



Briefing by Representative of the Secretary-General in Nepal Ms. Karin Landgren

Press conference

22 January 2010

Good morning.

Before I speak about the Security Council and the peace process, I would like to say a few words about the earthquake in Haiti on January 12th.

The United Nations is devastated at the appalling loss of life there. In addition to the terrible suffering of the people of that country, the UN family is mourning the loss of national and international staff, including peacekeepers, volunteers, as well as family members.

Many are people we have worked with on other assignments. A former UNMIN electoral staff member, Ms Nivah Odwori of Kenya, has been confirmed among the dead.

Our thoughts are with her family and with the many other friends lost there, and with the families who are still waiting for news of their loved ones.

I am very relieved that none of Nepal's large peacekeeping contingent supporting the UN Stabilisation Mission in Haiti has come to serious harm. As you know, Nepalese peacekeepers are supporting the ongoing rescue and relief operations.

Turning now to the peace process, on 9 January the Government of Nepal wrote to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon requesting an extension of the current mandate and related works of UNMIN.

In view of the transitional situation of the country, and in recognition of UNMIN's role within its mandate of supporting Nepal's nationally-driven peace process, the Government requested the extension of UNMIN's mandate until 15 May 2010. That is sixteen weeks from tomorrow.

The Government informed the Secretary General that Nepal's major political parties remain fully committed to taking the peace process to a positive and speedy conclusion.

Yesterday, 21 January, the Security Council adopted resolution 1909 supporting the Government's request and authorizing the extension of UNMIN until 15 May 2010.

The Security Council is strongly supportive of Nepal's peace process and wishes to see it succeed. The Council has called for all parties to move forward swiftly in implementing the agreements reached. During the remaining mandate period, the Government and parties are expected to focus on creating the conditions under which UNMIN's functions are no longer needed.

As requested by the Security Council, we will work with the parties and the Government to discuss and put together the arrangements for the withdrawal of UNMIN.

Until then, UNMIN will continue its activities in support of the peace process.

In its resolution, the Security Council has highlighted several recent developments, among them the discharge of the disqualified Maoist army personnel including those who were disqualified as minors, the establishment of the high-level political mechanism, and progress in the development of concrete and time-bound plans for integration and rehabilitation of Maoist army personnel.

We expect the Security Council resolution to be available online very soon.

Let me say a word about the Secretary-General's report to the Security Council, and my briefing to the Security Council one week ago.

There is inevitably a time-lag between the production of a report to the Security Council, and current developments. The most recent events are never reflected fully in the SG's report because of the week or ten days that are needed for translation and publication. The briefing of the Security Council conducted in person is intended to bring the Council completely up to date.

The SG's report said that the peace process had remained largely stalled between October and December, and despite some level of dialogue being maintained among the parties, no agreement had been reached on several critical issues. The Special Committee had not made headway, the HLPMP had not been formed, and the report also noted a confrontational climate.

The signs of very welcome flexibility that began at the tail end of the reporting period continued and were reflected in my briefing to the Security Council last Friday, 15 January.

In that briefing, I underlined that the peace process remains fragile, but the renewed urgency shown by the political leaders to address central peace process issues and the recent actions by the Government and the parties can herald a freshly constructive stage for Nepal's democratic transition.

Let me comment on some of these developments, beginning with the commitment by the Government and the Maoists in principle to a time-bound plan for integration and rehabilitation of Maoist army personnel.

The Security Council welcomed the understanding between the Government and the UCPN-M on having a timetabled action plan, and called on them to work together to ensure its completion and implementation.

These are the arrangements which, when agreed, will truly advance the peace process and will allow UNMIN's activities to be completed. UNMIN has been urging the Government and the Maoists to create the conditions that will allow UNMIN to conclude our work, so this is an especially encouraging development.

Another positive development is that the Government, the UCPN-M and the United Nations signed an Action Plan on the discharge of those Maoist army personnel disqualified in 2007 for having been minors at the time of the ceasefire agreement. Since this agreement was signed on 16 December, three discharge exercises have been conducted, in Sindhuli, Chitwan and Nawalparasi cantonments.

They have, on the whole, gone smoothly. Perhaps 40% of those disqualified have already left the cantonments. All of those originally disqualified will formally be discharged, whether or not they take part in the cantonment ceremonies.

All of the discharged are also eligible for the support packages that have been developed. It is up to the individuals themselves to decide whether or not to take the support - which consists of educational or vocational training. They have one year to decide whether or not they wish to use the support that will be available. This also applies to those persons who had already left the cantonments.

Each type of support is valued at approximately Rs 100,000 and is commensurate with good international practice for such exercises. The Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction is implementing the support arrangements with the assistance of the United Nations and donors.

The future of those discharged is important to the country. It is also important to the aim of no longer having the UCPN-M listed in the annual report of the Secretary-General as a group that uses children in conflict.

A "Monitoring Mechanism" has been set up by the United Nations country team here in Nepal, led by UNICEF. This is not an UNMIN function. It will undertake essentially spot-checking of those discharged who were below 18 at the time of the ceasefire.

The Security Council also welcomed the establishment of the high-level political mechanism. It is acknowledged that the peace process needs consensus-building and confidence-building, and the hope is that this forum can strengthen these important aspects of the process.

The period since 16 December appears the most positive in the peace process for quite some time. As I have told the Council, there are still risks to the peace process. There have been provocative actions, expressions of dissent or wavering commitment to the process, and some serious confrontations.

The parties now have the opportunity to bring the peace process to a successful conclusion, continuing the strong example Nepal has already set in this respect.

Can integration and rehabilitation be completed in 112 days? The timeframe is ambitious and the parties are committed to a challenging goal.

Elements of the plan still being worked on, as we understand, concern political agreement on major integration and rehabilitation questions such as the numbers of former Maoist army personnel to be integrated into different security forces and how this links to Nepal's overall security needs; the question of the recruitment standards to be met, and other such aspects.

The Technical Committee of the Special Committee to supervise, integrate and rehabilitate the Maoist army personnel is very knowledgeable about the technical steps involved in integration into security forces, and the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction, and several counterparts in UCPN-M, are similarly knowledgeable about rehabilitation matters.

Our aim and our hope is that UNMIN's activities in Nepal can be brought to an orderly and organised close in the near future. UNMIN, the Secretary-General and the Security Council members have long been encouraging the parties to focus on creating the conditions that will permit UNMIN to wind up our work, and the parties' agreement over an action plan will we hope facilitate the development of an exit strategy for UNMIN.

This is a critical and sensitive period for the peace process. The Security Council has called on all political parties in Nepal to expedite the peace process, and to work together in a spirit of cooperation, consensus and compromise in order to continue the transition and enable the country to move to a peaceful, democratic and more prosperous future. We encourage all parties to exercise great restraint, and to continue to engage as productively as they have done recently.

Thank you.