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**NOTE TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
(through Mr. Mulet)**

DPI Weekly Press Review

This week's press review examines the coverage of the imminent World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) and the latest developments in relation to Syria.

Coverage of WHS has been growing steadily in the lead-up to the gathering in Istanbul, with a constant angle centred on the aims and the possible outcomes of the event, and this past week was no exception. While some media outlets raised an eyebrow over the possibility of real results from the summit, there was a generally positive angle to the reporting, with a range of outlets discussing the hoped-for outcomes. The Department has sent a full team to Istanbul to provide extensive news and social media coverage, in coordination with OCHA, of the event on all major UN media platforms and in all official languages.

While the UN featured heavily in the latest coverage of the Syria crisis – centred on the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) meeting in Vienna and possible humanitarian airdrops in Syria – it could not escape the generally negative tone to the reporting. The prospect of having to resort to airdrops in the light of challenges to humanitarian access also received some negatively-toned coverage, with some media outlets noting that such a move would come as a result of the failure of political and diplomatic efforts to obtain access to besieged areas.

Meanwhile, the new Free and Equal video in which you featured for International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia, and that was presented on the Google home page, now has more than 630,000 views in only seven days.

Thank you.



Cristina Gallach
20 May 2016

cc: The Deputy Secretary-General / Mr. Feltman / Mr. Khare / Mr. Kim / Mr. Ladsous / Mr. Nabarro / Mr. O'Brien / Mr. Amdur / Mr. Dujarric

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PRESS REVIEW

Friday, 20 May 2016

Produced by News and Media Division, Department of Public Information

COUNTING DOWN TO THE WORLD HUMANITARIAN SUMMIT

Media coverage of the imminent World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) intensified this week, with media outlets continuing to centre on the aims and possible outcomes of the event.

Ban's "brainchild"

The linkage of WHS to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon was drawn out by some outlets. Sri Lanka's **News First** called WHS "the brainchild of UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon." According to the Canadian international affairs platform **OpenCanada.org**, the WHS "may well be a signature initiative" of Ban and "could hardly have been more heartily welcomed than in Turkey." The **Washington Post** reported that Ban hoped the summit would lead to humanitarian aid becoming more efficient, coordinated and cohesive. Turkey's **Daily Sabah** reported that Ban and Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan spoke by phone to discuss regional developments prior to the summit. **The Guardian** (UK) meanwhile pointed to Ban's outline document, noting that the Secretary-General had set out five core responsibilities, including a shift "from delivering aid to ending need," and **The Malay Online** was among those who ran the UN chief's opinion piece entitled, "The future of humanitarian action – Ban Ki-moon."

What's it all about?

There were various angles to the reporting on the event itself, ranging from its worthy aims to likely results. Sri Lanka's **News First** said WHS was "a landmark UN event, aimed at changing the way humanitarian response and aid is managed globally." **The Guardian** (UK) stated that the event aimed to tackle growing demands on aid agencies struggling to cope with competing emergencies. An **AP** story carried by the **Washington Post**, among others, reported that John Ging of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said that a major focus was humanitarian financing. According to **IPS**, the summit sought "a long-term solution for people fleeing protracted conflict." **Sputnik News** cited the German government as saying that the summit would set out short- and medium-term roadmaps for tackling humanitarian crises. And Nigeria's **NAN** news agency reported that the summit aimed to generate renewed focus on humanitarian commitments, including the need to "leave no one behind" and to "prevent and end conflict."

Scepticism about WHS also reared its head. **The Guardian** (UK) reported that "not all are convinced the WHS has the right priorities, or that it will have the weight to deliver them," and **DPA** noted that Russia had voiced its displeasure with the WHS and had raised concerns "that the UN was too focused on involving aid groups and was ignoring the priorities of Member States." **IPS** reported that OCHA's head, Stephen O'Brien, did not want to focus on expected specific outcomes ahead of the WHS, and noted the UN official's description of the summit as a unique opportunity to sustain momentum for change and to send a message of solidarity and support to those in need of assistance. The **Washington Post** reported that leaders would meet at the summit to discuss a response to the refugee crisis and quoted World Bank President Jim Yong Kim on the prospects of any major breakthrough there as saying, "I think it will be a realization that the problem is much deeper and more complicated than we appreciate."

A local perspective

A strand of coverage focussed on the impact of the WHS at the national level. An **AFP** story, carried in **French Africa Times**, among others, reported that O'Brien vowed to raise funds at the WHS to help the more than 240,000 refugees and displaced people in camps in south-east Niger. Somali news website **Horseed Media** reported that Somalia's President Hassan Sheikh Mohamoud would attend WHS and afterwards host a meeting on the country's humanitarian situation. **Radio New Zealand** reported that Emele Duituturaga, Executive Director of the Pacific Islands Association of Non-Government Organizations, said the summit offered an opportunity for Pacific islanders to tell the world about the global responsibility for climate-induced disaster.

In Turkey, the host country for the summit, non-governmental organizations – including the Turkish Red Crescent, and aid agencies Humanitarian Relief Foundation and Support to Life – speaking with Turkey's **Anadolu Agency**, underscored that the best way to cope with disasters was by empowering local communities. **Xinhua** ran a story pointing to Kilis, a Turkish border city grappling with Syrian refugees, saying it "has high hopes" for the summit. In its reporting, Iran's **Press TV**, citing German politicians, said that Chancellor Angela Merkel planned bilateral talks with other leaders in attendance to salvage an agreement in which Turkey committed to taking back all asylum-seekers who illegally reached Greece via the Aegean, and in return, Ankara was to receive financial aid, accelerated visa liberalization talks and progress in EU membership negotiations.

In commentary

The aims and outcomes of WHS also featured in commentary. In an analysis piece, **IPS's** Baher Kamal highlighted that the summit aimed to prevent and end conflict, respect the rules of war, leave no one behind, work differently to end need and invest in humanity. In a **Devex** analysis, journalist Virginia Vigliar noted that as pre-summit discussions were ramping up, actors within the aid community offered seven practical steps to put reforms into practice at the grassroots level. An editorial in Germany's **Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe** newsletter flagged the need to push for heightened importance of cash transfers as an instrument in humanitarian aid. In an opinion piece in the Kenyan weekly **The East African**, Jakaya Kikwete, a former president of Tanzania, and Mukesh Kapila, a special representative of the Aegis Trust for the prevention of crimes against humanity, heralded WHS as a global effort to "transform the life chances of the neediest and most vulnerable among us... [and] point the compass in the right direction."

Looking at the launches

A few outlets looked to some of the launches expected to take place at WHS. A **Reuters** story – picked up widely, including by **NBC News**, **yahoo.com**, the **New York Post** and Saudi Arabia's **Al Arabiya**, among others – exploring the provision of jobs for skilled refugees, made passing mention to WHS, noting that "a Global Alliance for Humanitarian Innovation would be launched" at the summit to enlist technology to improve crisis responses. The expected launch of an "Education Cannot Wait" fund also drew substantial coverage, including in international wires. **Deutsche Welle** reported that Gordon Brown, "speaking in his role as UN special envoy for global education," announced a fund to provide education to millions of displaced children and school-age refugees. **Xinhua** said the initiative seeks to raise \$3.85 billion from some 100 public and private donors over the next five years. According to the Indian education web portal **JagranJosh.com**, the fund can "save a generation lost to war, child marriage, forced labour and the recruiters for violent extremism." In commentary appearing in **The Guardian** (UK), Kevin Watkins, Executive Director of the Overseas Development Institute, explained that governments had a rare opportunity to get behind the education initiative saying, "they could make this a summit that delivers something more than vague promises and a communique that is long on words and short on action." In the **Huffington Post**, Kolleen Bouchane, Board President of the US's Global Campaign for Education, asserted that the process of creating the fund "increased attention to

education in emergencies and protracted crisis" throughout a range of stakeholders, which, "if stoked...can continue to fuel the revolution in education for all."

SYRIA: NO STEP FORWARD ONE STEP BACKWARDS

Coverage of the Syrian crisis this week focussed on two events: the latest meeting of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) in Vienna and developments in relation to humanitarian aid. The UN figured prominently in both – the former had UN involvement, the latter stemmed from comments made by UN officials in Geneva.

UN angle covered widely

The Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, anchored the coverage involving the UN through his various comments to the media. Earlier in the week, **Reuters** reported that after meeting with ISSG members, the envoy told a news conference that there was a strong desire to keep the peace process moving.

With regard to the next round of intra-Syrian talks, de Mistura's statement noting that "we cannot wait too long [...] We want to keep the momentum," played widely throughout the press – including in the UK-based Arabic daily **Asharq Al-Aswat**, the **Australian Associated Press** and **DNA India**. **Russia Today**. Iran's Shia news agency **ABNA** quoted de Mistura as saying that peace talks would become credible "when there is credible cessation of hostilities and credible humanitarian aid" delivery. According to **AFP**, he warned that the UN-mediated talks in Geneva would have little purpose if the killing continued on the ground. In its report, Austria's **Die Presse** emphasized that the UN envoy was clinging to the peace process and pushing for "the implementation of the already agreed plans." Some outlets covering the ISSG meeting accentuated a more positive angle: **Syria Online** reported that de Mistura "voiced optimism over resuming the intra-Syrian dialogue in Geneva soon," while Austria's **Der Standard** said that de Mistura was "optimistic after the talks."

Pessimism in Vienna

Apart from the UN aspect to the meeting in Vienna, there was much coverage on the ISSG meeting itself. **Reuters** reported that "a pessimistic atmosphere pervaded... between countries that support President Bashar al-Assad and his enemies." According to **NPR**, "one key division continues to be the fate of Syrian President Bashar Assad," with **AP** adding that "Moscow opposes any attempt to forge a peace settlement that is conditional on his removal."

AP also reported that underscoring the difficulties was the fact that 20-plus nations were unable to outline specific penalties for non-compliance with the cessation of hostilities. Pakistan's **Express Tribune** was one of several outlets which picked up an **AFP** story saying that "underlying disagreements between Washington and Moscow on how to handle the crisis were apparent, and the United Nations failed to name a date for new peace talks." Germany's **Süddeutsche** reported that all sides involved were "unable even to reach a minimum consensus on what a solution could look like," and **Reuters** quoted German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier as saying, "We must find a way back into the political process."

A few media outlets flagged a glimmer of hope in their coverage. According to Austria's **Wiener Zeitung**, expectations were low but the parties "managed to agree on small steps to be taken." And while the UK-based **Middle East Online** reported that participants vowed to strengthen the shaky ceasefire, **Al Jazeera** noted that the attendees confirmed their support for efforts to end the violence. An **AP** dispatch picked up by the **Daily Star**, **Al-Hayat** and most other Beirut media outlets reported that world and regional powers agreed to boost humanitarian aid deliveries and hoped to restart peace talks.

There was little in the way of commentary on the ISSG meeting. In Canada's **Globe and Mail**, columnist Konrad Yakabuski observed that new ISSG members – currently at 22 countries and four international organizations or alliances – were the result of UN attempts “to break a deadlock between Russia and the United States.” In the pan-Arab **Rai al-Youm**, editor-in-chief Abdelbari Atwan said it appeared “the meeting’s agenda was changed from a discussion of political and military issues to that of relief work, with an almost desperate attempt to secure and expand the ceasefire agreement.” In the Syrian daily **al-Watan**, Samer Dahi observed that “the international group has specified that the subject of the next round of talks would be the fate of detainees and the kidnapped.”

Parallel to the coverage of the meeting, there was a thread of reporting which looked to the military situation on the ground. In this vein, **Al Jazeera** headlined its article with: “Fighting continues in Syria as world leaders gather.” **Reuters** reported that jihadi militants were mobilizing, “taking advantage of the collapse of peace talks to eclipse nationalist rival insurgents that signed on to a faltering truce.” **The Times** (UK) cited US officials and analysts as saying that Russia was deepening its military presence in parts of Syria, “two months after President Putin announced a withdrawal of the ‘main part’ of his forces.” By week’s end, the **Financial Times** reported that Syrian state forces had advanced into the besieged Ghouta, on the outskirts of Damascus, “flouting international efforts to solidify a ceasefire.”

Manna from heaven

The humanitarian angle came to the fore through coverage of the UN envoy’s remarks in relation to air-drops. However, there was a twist to the tone in this coverage, seemingly going from a positive action to a negative one. According to **The Guardian** (UK), the ISSG meeting’s “one advance” was to call for the World Food Programme (WFP) to airdrop supplies to besieged areas. Midweek, **Reuters**, **AFP**, Turkey’s **Son Dakika** news portal and **Asharq Al-Aswat** were among numerous others flagging de Mistura’s vow to take the “last resort” option of airdrops, if access to besieged areas did not improve by 1 June. The **Financial Times** and **Irish Times** were among a slew of others with similar reporting.

This aspect received further attention through the envoy’s comments at a later press conference in Geneva, at which he emphasized the need to provide aid to all besieged and hard-to-access areas of Syria. Turkey’s **Doğan News Agency** reported that de Mistura set humanitarian aid delivery as his primary goal; his remarks, along with those of his special advisor, Jan Egeland, were also picked up by others, including Spain’s **EFE**, Austria’s **Vorarlberg Online** news, and Turkey’s **Anadolu Agency**. According to **Sputnik News**, de Mistura hoped “there will be no need in air-dropping aid to Syria’s besieged areas, and increasing help delivered by road would be a better option.” **Voice of America** reported that given the cost and technical difficulties of mounting airdrops, Egeland called them a measure of last resort. According to **Sputnik News**, Egeland said the airdrops may become a “turning point” in providing assistance across all of the country.

Some took a sceptical tone. The **New York Times** said “the very fact that they had to threaten the airdrops – which are expensive and often inaccurate – amounted to an admission of how little progress has been made.” **Le Temps** reported that airdrops were risky operations and would require some level of consent from the Syrian regime, in case government forces try to shoot down WFP planes.

Elsewhere, in what **Le Temps** reported as “the only glimmer of hope on the humanitarian front,” a collaborative effort between the UN, Syrian Red Crescent and International Committee of the Red Cross successfully delivered humanitarian support to the besieged Damascus suburb of Harasta. **Xinhua** reported that aid convoys entered the Syrian town “for the first time in four years.” The **Huffington Post** called it “the first of its kind” to make it in while the **Middle East Eye** noted that last month de Mistura had listed Harasta as being among areas in urgent need of supplies.