing its job...

Secretary-General: That... no, that I must tell you, I think UNVIM has been doing a remarkable job, but UNVIM is a... asked to make sure that, in relation to the access to a number of points of entry where humanitarian aid and other forms are taking place, this is not used for missiles or other weapons or other things to go into Yemen.

But Yemen has a big coast, and Yemen has several borders. And so I don't think it is fair to consider that it is because of UNVIM that the arms embargo has been violated. I am absolutely

sure that UNVIM has been doing its work with a lot of professionalism, and it's not because of UNVIM's failures that, illegally, arms have entered the territory of Yemen.

Spokesman: I24.

Question: Thank you. On the Palestinian issue, please, again, the Jordanian Foreign Minister said last week that Jordan and other key Arab states were considering lobbying the UN and presenting a draft resolution to declare East Jerusalem the capital of Palestine and declare a Palestinian state in the coming weeks and months. What's your reaction to that? Is the UN the right forum for this?

Secretary-General: No, this is an area which is in the competence of the General Assembly, and it's strictly dependent on Member States. The Secretariat does no action on that. There are several resolutions, as we know, and, obviously, Member States are entirely free to adopt resolutions that they consider adequate to their purposes.

Our commitment and our interest is not in asking Member States to withdraw that resolution. It's to do everything we can for the promotion of the two-state solution to be a reality.

And, in my opinion, I've always said that I would like to see a Palestinian state and an Israeli state, both with capital in Jerusalem.

Spokesman: Erol.

Question: Thank you very much, Mr. Secretary-General. You have spoken and you was at the wrapping up of the work of 24 years' work of the ICTY, International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia. And you said many times also that, at the end of that work, that Srebrenica is still haunting the United Nations conference.

At the same time, there is a huge archive left of the documents, millions of documents. What do you think, sir, where that archive should have finished, in which country or to stay in Hague and whether United Nations is entitled or you would like to see part of that documentation because of that Srebrenica issue and all other things at the United Nations?

Secretary-General: No, I think what's essential is to guarantee that the archive is well preserved. We have full confidence in the institutions in The Hague. As you know, there is a mechanism that prolongs... continues, so we have full confidence in the institutions in The Hague to do it.

What is absolutely essential is that the archive is not lost and that the archive will be open for all independent analysts and people interested to be able to use it for a more widespread knowledge of the reality that has happened.

We are not claiming that we want to keep the archive in New York or whatever. We are open to discuss any solution guaranteeing the preservation of the archives. For the moment, we have a situation in which, as you know, the court is replaced because there are many remaining things for the future by the mechanism that was created, and we fully trust the mechanism.

Spokesman: Richard.

Correspondent: Thank you, Mr Sec...

Question: [Off mic] Just... just... is the UN... is the UN... since it's a UN court, would UN would like to have some kind of supervisory role? And what about the states that are involved in the Balkan... what about their right to have part of that archive?

Secretary-General: I think the states would have the right to consult the archive. I think it's good that an archive of this nature is kept by an independent institution.

Spokesman: Richard?

Question: Mr. Secretary-General, Richard Roth, Cable News Network.

Secretary-General: Sorry?

Spokesman: Richard Roth, over there.

Correspondent: Hello! Over here.

Spokesman: He's hard to miss. [Laughter]

Question: You have been in office here over a year. You promised transparency. The reform of the UN, the streamlining, big themes, but the public never really knows what has been accomplished in that spirit. Can you give me one example of something that you found that shocked, disappointed, horrified you, regarding the bloat, the labyrinth of the UN system, something that at meetings you say to people, listen, I can't believe that we have 200 people doing this or somebody's stupid brother-in-law was hired to do this. There's got to be one example. Otherwise, people just hear these theoretical complex ideas of reform. If I'm going too fast, I will slow down. [Laughter]

Spokesman: [Off mic, inaudible] something that you've shocked since you've come into office.

Secretary-General: No, the area that has worried me much and in which we are working hard and I hope that will be working successfully, there are some indicators that are very positive. For instance, the time that Member States were using to appoint the authority to investigate situations of sexual exploitation and abuse moved from [79] days to [6], just to give an example of how seriously Member States are taking this question.

But the area that I would say has corresponded to the biggest concern and the thing in which I felt more uncomfortable as Secretary-General of the UN are the forms of sexual exploitation and abuse perpetrated by UN staff, military or civilian, in several circumstances where they are supposed to protect the populations. And this is an area where we have developed a number of actions. You know that we have appointed the first victims advocate at global level, four at operations level, that we have now the compact signed by more than 80 countries, that more than 50 leaders have joined our circle of leadership.

As I said, we start to see, both in our own operational procedures and in Member States, an enhanced commitment, but the problem is not yet solved. There's a long way to go. And this is something that really I cannot accept, I mean, that UN members that are supposed to protect populations violate human rights and especially in the area of sexual exploitation and abuse.

Question: France yesterday said their peacekeepers did not abuse women, children in the Central African Republic.

Secretary-General: Well, there is a report I've seen on that. I've seen part of the things in the report are related to things that have happened long time ago. Others are more recent. This is exactly one of the areas where we are trying to be more active to make sure that we really change the situation on the ground. But we are not in a state of denial. We are in a state of recognition of a problem and of considering a priority to tackle the problem to eliminate it.

Spokesman: Maggie.

Question: Secretary-General, Margaret Besheer, Voice of America. A follow-up on the UNRWA. Have you received official notification from the Trump Administration? There were reports before we came down here this afternoon that they've sent a letter to UNRWA, \$60 million to be withheld... withheld now and another 65 million under review. Have you been notified of this? And have you spoken to Ambassador [Nikki] Haley about it?

Secretary-General: It's probably my fault, but this is an information I have not [received]. I mean, I've been in close contact with UNRWA, but what you are saying now, I was not yet informed.

Question: So no... no official confirmation at all from the Americans... [Cross talk]

Secretary-General: No, there might be something I do not know, because, I mean, it's impossible to accompany things by the minute. Until I was informed, there was no official notification of a position, but it might have happened.

Spokesman: Thank you. Matthew.

Question: Sure. Thanks a lot. Matthew Lee, Inner City Press, on behalf of the Free UN Coalition for Access, hoping for more question and answer in 2018, as you said.

In November, there was a... there was an indictment announced in Federal Court downtown of the head of an ECOSOC (Economic and Social Council)-accredited NGO for bribing, allegedly bribing, the President of the General Assembly, Sam Kutesa, to benefit the China Energy Fund Committee. And I wanted to ask you, that remains still in the Global Compact, and there hasn't been even an audit or anything created.

What... why haven't you started an audit in that case? Why is the beneficiary of what's described as bribery in the UN still in the Global Compact? And how do your reforms preclude or make impossible this type of bribery that's now happened twice under John Ashe, may he rest in peace, and under Sam Kutesa?

And, also, on Cameroon, you visited, I know, in late October. Since then, some Anglophone leaders have been arrested... or abducted in Nigeria, where I know your deputy was. I wanted to know what the UN system is doing about this now cross-border problem. Thanks a lot.

Secretary-General: Well, as a matter of fact, in relation to that, we have done several initiatives, and some of them even led to the release of people, and we will go on engaging with all the states involved.

In relation to other cases, I would like to say that I'm not aware of presence in the Compact or whatever. I will have to look into it. I will look into it. What is clear for me is that we don't want the Compact to have companies that do not abide by the set of principles that were defined in the constitution of the Compact. There is a code of conduct that is there, and that should be respected. So, I don't know exactly what happened in the compact in that regard. I will look into that.

Spokesman: Abdelhamid.

Question: Thank you so much, Mr. Secretary-General. My name is Abdelhamid Siyam from the Arabic Daily al-Quds al-Arabi. And I'm thankful because you answer some of my questions about UNRWA, but I have two other questions. Since the US casted itself out...

Secretary-General: Since... sorry?

Question: Since the United States, Trump Administration took the side of Israel become unacceptable mediator in the Middle East process. Can the UN fill the void since the UN is all... the only frame of reference for peace talks in the Middle East, taking into account all these resolutions?

The second, we talk about two-state solution. Do you know, Mr. Secretary, how much land left in the West Bank to establish a Palestinian state? Do you know that when the UN start talking about the two-state solution 2002 by adopting Resolution 1397 and then Resolution 1550, from that day on, nothing left. Most of the land had been confiscating by Israel. There is no... do you believe there is land left to establish a Palestinian state? Thank you.

Secretary-General: So the first question... yes. Let me be very clear. The UN is ready to play whatever role both parties are ready to accept us to play. I have no doubt that United [States] as a negotiator at the leverage that the UN has not. And so I don't think that there should be a false hope that the UN can now do things that probably are very difficult to obtain. But the UN is always at the disposal of the parties for whatever is possible to do for a solution to be found.

Now, there has been, as you know, as you said, a lot of land that have been now used in settlements, and it's true, but we are believing and, according to the opinion of our people, that a solution... two-state solution is still possible, including eventually aspects of land swaps, including the possibility of... I mean, it can have one settlement in Palestinian territory and the Palestinian law. I mean, there are many solutions for that.

But we still believe that the two-state solution is possible. Obviously, as settlements grow, this makes it more difficult. But we still believe the two-state solution is possible, and we still believe that, without it, we don't see a Plan B.

Spokesman: Victor?

Question: Thank you. [Indiscernible name] Turkish News Agency. I'd like to ask about the US decision to establish a border security forces on the Syrian border. The decision has already led to tension between Turkey and the US, and Russia also warned about a possible division in the country, and Syria sees it as an attack on the sovereignty. I was wondering if you have a comment or any concerns about this decision. Thank you.

Secretary-General: As you know, too many countries have had troops in Syria. I think if the Syrian people could be able to solve alone its problems, it would probably be much better. [Laughter]

Spokesman: Benny.

Question: Hi. Benny Avni. Secretary-General, hello. The events in Iran... [Cross talk]

Secretary-General: Oh, sorry. You were covered by very important media outlet. [Laughter]

Question: The events in Iran, at least two dozen were reportedly killed. More than thousand... thousands were arrested.

Spokesman: [Off mic, inaudible] Please.

Question: Well, if you want to correct my questioning, please do that.

The international community has been relatively silent about this. Do you have anything to say about the situation there, which is volatile?

Secondly, yesterday, President [Mahmoud] Abbas delivered a speech in which he said there's no relation between Zionism and Jews and that Jews have no... and he indicated that Jews have no relation to the land of Israel. Does that present a problem for the two-state solution? He also used very colourful Arabic language towards the President of the United States and said that the United States can no longer be a mediator. Is that... does that factor in your assessment of the situation?

Secretary-General: First, you know, in my life, I have been in government against which there were demonstrations, and I was a demonstrator for different purposes. So, if there is something I cared a lot about is... and I must say, when I was in government, there was no demonstrator arrested or demonstrations repressed.

If there is something I care a lot is for the right of demonstration, of peaceful demonstration of any people. So, I care about the right of Iranian people to demonstrate, and we have clearly stressed that that right should be respected. We also appeal for demonstrators to do it peacefully, but the right of demonstration is an essential part of the human rights in any place in the world.

Now, one of the reasons why we believe that we need to have a two-state solution with Israelis and Palestinians is that we believe that there is a link between these two people with that land. There is no way we can solve in another form this problem.

I understand that the relationship between the United States and the Palestinian Authority is difficult and complex at the present moment. We have the recognition of Jerusalem, so there are many difficulties and complexities in that relationship. I hope that this will not undermine the possibility of Israelis and Palestinians to seriously discuss the way out for both to be able to construct finally a solution for this too-long-lasting problem.

Spokesman: Mr. Abbadi.

Question: Thank you, Mr Secretary-General. Thank you for this press conference. And happy New Year to you as well. Abbadi from Le Dossier du Maroc.

You said that the year 2017 should be the year of peace, and you just expressed your disappointment, saying that it remains elusive. My question is about global peace. And, in this instance, I would like to quote President... Chinese President Xi Jinping what he said about that. And I quote, a good China...

Secretary-General: What peace?

Spokesman: Can you speak a little louder?

Secretary-General: What peace your concern is about?

Spokesman: Peace.

Secretary-General: No, but he said...

Question: Global peace.

Secretary-General: Global peace.

Question: The Chinese President said, and I quote, a good China-US cooperation will serve as an anchor for global stability and a booster for world peace. In your capacity as the Secretary-General of the United Nations, what importance do you attribute to these bilateral relations in the promotion of peace and security in the world?

Secretary-General: A vital importance. As you know that one of the things that today is very widespread in intellectual discussions about the future is so-called Thucydides trap, according to which and based on the old war between Sparta and Athens, when a power emerges and another power has been dominant, there is a serious risk of confrontation between the two.

And so it is obvious that, with the rising influence of China and international affairs that I think is a welcome development and United States being traditional the biggest power, it's absolutely vital that these two countries have a constructive, positive relationship, as it is vital that the US and Russia and Russia and China and other big powers have a positive relationship.

Spokesman: Maurizio, Notimex.

Question: Thank you, Secretary-General. Maurizio Guerrero from the Mexican News Agency, Notimex. Portugal effectively decriminalised drugs...

Secretary-General: Sorry?

Question: Portugal effectively decriminalised drugs more than 15 years ago, a policy by...

Secretary-General: Which was done by me.

Correspondent:: Right, exactly. [Laughter]

Secretary-General: And it was not drugs. It was the consumption.

Question: The consumption of all drugs, yes. A policy that has been regarded and, by all metrics, has been successful, and it's perfectly in line with the conventions of the United Nations. So my question is, would you actively recommend Member States to consider these policies, given the high cost of the so-called war on drugs? Thank you.

Secretary-General: Well, it would not be nice if I would be now making self-propaganda, no? [Laughter]

First of all, the policy that was approved was not simply a problem of decriminalisation of consumption. It was not legalisation. It was decriminalization, in the sense that the state guarded the responsibility to support the people, looking into their health, into their treatment, and there was a responsibility, an interacting with the persons on this. And there was a number of other measures of prevention, of public health related to this, the introduction of several other policies to complement it, so it was not just one single measure. And we kept a very strict policy of criminalisation of traffic of drugs.

This policy, according to the indicators that are now available, proved to be successful, not only because it diminished the risks for the people and for society, but in the end, consumption decreased in the follow-up of the introduction of the policy.

I mean, it's up to each country to define its own policy. Not as Secretary-General of the United Nations, as former Prime Minister of Portugal, I'm particularly proud of what we did. It was not easy. It was not a [consensus] measure. I think it worked.

It's up to each country to decide its policies, but I think, if I can... I think that there is a serious discussion that is needed about drugs, the so-called war on drugs. And I believe the discussion should be without prejudice, without pre-established parameters, because this is one of the most complex problems that we face. It has a personal dimension. It has a dimension of public health. It has a dimension of impact on the structure of states. We see states being dramatically impacted in their institutions because of this.

So, this is an area in which I would suggest open discussion without prejudice and without predetermined positions, because I don't think anybody can be sure that there is one single solution for the problem. This is very complex in many dimensions, and it is a very serious problem that need to be addressed.

We tried in Portugal at the time, and I'm now speaking in my past capacity, to find what we thought was the best solution for a country that was a small country. We couldn't adopt a policy not taking into account the environment, so we were not entirely free, but a small country, for a small country that would optimize the situation of the people. No? Having the people as the centre, and I think it was successful.

Spokesman: Masood Haider. Masood.

Question: Thank you. Thank you. Secretary-General, my name is Masood Haider. I represent Daily Dawn Newspaper of Pakistan. My question is about 400 Palestinian children in Israeli jails, according to latest figures available, and one of the thing that is happening is, once when the children are picked up by the Palestinian... by the Israeli authority, they are then transferred to the prisons in Israel itself, which is considered to be a violation of the fourth Geneva Convention and that the children are brutal... treated brutally.

Have you been able to talk to the Israeli authorities about this treatment of the Palestinian children? They're between 12 and 17 years old. Thank you.

Secretary-General: The answer is yes. This is one of the things we have discussed in my visit to Israel and Palestine.

Spokesman: Kyodo News.

Question: Thank you, Secretary-General. I'm [inaudible], Kyodo News Japan. My question is about DPRK's (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) visit... participation for Olympic Games. In General Assembly, you expressed that it is encouraging, but on the other hand, full implementation of sanction resolution is very important at this moment. And I have seen growing concern, which is that, if a large number of people come from DPRK to South Korea, especially with logistic help by South Korea, for example, for transport or where to stay, that could undermine the effort of implementation. What do you think about that kind of concern? And I'd like to ask you if you have spoken with South Korean government or US government about that point.

Secretary-General: No, I have to say that we have full confidence in South Korea to be able to handle that in a way that will present no risk. I think South Korea is a very developed country with very solid capacities. We are absolutely sure that this will be properly handled.

My only concern is sometimes that we look at these symbols of goodwill and positive indications, and we forget that the main problem is yet to be solved. And so, this is... if there is a risk is for people to think, oh, no, now things are solved. No. It's very important that we have these conversations between the two Koreas. It's very important that we have these Olympic Games, but let's not forget that the central problem is yet to be solved, and that's to make sure that the international community commits strongly to that.

Spokesman: Sorry. Last question will be to Olga.

Question: Secretary-General, Olga Denisova with RIA Novosti Russian News Agency, and the question will be also about Olympic Games.

Secretary-General: About?

Question: Olympic Games, Winter Olympics. As you may know, Russian athletes will be going to South Korea without the right to play national anthem and to carry the national flag. What's your idea of... what do you think of such participation of the team in Olympic games?

Secretary-General: Well, as you know, this is a very complex question relating to rules and regulations about the Olympic Games and questions of doping and etc. I don't think I am the right person to comment on that. I would like to say that I have a lot of admiration; many times in my life I've seen Olympics Games and I've seen Russian athletes doing fantastic performances, and I hope that all these problems that have been existing will be solved to allow for, in the next Olympic Games, to have a full-fledged presence of Russian athletes.

Spokesman: Great. Thank you very much.

Secretary-General: Thank you very much.

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