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NOTE TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
(through Ms. Malcorra)

DPI Weekly Press Review

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EXECUTIVE OFFICE

OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

The press review this week examines coverage of the latest developments in Ukraine and the ongoing conflict in Syria as it enters a fourth year.

The Syrian "anniversary" was widely acknowledged by the international media, which used the milestone to renew its focus on the dire humanitarian dimensions of the conflict.

Your joint statement on Wednesday with UNESCO's Irina Bokova and United Nations-Arab League envoy Lakhdar Brahimi also helped to generate interest in another aspect of the crisis: the continuing destruction of Syria's priceless cultural heritage.

In Ukraine, the visit by OHCHR's Ivan Šimonović generated widespread coverage. We can expect the media to closely track the activities of the UN human rights monitoring team that is being deployed, and we will therefore need to ensure that we are able to meet media demands for daily updates.

Press interest on the broader Ukraine crisis is likely to peak even higher over the weekend, given tomorrow's scheduled vote in the Council and Sunday's referendum in Crimea.

Turning to social media, a Facebook post quoting your comment about the role that men and boys can play in achieving gender equality – timed for International Women's Day last weekend – reverberated throughout the week. It garnered more than 9,000 separate comments and was seen by at least 125,000 people, far above the average for a UN post.

Thank you.



Peter Launsky-Tieffenthal
14 March 2014

cc: The Deputy Secretary-General / Ms. Amos / Mr. Feltman / Ms. Haq / Mr. Ladsous / Mr. Kim /
Mr. Orr / Mr. Amdur / Mr. Dujarric



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PRESS REVIEW

Friday, 14 March 2014

Produced by News and Media Division, Department of Public Information

SYRIA

This week, the United Nations featured prominently in media reporting about Syria as the country entered the fourth year of its civil war. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's call for peace talks to be renewed and his flagging – alongside UNESCO's Irina Bokova and UN-Arab League envoy Lakhdar Brahimi – of the destruction of the country's cultural heritage played widely in media outlets. The press showed enormous interest in the latest report from UNICEF on the war's impact on children, while updates on the wider humanitarian issues also received significant pick-up.

Is Syria becoming the forgotten war?

Marking the three-year milestone, Ban Ki-moon appealed to the international community, and especially the United States and Russia, to "re-energize" the stalled Geneva peace talks, reported **DPA** in a dispatch that was echoed by **AFP** and the **Irish Times**, among others. According to **ITAR-TASS**, the Secretary-General called for renewed political will to end what was described as the greatest humanitarian and security crisis in the world. Media coverage of Ban's appeal ran globally: "UN chief calls Syria the biggest global security crisis, warns world not to lose focus," (**AP**); "Syria: Ban urges focus on political talks to end bloodshed" (**India Blooms News Service**); and "UN Chief: World Must Not Lose Focus on Syria" (**Saudi Press Agency**).

The destruction of cultural heritage also drew headlines after Ban, Bokova and Brahimi issued a statement expressing alarm. "Syria cultural heritage in peril from war, looting: UN" ran an **AFP** headline atop a story carrying the UN's appeal to the various warring parties. **AP** highlighted that four of Syria's six World Heritage sites are being used for military purposes, or have been transformed into battlefields. **Voice of America** led its story by relaying the UN chief's concern that war is "ripping Syria's rich cultural heritage to shreds." While the Dutch daily **Reformatorisch Dagblad** drew attention to the "alarming reports" of deliberate destruction, Algeria's **Ennahar** called Syrian cultural heritage the "forgotten victim of war" and **ANSA** (Italy) referred to it as Syria's "less discussed tragedy."

In an interview with Turkey's **Anadolu** news agency, politician Reha Denemec levelled accusations that European countries are less sensitive towards Syria than Ukraine. Denemec charged that the UN had referred to the Ukrainian situation as dire since the beginning, while "human tragedy is being lived in Syria." Labelling the crisis over Ukraine as the "new Cold War," **Le Monde** lamented that "to their misfortune, the Syrians are also hostages of the situation in Kyiv and Sebastopol." A **Washington Post** editorial, remarking that the Ukrainian crisis has been "a boon" to the regime of Bashar al-Assad, reckoned that the Syrian Government continued to wage a war of starvation, besieged civilians in violation of a Security Council resolution approved more than two weeks ago, missed chemical weapons deadlines and was now preparing for a "bogus election."

In the **Huffington Post**, the UN education envoy and former United Kingdom prime minister Gordon Brown observed that "three years into the war... the United Nations and humanitarian organizations are fighting an uphill struggle to arouse the conscience of the world," adding "the Syrian people also have a new enemy: donor fatigue." Beirut's **Daily Star** editorialized that "the scale of horrors" becomes clearer "with each damning report," yet "news items have become so commonplace that many people are tuning out."

Security Council briefed on Syria

Brahimi was again thrust into the spotlight after briefing the Security Council on Thursday – with media emphasizing the envoy's concern about Syria holding presidential elections (AP, Reuters, EFE, DPA). Other outlets, including *Agence Télégraphique Suisse*, Venezuela's *El Universal* and Lebanon's *Naharnet*, highlighted Brahimi's comment that Damascus was using "delaying tactics" to hold up the peace talks. Some outlets gave prominence to his statement that new Geneva talks needed Council assistance to ensure they would be more productive than the previous two. Amid speculation that Brahimi would resign, Lebanon's *Al-Akhbar* denied the conjecture, saying "an international diplomatic source" had ruled out the possibility.

With the other elements of the Syrian conflict attracting the bulk of media attention, coverage of OPCW-UN head Sigrid Kaag's Security Council briefing was relatively limited. However, in an extensive interview with UAE's *Al Arabiya*, Kaag explained that "a lot" of implementation needs to happen during the remainder of this month for Syria to meet its 30 June deadline for destroying chemical weapons stocks.

UNICEF report: Syria most dangerous place to be a child today

The latest report from UNICEF chronicling the downward spiral facing Syrian children received sweeping worldwide coverage, including from the major wires (AP, AFP and Reuters). The *Egyptian Gazette* emphasized UN statistics that the number of children impacted by the war has doubled over the past year to 5.5 million – with many trapped in areas that were besieged or beyond reach. Christiane Amanpour of CNN interviewed UNICEF head Anthony Lake – with video clips depicting the plight of children – who outlined the fear that countless children will grow up with a demand for vengeance. US website *Buzzfeed* re-stated the UNICEF findings that children have borne the brunt of the fighting and posted a graphic compiled by agency quantifying the crises they face. Roger Hearn commented in *The Age* (Melbourne) flagged the impact of Syria's declining health-care system. Hearn noted that "children went to school with the prospect of some sort of future," but those hopes "have unravelled." A *Gulf Times* (Qatar) op-ed by Cesar Chelala pointed out that while the country was once on track to reach MDG 4 – reducing child mortality – today "those gains are shattered." Chelala added: "Children's lives are at risk even before they are born."

Elsewhere, as humanitarian concerns continued to prevail, the trend in media outlets was to zoom in on the resurgent violence that was preventing the delivery of UN aid. The BBC posted a four-minute video of an interview with UNHCR's António Guterres under the headline, "Syria refugees 'needs support from international community'." *The Wall Street Journal* elaborated on the difficulties involved in balancing humanitarian needs against supporting the regime, noting the opinion of "an EU diplomat" that unfrozen funds should be subjected to UN oversight. From the Arab world, a *Jordan Times* editorial emphasized a "pressing need" for UN agencies and others to coordinate long-term efforts to address the refugee crisis. An editorial in UAE's *Khaleej Times* asserted that "widespread hunger and malnutrition... shouldn't be subject to political considerations" and called on the UN to "go back to its earlier resolution calling for all parties involved to agree to a ceasefire, lift the siege and enable aid supplies to reach besieged civilians."

UKRAINE

As the situation on the ground in Ukraine, and in Crimea in particular, continued to shift rapidly, media coverage kept pace with the developments in the Security Council, access for senior UN human rights official Ivan Simonović to conduct a probe, and potential openings for the UN to help defuse the crisis. The greatest press interest was reserved for developments beyond the UN, including manoeuvring involving Kyiv, Moscow, Washington and Brussels, and the possible involvement of the OSCE.

Ban: De-escalate tensions

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's statement on Monday expressing alarm over the escalating crisis reverberated globally, thanks to prominent pick-up by wire agencies. Headlines encapsulating Ban's concern ran in **AFP** – "Ban warns of 'provocative rhetoric' in Ukraine"; **AP** – "UN chief urges parties in Ukraine to avoid 'hasty actions'"; **UPI** – "UN Secretary-General warns of regional instability if Ukrainian situation deteriorates"; **NOTIMEX** – "Ban Ki-moon: Crisis in Ukraine would bring 'serious repercussions'"; Brazilian daily **The Afternoon** – "Ukraine: UN urges care with hasty actions"; Italy's **24 Ore** "Increasingly alarmed by crisis in Ukraine: UN's Ban Ki-moon". The **Armenian Times**, **Deccan Chronicle** (Hyderabad, India) and Singapore's **Business Times** all carried similar headlines or stories. **Kyiv Post** carried an **INTERFAX-Ukraine** story that stressed a UN spokesperson's comment that any settlement to the crisis should be based on the principles of the UN Charter.

Šimonović made news with his travel to the region, with interest peaking over thwarted attempts to visit Crimea. "UN says senior official drops plan for Crimea visit for now," ran a **Reuters** headline over a story conveying that although in Ukraine, Šimonović would skip Crimea due to logistical and security concerns. **Talk Radio News Service** (US) reported that, "five days before a crucial independence referendum, airport restrictions bar UN official from assessing alleged human rights violations in Crimea." Germany's **Die Welt** relayed that Crimea's Simferopol airport had been closed to flights from other parts of Ukraine while the online Slovak daily **Pravda** reported that Šimonović had cancelled for safety reasons. According to UK's business-themed **M2 Press Wire**, the Secretary-General sent his emissary to the Ukraine, hoping to obtain information for a peaceful settlement. While Croatia's **National News Agency** reiterated Šimonović's stand that any solution lay in protecting human rights, **ITAR-TASS** went further in surmising that the UN was considering options for future actions – including sending UN observers to monitor the situation in Ukraine. In late-breaking news on Friday, several outlets began to report on the formation of a human rights monitoring team (**UPI**, **Malaysia Sun**, **Turkish Press**).

Security Council mired in great power tensions

As diplomatic tensions continued to heat up, the schisms in the Security Council fed into media reports. "Russia stares down UN Security Council" ran a headline atop an **AFP** story reporting that Russia has "refused to budge" from its "seemingly imminent" annexation of Crimea, defying Western pressure at the Security Council. Below the headline "UN Security Council's meeting on Ukraine ends to no effect," **ITAR-TASS** highlighted that the Council had held its fifth meeting on Ukraine within 10 days, while an article in India's **Business Standard** stated that "despite five meetings" on the crisis, the Council has yet to succeed in adopting a common opinion. In Algiers' **Expression**, Karim Mohsen noted that "the geostrategic interests of the great powers have paralyzed" the Council and concluded it is "becoming a vicious circle." Poland's **Gazeta** pointed to Vladimir Putin's August 2013 op-ed in **The New York Times** – in which he "criticized ideas to engage the West in Syria" without Security Council approval. Adopting a more critical tone, blogger Tom Rogan asserted in **National Review** (US) that the UN's performance in Crimea was only "the latest in a series of debacles," likening UN envoy Robert Serry's departure as a sign that "the world's greatest global institution can be rendered impotent" by thugs. In Canada's **Globe and Mail**, Christopher Westdal opined that UN representatives have been rejected.

Meanwhile, the major wires – **AP**, **AFP**, **Reuters**, **PTI** – were abuzz with news that new Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk would address the "UN's most powerful body" on Thursday. In coverage of the Council debate, **BBC News**, among others, spotlighted the dramatic appearance of Yatsenyuk waving a copy of the UN Charter and relayed that Russian Ambassador Vitaly Churkin did not respond to Yatsenyuk's request for talks, and claimed it was Kyiv that was "splitting its country into two parts," not Moscow. **AP** relayed that Yatsenyuk "dramatically switched from English to Russian to

ask Russia whether it wants war.” In late-breaking news ahead of a vote on a US-sponsored draft resolution that would declare Sunday’s “planned referendum on independence for Ukraine’s Crimea region illegal,” **Reuters** suggested that more time was being given to allow for negotiations and was “aimed at Russia changing its calculations.” Wagering that a referendum would only heighten tensions, Japan’s **Nikkei Shimbun** advocated that “the international community should make its utmost efforts to avoid the referendum.”

Referendum – political or legal?

As the media waded into the debate on whether Crimea would break away from Ukraine, voluminous inches of commentary covered the spectrum of the debate, from questions about Russia’s motives to arguments about legal precedents. Russia’s **Vedomosti** maintained that the referendum was of a political rather than a legal nature, adding that Crimea could not remain part of Ukraine. An editorial in the **Khaleej Times** claimed that the referendum was Putin’s way of questioning the credentials of the democratic West by invoking the right of Crimeans to vote and choose for themselves. **The Pioneer** (New Delhi) questioned whether the vote would “hold up to legal scrutiny,” pointing to the precedent of Kosovo splitting from Serbia. In his **Russian Times** op-ed, former UN peacekeeper Gerard Gallucci remarked that Kosovo’s unilateral declaration of independence from Serbia could provide the legal basis for Crimea’s succession based on self-determination – “despite US claims that Kosovo was a ‘unique’ case not setting any precedents.” A **Washington Post** editorial determined that Crimea’s annexation would be “an extraordinary violation” of the UN Charter. The **Financial Times** had harsh words for Russia pushing ahead with a referendum in Crimea and concluded that while international law did not provide easy answers, this was “divorce at gunpoint.” An editorial in Kenya’s **The Star** argued that the international community needed to accept that the annexation of Crimea is irreversible – Russia gave it to “Ukraine” and now wanted it back. Meanwhile, in a **Gulf News** (Dubai) op-ed, Adel Safty recalled a double standard on the part of Washington, given it had disregarded the UN Charter’s ban on the use of force and “sent American troops to occupy Iraq.”

Shades of Cold War rhetoric

As the Ukrainian crisis continued to assume major geopolitical dimensions, another thread of coverage pondered the prospects for a propaganda war. **The Moscow Times** cast coverage of Crimea as the pro-Kremlin versus Western media accusing each other of launching information wars – with the West painting a picture of Russian-manufactured provocation, and Russian media portraying a humanitarian crisis. **The New York Times** reported that Cold War media tactics in Russia had whipped public opinion into “a nationalist fervor.” CNN chimed in that “a propaganda war over Ukraine” has developed as each side sought to strengthen its stance. In Greece’s **Kathimerini**, Costas Iordanidis called the situation a “mini Cold War,” warning that whatever the outcome, the people of Ukraine stood to get hurt the most. A **China Daily** editorial asserted that Ukraine’s territorial integrity deserved respect as did Russia’s legitimate interests, but cautioned that “Cold War thinking,” added an antagonistic edge to the crisis. An editorial in **The Times of India** departed from these views, deeming talk of a Cold War “phony,” and asserting that the US needed Moscow’s active cooperation on many key geopolitical issues.
