

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

**Office of the
Special Coordinator
for Lebanon**

**Bureau du
Coordinateur Spécial
pour le Liban**

**SCL Michael Williams
Security Council Consultations on Resolution 1701
Press Stakeout
UNHQ, Wednesday 08 July 2009**

I just briefed the Security Council on the tenth report regarding the Security Council Resolution 1701. We commented on the fact that we have new governments now both in Lebanon and in Israel and we believe that this is a very important moment for the implementation of Resolution 1701.

We discussed with the Council the remarkable achievement, the successful elections held in Lebanon on June 7. Clear results and also the very professional manner in which those elections were conducted, a tribute to the Lebanese people and also to the institutions of Lebanon, above all the Ministry of Interior, the Minister of Defense and also the armed forces.

In the course of my briefing of the Council this morning, we commended the progress that the Lebanese Government has made in recent months with regard to the control of its land border with Syria. We commended the Lebanese Government for the plan that it has developed, for the extension of the Common Border Force from the northern border to the first stretch of the eastern land border. And we believe, with the successful implementation of diplomatic relations between Lebanon and Syria, that other positive developments in the relations between the two countries. We hope the next step to be taken will be the delineation of the common border between the two countries.

Unfortunately there remain of course many areas of 1701 where there has been little progress. Despite repeated criticism by the Secretary-General, Israeli overflights continue unabated and on a daily basis. No date for a withdrawal from the northern part of the village of Ghajar has been set despite some progress in technical talks with Israel.

I wanted to touch on one particularly disturbing element in recent months, which has been, which I know has disturbed many Lebanese, namely the uncovering of alleged Israeli spy networks in many parts of Lebanon. I, as Special Representative of the Secretary-General, am acutely conscious of the great unease and worry that this has caused amongst Lebanese. If these allegations – and I know that some people, I think about half of those arrested have already formally been charged – if these allegations are

confirmed in court, this will constitute a very serious violation of Lebanon's sovereignty and consequently undermine relevant Security Council Resolutions.

Despite these developments, I believe that three years after the war of 2006, with the renewal of the democratic mandate for the new government of Lebanon that Prime Minister-designate Saad Hariri is trying to form, there is a sound basis in the coming months for proceeding with the further development and implementation of 1701.

Thank you very much. If you have any questions, I will take them now.

QUESTION: Do these uncovered spy rings have anything to do with the killing of the Spaniards, and the Tanzanians and other attacks on UNIFIL and are there any indications that there are investigations in that direction?

SCL MICHAEL WILLIAMS: I am afraid I have no information on that whatsoever. But there is no doubt that the discovery of these spy rings, not only in southern Lebanon but of course elsewhere in Beirut, in the Bekaa Valley, is deeply disturbing.

QUESTION: On the issue of borders that you referred to, is there any indication that the issue of the Shebaa Farms could be solved if Lebanon and Syria manage to delineate their border together. Are you working on that?

SCL MICHAEL WILLIAMS: I think that would help, there is no doubt about it whatsoever. The delineation of the border, it would have significance for the Shebaa Farms area. There is a joint border committee, as you know. We hope, given the remarkable progress – and we need to remember that it's less than a year since the two Presidents, President Sleiman and President Assad, had their summit meeting, that in that period there was complete movement from the absence of any form of diplomatic relations to the full establishment of diplomatic relations and the opening of embassies and so on. So I think this is a sound basis on which to tackle in due course the border issues.

QUESTION: There have been letters from the Lebanese Government, through their mission here, to the Secretary-General and the Security Council, alleging that the UNIFIL forces in the south were facilitating the crossing of these spies to leave Lebanon to Israel. Has this been investigated by the UN, looked at, taken seriously, any measures, I mean finding whether it is true or not that UNIFIL is playing a part in smuggling these people through the Blue Line to Israel?

SCL MICHAEL WILLIAMS: I think UNIFIL has looked at this very very seriously. I think the allegations that they were facilitating in some way the passage of individuals across the Blue Line is, I think, without foundation.

QUESTION: Could people just cross the border without UNIFIL even noticing these people passing? Are they invisible?

SCL MICHAEL WILLIAMS: You know the border terrain far better than I but it is a border across which there has been smuggling in the past. We know from borders elsewhere in the world that in the last resort no border is safe from violation.

QUESTION: So what you are saying is that these people might have crossed and what UNIFIL is saying is that these people might have crossed but that they had no knowledge of them crossing, that they had not seen them...?

SCL MICHAEL WILLIAMS: To the best of my knowledge.

QUESTION: How about when you mentioned in your report that the Israelis went into Lebanon and helped some families and some of these operatives to cross the border?

SCL MICHAEL WILLIAMS: We have seen that allegation but we can't confirm it.

QUESTION: What about the issue of Ghajar. You mentioned there is some technical progress. When do you expect some progress on this matter?

SCL MICHAEL WILLIAMS: We very much hope that we can see progress in the next quarter, that I could come back here in October or November or whenever the next meeting of the Council on 1701 takes place, and we could record a successful result, and by a successful result, I would mean the complete withdrawal of the IDF from the northern part of the village of Ghajar.

QUESTION: On what basis are you assuming this?

SCL MICHAEL WILLIAMS: On the basis that this is going to be one of the main areas of work in the coming months. We believe now, with the new government in Israel, the formation of a new government in Lebanon, the hard work of UNIFIL, that the atmosphere we trust may be more propitious to a settlement.

QUESTION: What about the Shebaa Farms? Where are we on that?

SCL MICHAEL WILLIAMS: We are still working on that. We believe that on Ghajar, that it is far more achievable in the short run than the issue of the Shebaa Farms.

QUESTION: You mentioned that Syria and Israel did not provide you with any information, so how do you expect to see progress on that front?

SCL MICHAEL WILLIAMS: It is difficult. I can't deny that. The delineation of the Shebaa Farms area, undertaken by the United Nations, the cartographer was sent to the Governments of Syria and Israel in October 2007 and we still await a response to the Secretary-General's communication (inaudible)

QUESTION: There were a lot of allegations speaking about buying votes, rigging, transferring of votes (inaudible). Does that concern you at all, that the elections were not as clean and as honest as it should have been?

SCL MICHAEL WILLIAMS: What I take satisfaction from is the reports of the election observers, the international observers, the EU, the Carter Centre, the NDI, the Turkish Government and parliament representatives, representatives of Russia and the Arab League. Although in their reports, they found that the elections were not without some shortcomings, without a few blemishes, these reports were overwhelmingly positive. I also know that in Lebanon you have sound institutions with regard to possible shortcomings, and in particular I refer to both the Constitutional Council and the SCEC, the Special Commission. So if there are allegations, they need to be laid out with considerable rigor and detail before those bodies.

Thank you very much.
