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Transcript of Press Stakeout after Security Council Briefing on resolution 1701
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It is very encouraging to come to the Security Council and to hear the absolute unanimity and unity of Council members with regard to Lebanon and the needs of Lebanon, the importance of meeting those needs, the importance of sustaining its stability, the importance of moving forward with resolution 1701. That very much has been my experience actually over several years now in this job, but it was particularly the case today.

Gary (Security Council President Gary Quinlan) has already set out some of the key points, some of the points on which there was very precise agreement between Council members and the language that he read out was agreed language. But what I would tell you about the discussion was that it was as always an extensive discussion of 1701, what's going on the Blue Line and in UNIFIL's area operations. We have just I suppose three points really: one is the concern at some of the incidents that have occurred, quite serious ones, violations of the Line during this past four month period, frustration too actually -- I mean people talked about a permanent ceasefire and said why aren't people moving forward on some of these outstanding issues -- but a shared sense that it is enormously important that over eight years calm has actually been maintained over the Blue Line and it is an enormous contribution to what remains of regional peace and security certainly and of enormous benefit to the people on both sides of the Line and appreciation for what UNIFIL does and for the cooperation of the parties in ensuring that that goes on, which I think is very much in everybody's interest.

The second area of focus was really what Gary talked about, the impact of the Syrian conflict on Lebanon and really the growing severity of some of these impacts. People were very focused on the presence of elements from ISIL-Daesh and Nusra in the mountains beyond Aarsal, on what had happened in Tripoli in the north last month, concerning but yes also that the robust response of the Lebanese army and the united response of the Government and of political leaders across the political spectrum in Lebanon in support of the army and in support of, standing up to this extremist threat and I think one has to acknowledge the success in recent days in the north in that respect, that's important.

The other impact which people talked about, and Gary mentioned it, was that of the burden of the refugee presence and influx on Lebanon, which is exactly as he said thirty percent of the population, and the need for the Government, for UNHCR, for UN agencies to work very closely together as was discussed in Berlin recently in order to manage that effectively and to ensure that the best interest of host communities are met and also the rights of the refugees respected. We are working very hard now in Lebanon to put together a new Crisis Response Plan with the Government, with ministries, all of the ministries concerned and the UN agencies and the donors so that next year "Inshallah" we will have a good basis on which to go to the international community and say "help" because help is really needed for the communities that are hosting people, for all of the vulnerable whether Lebanese or refugees from Syria and for the Government programs, education, health, infrastructure and so on which were badly impacted by this

extraordinary explosion in the population basically which Lebanon has experienced over the past three years.

That actually is a final message that will come out of all of this: these are burdens that need to be shared. People talked about the very prompt response actually, after the battles in Aarsal and the fighting there, of the international community to the immediate needs of the Lebanese Armed Forces and the very substantial assistance that has come with encouragement from the International Support Group, from the Security Council, from the Secretary-General. My hope is that we can get very generous support also on the other front, that is to say the humanitarian one, but we need to tap into development funds as well in order to try to ensure that some of these pressing social and economic needs that I mentioned are met.

Thank You.

QUESTION: Thank You Mr. Plumby. Did you tell the Security Council members why the Lebanese politicians have failed so far to elect a new president despite this international unity especially from the Security Council? And also would you please tell us how dangerous is the situation in Lebanon vis-à-vis ISIL and Nusra spillover from Syria into Lebanon? Thank you

SCL DEREK PLUMBLY: Yes, I mean I describe the situation as I see it and observe it and the encouragement that we are all giving to Lebanon's leaders but it is a Lebanese matter. This is not something that we can interfere in or dictate. It is for the Lebanese to decide the way to forward on this but we as Lebanon's friends and partners see it as being extremely difficult for Lebanon that there isn't a Head of State, a Commander in Chief as the President of the Council said at this time and it has a very debilitating effect on the work of Government, Parliament, all of the institutions of the State. So yes that was a point that I emphasized. What was your second question sorry?

QUESTION: My second question: how dangerous is the spillover from Syria to Lebanon especially that we know now that Daesh or ISIL-ISIS and El-Nusra are inside the country? Is the Lebanese army capable to protect the country from this danger, from the terrorist groups? Thank You.

SCL DEREK PLUMBLY: It is a threat you have to take seriously. If you have several thousand persons on the other side of the sort of front line around Aarsal who have kidnapped Lebanese soldiers and security personnel, done terrible things already, it has to be taken seriously. On the other hand, I think the experience in Tripoli, in the north and the international support that has flowed, and the response so far of not just the government but politicians across the board, united response in the face of this, the failure of these calls for people to rise up, quite the reverse was the reaction. It is almost a cliché to say Lebanon has proven resilient but it has proven extraordinarily resilient and it can come through with the help of its friends, in my belief.

QUESTION: I wanted to ask about the situation of refugees. One, I know that there was the Berlin conference. I have seen it reported or headlined: Plumby rules out the naturalization of Syrian refugees. I just wanted to (inaudible) with you the idea that it is actually up to Lebanon. What is

your position, is it a matter of joining the 1951 Convention or not, can you just clarify exactly what your role is in terms of deciding the legal status of refugees there. And also the Belgians that are pulling out of UNIFIL. Are you aware of a replacement contingent? Is that a routine thing or will it impact UNIFIL's ability to police the Blue Line?

SCL DEREK PLUMBLY: Yes, I can absolutely confirm what I said when I think it was As-Safir that asked me that question. There is absolutely no question of settling refugees from Syria in Lebanon. And Lebanon's position on the refugee convention is well understood, it is not just Lebanon's there are other Arab countries who have the same position. So our focus is on encouraging resettlement in third countries and that does happen. Some countries, Germany, Sweden, have been very generous in that respect but of course it is not going to remove the very large burden that Lebanon is already bearing. So the emphasis is on burden sharing and yes, people's return but return in safety and when that's possible. This is the agenda. It is not for me to set the agenda, this is a matter for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and above all it is a matter for the Government of Lebanon and we respect the Government of Lebanon and we work with the Government of Lebanon on this issue like all other issues. On the Belgians, I would just say they have done well, their mission was mine clearance specifically and they are about 100 soldiers I think. It is not going to make, you know contingents come, contingents go. There have been other, including Europeans, who have come in in the past year or two so it is normal business frankly.

QUESTION: Is there any fear the Syrian Government returning?

SCL DEREK PLUMBLY: Well one of the reasons I think that Lebanon ought to be able to agree on a President is that this is a very different situation from the normal one in Lebanon. I think this is really a situation where there is no external impediment to the election of a president. It can be done. It is for the Lebanese really to move forward on this. Of course, you know some of Lebanon's friends may have different views but none of that is dispositive. The answer is in Lebanon.

QUESTION: It is again about the threat of ISIL and UNIFIL. Do you predict or did you have this discussion with the Security Council on the possibility that if there is a situation like similar to Syria where civilian population is threatened in Lebanon, that the rule of engagement, that UNIFIL could be involved in protecting the people of Lebanon if the Lebanese army is not able to?

SCL DEREK PLUMBLY: UNIFIL has a specific mandate which is enshrined in resolution 1701. So it is not something that could be extended to a different border or for a different purpose without a request from the Government of Lebanon and a decision by the Security Council and all the rest of it. I think our focus is very much on supporting and strengthening the Lebanese army and it is extraordinary what has happened in the past year. I think I told you when I was here when we were encouraging, helping, supporting the army as they were putting together their five-year plan and laid it before the international community as well as the Government or both and then the response from a number of member States, the response at the Rome meeting, the extraordinary support from Saudi Arabia now signed, sealed and about to be delivered. This is really a massive declaration of international faith and support in Lebanon.

QUESTION: Has Lebanon said at what point they might have to close their border with Syria?

SCL DEREK PLUMBLY: They have taken a decision, a Government decision, which is not to close the border but actually to look only to the admission of exceptional humanitarian cases. That's the decision that they are seeking to implement at the present moment.

QUESTION: Was it a wise decision?

SCL DEREK PLUMBLY: It is not for me to comment on the Government's decisions. It is a decision of the Government of Lebanon.

Thank you very much.