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Bureau du Coordinateur Spécial  
pour le Liban

**United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon Michael Williams  
Statement at the Stakeout Following Security Council Session on Resolution 1701**

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AS DELIVERED

Good Afternoon,

I'm very pleased to be here in New York again and especially pleased to be here after the formation of the new Lebanese Government. I think the Cabinet met for the very first time several hours ago. In the briefing just now in the Security Council, many member states expressed their strong support and good wishes for the new government.

Speaking personally, I'd also like to take this opportunity to commend the new Prime Minister Saad Hariri for his leadership and determination, and to wish him all the very best in the tasks ahead in meeting the many challenges before the Lebanese government and also look forward to his renewed commitment to Security Council resolution 1701.

As you know I just briefed the Council on the implementation of 1701 and on the general situation in Lebanon. I think the formation of the new government will enable Lebanon to address the many challenges facing the country. The United Nations looks forwards to working with that new government closely in addressing those challenges and the full implementation of Security Council resolution 1701.

With regard to the situation in southern Lebanon itself, we believe that more needs to be done to safeguard what has been achieved in the past three years. In the period under review just now by the Council of the past four months, there have been a number of serious incidents in south Lebanon and regular, in some cases daily, violations of 1701 have caused concern and raised the specter of a potential escalation.

The Secretary-General condemns all violations of Resolution 1701, whether in the form of rocket launches, air, land or sea violations, the active maintenance of an arms depot or the use of surveillance equipment on sovereign Lebanese territory. While welcoming the parties' stated commitment to resolution 1701, which is critical, we also stress the need for more tangible steps to facilitate forward movement in the direction of a permanent ceasefire and a long-term solution. Lebanon, Israel, and the international community must be vigilant and undertake greater efforts in the coming period to allow us to move forward.

Thank you very much

QUESTION: (inaudible) the challenges you were talking about, are you afraid of a new war? Is the situation in southern Lebanon at stake nowadays?

MCW: No, I think talk of a new war is far too alarmist. There have been quite a number of incidents that the report refers to in the past three or four months, worrying incidents. But I think on the whole and I take the opportunity of your question to state that the cessation of hostilities that followed the adoption of 1701 more than three years ago now has held and has held well. There are violations of that resolution, repeated violations but the cessation of hostilities has actually held remarkably well. And I think that is a tribute to UNIFIL but obviously to the Lebanese and to the Israelis. One of the remarkable facts for example is that the Tripartite group, chaired by UNIFIL, and bringing together the Israeli forces and the Lebanese forces, has met monthly I believe every time since the 2006 war.

QUESTION: the challenges?

MCW: The challenges are, I think, to recommit to 1701 and to move forward. Although the cessation of hostilities and the maintenance of it is welcome, I think the longer term challenge is to try and move to a ceasefire but we are still a far way off from that eventuality. I think there are other challenges that face the new Lebanese government, challenges with regard to the many reforms that are needed, economic, social, political but also the challenge of exercising its authority throughout Lebanon.

QUESTION: How do you perceive the report of the Israeli seizure of an armed ship that was supposedly going from Iran to Syria, bound for Hizbullah, what perception of that is and what threat that poses to rearming Hizbullah getting weapons contained in that shipment into southern Lebanon and that they (inaudible) ?

MCW: You make a lot of assumptions there Bill, which not even the Israeli Government makes in its statements...

QUESTION: (inaudible)

MCW: If we look back at the statement, the Israeli Government statements talks about a serious violation of Resolution 1747, which if you recall is the resolution with regard to the arms embargo on Iran but then carefully states that if proven that the arms were bound for Hizbullah, that might constitute a violation of resolution 1701.

QUESTION: Have you coordinated that (inaudible)?

MCW: No, we haven't at all.

QUESTION: How about the blame that for example when UNIFIL went into Khirbit Silim, they tried to enter some houses and to search them. When they were intercepted by civilians, you condemned that. Was that part of their mandate to go and search the houses?

MCW: Well, you'll recall that the UNIFIL action followed a very substantial explosion several days earlier, which you haven't mentioned, also in Khirbit Silim and that was three months ago now, July 18, four months ago, but that was the explosion of an arms dump, an arms dump that was actively maintained. That is the findings of a UNIFIL inquiry and I

think the outcome of that investigation was that it was an arms dump maintained by Hizbullah. So we need to see all the events in context.

QUESTION: You never condemned for example Israeli violations?

MCW: Every single Israeli overflight of Lebanon is a violation. Your question gives me a welcome opportunity to repeat that. Every single one. Every single violation is condemned. I also take the opportunity to state that to the best of my knowledge probably no other country in the world, probably, I may be wrong, is subject to such an intrusive regime of aerial surveillance. Now we also have other events, the discovery of listening devices which almost certainly seem to have been left by the Israelis. Are these violations? Yes, of course they are violations of 1701.

QUESTION: What about the spy rings?

MCW: To the best of my knowledge, 60 to 70 people have been arrested and again, to the best of my knowledge, nobody has yet been found guilty. I will reserve final judgment until court cases are completed, as I would in every other single country in the world.

QUESTION: The other explosion that took place, you were not conclusive about this particular investigation, although its been a while. Can you say for sure whether that was an arms depot for Hizbullah or not?

MCW: No we can't and in that regard I think it is different from Khirbit Silim but also I have to underline – and my colleague Edmond Mulet just said this in the Council – that the investigations into that incident continue.

QUESTION: A lot of diplomatic sources consider your report to the Security Council imbalanced. You speak a lot and you condemn mostly Lebanese militias but the Israeli side, you don't focus...

MCW: Did you hear my remarks just now?

QUESTION: Yes, but still its not that strong. You don't ask the Israeli government to stop its violations.

MCW: Let me take this opportunity to state publicly that we ask the Israeli government to stop all air violations of Lebanese airspace. I am not sure how many times I can say this. But if you like, I can say this daily if you wish, no problem for me.

QUESTION: It is not strongly worded.

MCW: What stronger word is there than saying that every overflight is a violation of Lebanon's sovereignty and of Council Resolution 1701.

QUESTION: (inaudible) Israeli government to stop all illegal actions in the south?

MCW: Indeed, indeed I may a very strong plea just now in the Council with regard to the northern half of the village of Ghajar which has been occupied by the Israeli forces since

the 2006 war. Now, earlier, as you may know after the Israeli withdrawal in 2000, the Israeli forces withdrew from the village because no Israeli has ever contested that this is Lebanese territory. Now, the Israelis reoccupied the northern part of the village in 2006. This is a flagrant violation of 1701. We had hoped to see progress on an Israeli withdrawal from Ghajar but so far that has not been forthcoming.

QUESTION: Why don't the Israelis want to open a UNIFIL office in Tel Aviv despite the fact that you've been working on this for quite some time.

MCW: I have no idea. I really don't know on that. It is a sort of technical matter that UNIFIL handles.

QUESTION: Do you believe that the Israeli seizure of the Francop was justified, was it legal and was there any discussion of this issue in the Council?

MCW: It did come up. I am trying to remember, I think two or three member states referred to it. I would be straying way outside my mandate to comment directly about the ship, which is a ship well known in the region and has been plying back and forth between Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, Cyprus for many years. But I cannot comment further than that. I am sorry.

QUESTION: Israel's army Chief of Staff has said that he believes that Hizbullah has rockets that can reach Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. Is that something you have any basis for that?

MCW: I am afraid I can't comment on that. We know from the last war in 2006, the reality was that quite a number of Israeli towns and cities came under rocket attack. Haifa did for example. Whether they now have longer range weapons, I am simply not in a position to say, I am afraid.

QUESTION: In your report, you mention that there was no real smuggling, no catching of any smuggling into Lebanon, whether through the Syrian border or from other sides. Can you categorically say that there are no arms smuggling into Lebanon?

MCW: No I would not say that. First of all, UNIFIL colleagues would have to comment about the situation south of the Litani River. I think with regard to Lebanon as a whole, it is an established fact that Lebanon does not have an active border control regime in a way that most countries have on their borders. In the past, there have been two UN missions, LIBAT I in 2007 and I think LIBAT II in the summer of 2008, which looked at the border regime and which declared the borders to be very very porous. That's an objective and scientific assessment of what pertains on the borders. What they were not in a position to say is what may or may not come across the borders.

QUESTION: Is it true that Israel was trying to reach out to Italy to make sure that its Force Commander stay on rather than have something from Spain. When is that supposed to take place and who decides (inaudible)?

MCW: Like you I read newspapers and there have been lots of colorful reports in recent weeks but that's a decision to be made by the Secretary-General and one that he will make in the coming weeks.

QUESTION: You meet with Hizbullah officials. What do you discuss with them? Do you ask them regularly to adhere to 1701 and what do they promise you?

MCW: Every single meeting. We have very frank and detailed discussions with Hizbullah. In recent weeks, those discussions have revolved around two main issues: 1, the formation of the new government in Lebanon and 2, Security Council Resolution 1701. And again we have spoken very frankly about all the issues we covered here now, about the arms depot in Khirbit Silim, about the Israeli violations whether through espionage activities or through aerial violations. It's a discussion that we have with them that is ongoing, that is detailed and which is very important for the United Nations and for Resolution 1701.

Thank you very much.

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