

Press encounter with Ibrahim Gambari, Secretary-General's Special Adviser on International Compact with Iraq and Other Issues,

**following his briefing to the Security Council on his recent visit to Myanmar
UNHQ, 5 October 2007
(unofficial transcript)**

<http://www.un.org/news/dh/infocus/myanmar/gambari.htm>

Mr. Gambari: Ladies and Gentlemen, as you know I was in Myanmar from 29 September to 2 October, and I want to place on record the specific and very powerful efforts made by the Secretary-General himself, and with the strong help of China and some of the other members of the Security Council, to ensure that I did in fact get invited to Myanmar for this visit, and that the programme was decent. I have come back, reported first to the Secretary-General who sent me, under the mandate of the General Assembly, establishing the good offices role, and also provided the briefing as required by the Security Council, which was just completed in the open meeting and the informal consultations.

As you know, this is my third briefing in about ten days, which shows the interest that the Council has in this matter. I think it is fair to say that, as a result of the briefing and the consultations, five points emerge by way of consensus.

One, that unity among Council members is key to really getting Myanmar and the authorities to move along the lines that we all want, which is a peaceful, democratic Myanmar, with full respect for human rights.

Second, there is strong support among all Council members for the good offices role of the Secretary-General, and my own efforts on his behalf.

Third, there is a consensus around the principal that the status quo ante is unacceptable and unsustainable and is probably unrealistic. We cannot go back to the situation before the recent crisis. The underlining factors - the socio-economic and political - must be addressed.

The fourth is the critical role of the ASEAN [Association of South-east Asian Nations] countries, the neighbouring countries, as well as regional powers. In this connection, the leaders of ASEAN have spoken up much more strongly. This is very much welcomed, and we, the Secretary-General and his good office role, will work very closely in a sustained manner with the ASEAN leaders, and also with China and Japan. They have an important role to play.

The fifth point that emerged by consensus in the discussions is that a return visit to Myanmar and to the region would be useful in order to keep the momentum, which we must not allow to slip. But at the same time, the planning for it is very important, because we have to give some time for the authorities there to respond to some of the issues left on the table from the last visit and the previous ones. And also for us at the UN family to prepare to be helpful very carefully. Thank you.

Q: Mr. Gambari, in your trip to Myanmar this time, to what extent, if any, did you detect any shift - subtle, whatever - movement in the leadership's position away from the positions they have had before? Are they shifting at all? Is there flexibility? Did they send these signals that they are moving off the positions they have had before? And also, would you be considering moving up your next visit from mid-November to a little bit earlier at all?

Mr. Gambari: On the first, well, the crisis occurred. I think it took them by surprise, and the reaction of the international community was very, very clear and the messages I was instructed to convey to the authorities were very strong. So that is something that they have to take into consideration. Also, the Senior General has now announced publicly that he is willing to have dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi, although with some conditions, but that could very well provide an opening, and I can confirm that Aung San Suu Kyi is also interested in dialogue, but we have to try to see it move forward, to actually happen. They haven't talked to themselves for a long time. There is a lot of mistrust on both sides.

The second question is that, yes, we are thinking of a visit earlier than mid November, for which I have an invitation that has been confirmed. But we have to work out exactly when that would take place. But in any case, even before going to Myanmar, it may be necessary to be in the region, and to have more consultations with the ASEAN countries.

Q: Mr. Gambari, when you saw Aung San Suu Kyi, can you tell us about the conditions of her health, whether her position has changed, softened or anything from before, and whether she actually is speaking in support of sanctions, as General Than Shwe has said?

Mr. Gambari: Well, in terms of - you saw her picture - some people say she looked frail but actually I thought she looked better this time than last November, when I last saw her. She herself said she is in fairly good health, under the circumstances of her continued detention. So the important thing is to have her restrictions eased before she is released. It is something that the UN has called for. Now, in terms of her position about sanctions, I think we have to find ways to get her own point of view on the record, rather than me interpreting her position.

Q: Mr. Gambari, did you come away with a feeling now that the regime in Myanmar has now softened up a little bit, and is ready to talk and compromise? And how much pressure does a country like China, an ASEAN country like China, and India, need to put on them in order to make some compromise and come up with some sort of a resolution?

Mr. Gambari: We are in this business of the Good Offices role of the Secretary-General; we have to be optimistic and keep pressing that they respond to the concerns of the international community and also that the leadership listens to the voice of their own people. I sense that for those two reasons, I see that there may very well be a window of opportunity here. Now, the role of China is of critical importance, as is [that of] India, and we are working closely with them to try to promote flexibility on both sides, and movement in the direction of an all-inclusive national reconciliation process and full respect for human rights.

Q: Mr. Gambari, you are one of the few people who have gotten to meet Gen. Than Shwe. What was your sense of him? What was he like? There are rumours that he is very hard-line, very

conservative. What would the United Nations like to see come out of a meeting or discussions between the General and Aung San Suu Kyi?

Mr. Gambari: Your first question, Edith - Well, he seems fine to me, but we are not really in the business of assessing the mood. We want the delivery of results. There are issues that were put on the table the last time: the release of political prisoners, humanitarian access to those in need, cessation of hostilities against ethnic minorities, health and educational issues, and cooperation with the ILO. Then we have added some new ideas, which is for example how to deal with the underlying process of discontent of an economic and political nature and also possible ideas about constitutional review. Now we are just waiting for the response, and we will judge by what they actually do in terms of a response to these.

Q: What did he say in response when you put these things on the table?

Mr. Gambari: Well, he listened very carefully, along with his colleagues. We are waiting for a concrete response to these issues. But in terms of your second questions, I think there is an opening for a dialogue, and that dialogue, the expectation is not dialogue for the sake of dialogue, not an open-ended dialogue, but dialogue that is targeted to achieving national reconciliation in an all-inclusive manner, a constitution that reflects the will of the majority of the people, and also a Government that is responsive to the needs of their own people. That's the kind of thing that Aung San Suu Kyi would like to see from such a dialogue: time-bound, concrete and serious.

Q: Regarding the flexibility that you asked both sides -- Madame Suu Kyi, did she show any flexibility to those four conditions that the general announced to the TV? Apparently, it was considered for some people as a de facto unrealistic obstacle for her to concede.

Mr. Gambari: Well, that is what the NLD, her party, is supposed to have said. But from my own conversation, she appears to be very anxious to have proper dialogue. And of course, the Secretary-General has characterized it as without preconditions, because that would be the best way to move forward. You just start talking. Because there is just so much distrust between her and the Senior General that the bridge has to be built, and the best way in our view is to start.

Q: During your visit to this sort of pro-government rally in Shan State, I wanted to know, was that suggested by the Government? Did you want to go there? How much freedom of movement did you have while you were there? And what can you say about what people are calling the missing monks, what's the follow-up on the UN's part?

Mr. Gambari: This is the good offices role of the Secretary-General. And therefore, I went there with the consent and invitation of the Government. The programme was tightly controlled. I had asked to see everybody and everything that would contribute to an assessment of the situation, as demanded by the Secretary-General. I did get some; I didn't get others. With respect to the pro-government demonstrations, it was certainly not something I requested but we could not avoid. But the compromise was to stay there for as short a period as possible. Somebody said ten minutes; it was probably less.

With the monks, I was not able to see them. But we had the UN country team, and we did get an assessment and some communication from them, as well as from other groups that informed our assessment of the situation and the ideas of the way forward.

Q: Speaking of results and targeted dialogue, in terms of level of access, or any changes to the structure of your visit, are there any changes that you would be pursuing for future visits that you think would make your visits more productive?

Mr. Gambari: Well, certainly to be able to see all the people I want to see. And also to stay as long as possible, that would be my preference.

Q: Was it a success?

Mr. Gambari: Well, the Secretary-General already said you cannot judge one visit and characterize it as successful or not successful. It is a process, and we will keep at it until, together with the authorities, and bearing in mind the wishes of the opposition and other segments in the society, that we all reach a goal of a peaceful, united, democratic and prosperous Myanmar that has full respect for the human rights of its own people. Thank you very much.