



United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo

PRESS BRIEFING

www.unmikonline.org

UNOFFICIAL TRANSCRIPT

Press Briefing Notes

21 September 2005

UNMIK Spokesperson Neeraj Singh
KFOR Chief PIO Col. Pio Sabetta
OSCE Spokesperson Sven Lindholm
EU Pillar Spokesperson Mechthild Henneke

UNMIK Spokesperson Neeraj Singh:

Today the International Day of Peace is being observed across the world. On this occasion, a message from UN Secretary General Kofi Annan is available outside that you may pick up after the press conference.

KFOR Chief PIO Col. Pio Sabetta

I would like to specify something about the ongoing Operational Reserve Force (ORF) rehearsal. Part of Operational Reserve Force of NATO is actually deployed in Kosovo to take part in a routinely scheduled operational rehearsal. Its aim is to ensure NATO troops and the Reserve Forces Headquarters remain prepared to respond to any crisis in the Balkans.

It is the reason why German Operational Reserve Force Battalion is already deployed in Kosovo. This battalion will be joined in a few days by the Italian ORF in order to be deployed together. This rehearsal will generate a lot of activities in Kosovo.

This rehearsal was planned in the summer 2004. It constitutes the last phase of a series of operational rehearsals nicknamed DETERMINATED EFFORT 2005 (DE 05), which started in March 2005.

The Commander of Allied Joint Force Command (JFC) Naples, who is the Joint Force Commander responsible for the NATO-led Balkan Operations, coordinates this operational rehearsal. The multi-national NATO Headquarters in Kosovo, KFOR, will control assigned units.

OSCE Spokesperson Sven Lindholm

The OSCE with the Geneva-based Centre for Applied Studies in International Negotiations (CASIN) will, on Thursday and Friday, be holding a negotiation skills workshop for members of the Technical Working Groups which participate in the Pristina-Belgrade dialogue. The programme is specially designed to strengthen decision-makers' and governmental officials skills and know-how on topics such as effective negotiation, communication, leadership and teamwork. Media are welcome to attend the Friday morning session, from 9:00 – 12:30, at which the CASIN trainers will share experiences from the Northern Ireland peace negotiation. It will take place at the Hotel Palace in Mitrovica/Mitrovica. Also on Friday, the Prime Minister and OSCE Deputy Head of Mission will be on hand for the closing reception at 17:30.

EU Pillar Spokesperson Mechthild Henneke:

We have KTA Bid day today for the 7th round of privatisation. From 13.00 bids will be opened in UNMIK Cinema Hall. Please come and attend the bid day.

Four staff members from Pristina International Airport will be suspended today from duty pending a court judgment with regard to alleged fraudulent activity against the airport. They are suspected of having acquired money using the airport property and of having committed the criminal offence of fraud. The suspension of the staff members is a normal procedure in such cases. A recently suspended airport employee was found not guilty by the court and now returned to his working place. I would therefore like to ask you to not pre-judge the now suspended staff members and let the judge decide about that. The airport takes a very serious view of these charges and regrets this necessary action.

I would now like to draw your attention to attacks on KEK and PTK staff members. You might have read the news that on 13 September in Mitrovica (South), a KEK disconnection team was attacked. Fortunately there was nobody injured, although a four-member team was threatened and attacked with an axe and later intimidated by fire from a machine gun. PTK employees are also frequently victims of such attacks. On the 07/09/2005, in Ferizaj/Urosevac, on the main street, a gun robbery resulted in injuring one PTK employ.

On the 12/09/2005, in Pristina a security guard of PTK was attacked and beaten by three young men while he was performing his duty. On the 15/09/2005, at midnight, the Lluzhane (next to Batllava lake) Post Office was robbed. We strongly condemn these attacks. These people are just doing their job and should be respected for that. PTK and KEK are public services, we all depend on. Their staff members or premises should not become target of crime. Thank you.

Neeraj: Thanks Mechthild. Arber?

BBC: When has Mrs. Sanda Raskovic-Ivic asked for permission to come to Kosovo?

Neeraj: I can't tell you when, but I can tell you that as per procedure permission was sought.

BBC: You mean 48 hours prior to this visit?

Neeraj: I can't tell you when exactly, I don't know that.

BBC: Is she getting a special escort to come to Pristina today?

Neeraj: It is normal to provide escorts whenever police or KFOR feel there is a need for escort to ensure the security of any person.

Koha Ditore: Have you asked about the approval or have you consulted with the PISG and the local leaders about her visit?

Neeraj: I am not aware of such consultations.

Express: When is the next meeting of the Kosovo Forum planned to take place?

Neeraj: We are consulting with the political leaders to decide when and where the Forum meeting can be held.

Express: Can you explain if Kosovo Forum and this group of unity are two different groups to prepare for status discussions?

Neeraj: I would just draw your attention to the press release we issued after the statement from President Rugova about the team of unity. We said that the very good work done by the Forum and its Secretariat to prepare the grounds for status preparations will be of good value to this team as they engage all political leaders, civil society and international elements in the process of the talks. So it is a complementary process, I don't know why you see it in an adversarial way.

Express: Kosovo Forum will continue but with the name 'Group of Unity' after this proposal?

Neeraj: Don't forget what is the purpose of the Forum, and what is the purpose of this group. The Forum, we have said several times, the purpose of the Forum is to bring the major political parties in the Kosovo Assembly together on a platform where they can discuss all the issues that concern Kosovo. Now status talks is one of those issues, or rather the primary issue before Kosovo. Therefore, preparations for the status talks has been a primary concern of the Forum. So there are these two things: the Forum exists, and then there is a very good initiative taken by the President on forming this team where he has named the members of the team, that is a separate issue, but directed at the same purpose. It is the purpose that is important.

BBC: Let me go back to Sanda Raskovic-Ivic visit. If you say that the dialogue between Pristina and Belgrade is the main Standard, why is Sanda Raskovic-Ivic not meeting today with any of the Kosovo leaders in Pristina?

Neeraj: We didn't prepare her itinerary for Kosovo. We certainly always encourage dialogue at every level, both within Kosovo and between Pristina and Belgrade. That goes without saying, I don't have to... I cannot stress that enough actually. Certainly we want to see more dialogue and we have seen some dialogue recently, in Vienna for example. So it's happening and it should be pushed forward.

BBC: Do you take seriously the call of the Kosovo Action Network for the protests today at 12 o'clock just at the time when Sanda Raskovic-Ivic is coming to the UNMIK building?

Neeraj: The question is not whether we take it seriously or not. The question is, as the SRS has said in the past, it is important for Kosovo to get its priorities right, to focus its energies on the way forward. And the way forward is very clear. You see, when you are walking through the dreary desert and you reach a point where you can clearly see the oasis in front of you, it is not wise then to be distracted by mirages around you. The oasis is in front of you. The political process clearly defines the path to the oasis; but as Kosovo walks on that path it must pave the way, and that calls for a lot of hard work. Time is short. So it is important, we keep stressing that, it is important that Kosovo focuses on this work, and you have the world standing by to assist in that endeavour.

Beta: My question is related to the visit of Ms. Sanda Raskovic-Ivic. What measures are the police going to take since there are announcements that she will be received in the same way as Mr. Draskovic was received? And the second question is why the Serb journalists were not allowed to participate in the press conference of Kai Vittrup, the Police Commissioner?

Neeraj: On security measures, I will not discuss such details. I am not privy to the details of the security measures and it is not something we discuss publicly. I am surprised that you say

that Commissioner Vittrup's press conference was closed to the Serbian media, it was not. In fact I was assured by the police press office, I was there myself and when I saw that the Serbian journalists were not there, I double-checked and they told me that the media alert had been sent out to all the journalists. We were disappointed not to see you there. In fact I would very much have liked you to be there, as happened in the previous press conferences. But in case you did not receive the police media alert do let us know after the press conference and we would like to then update the mailing list so that everybody is included in that. It was open for all the media and we encourage the media to participate.

Beta: Maybe it was the interpretation; I didn't say it was closed to the Serbian media. I just said that Serb journalists did not take part there.

Neeraj: That is precisely what I am saying, that we were disappointed to see that. In fact throughout the press conference there was translation in both Albanian and Serbian and that arrangement was in anticipation of the participation of the Serb journalists.

Blic: A question for Mr. Singh in relation to the arrest of four Serbs in Gracanica. Obviously, the force used was very strong and some of your representatives, as we received information from the family members, Kai Vittrup sent one of his representatives to see what kind of damage has been caused during the arrest. Is there any kind of control from the side of the Commissioner on International Police and in what way the special units carry out arrests so that they do not break windows, doors, to put two year old children or the mentally retarded children, to tie the child and put it in a small room and close it? Is there any one who can answer about the use of force, because Vittrup sent the message that they are going to compensate all the damage caused during the arrest action?

Neeraj: You should know that whenever police special units carry out any operations, they have their operating procedure and they act accordingly. Certainly there is an element built into the operating procedure to ensure that the human rights of the people who are the subject of the operation, are not violated. Now, if you are stating some specific allegations that have been made by the family, I cannot comment on that because it is something that has to indeed be looked into by the police, if there is any specific complaint. The Commissioner, as you say, has sent his representative; I'm not aware of that, but there is a procedure for addressing such issues. At the same time the police must carry out their operations. These people have been arrested for very serious charges and we have to now wait and see how the judicial process goes in this case.

Koha Ditore: Col. Sabetta, a question for you. You are saying that this rehearsal about the Serb troops was planned last year and that it is not linked with the current situation. Can you tell us then what are you planning for the next year, let's say, for summer 2006?

Col. Sabetta: It is normal for the military to plan rehearsal every year. What we are going to plan next year we will see in the future. For the moment this is the third part of this exercise that will conclude this year. We will plan for sure different rehearsal for the future, the way we will do it we will see in the future. It is a normal procedure for us to plan this rehearsal every year.

AP: Two issues. Last week when we were speaking about, just before the Vienna meeting, you didn't even indicate that you knew that Kai Eide would be chairing that meeting. Was that the case, you were not aware that Kai Eide would be chairing that meeting or you were deliberately misleading us? The second question is, if you see UN cars in Drenica driving at night, which number they should report to for violation of the curfew? Where do you report? Do you report it?

Neeraj: First, can I ask you a question similar to a question you asked us last week: why we were sitting so far apart? May I ask you why you are standing there at the back today and not sitting here? [laughter] Okay, look, when there are meetings like the Vienna meeting for example, which we are not organizing, which are not organized by UNMIK, the details of such meetings is not for us to provide to the public. And it is not a question of misleading. It is a question of prerogative, like who has the prerogative to actually inform the public on something. It is the organizer that has the prerogative, so that's the reason we don't do that.

AP: You didn't even know who the organizer was?

Neeraj: No, because the press office is informed of issues only when we in turn are required to inform the public about it. So you shouldn't be surprised if I don't know about something that is not meant for the public, to be coming from UNMIK. On your second question, there is no curfew in Drenica and it is not for the public to worry about any UN vehicle in any part of Kosovo. If at all there is any concern about where a UN vehicle should or should not be at a particular point of time, that is a matter for the UN security to consider, so don't worry about it.

AP: No I just want to do a citizens duty and report a violation of a UN sort of code, for them to be careful at night. I mean should they call someone or should they just ignore the UN car they see driving around at night?

Neeraj: I'll stick to what I said the first time you asked that question: that we will not publicly comment on any internal advisory that the UN security may issue, they keep issuing advisories from time to time.

AP: And for KFOR, is KFOR in some sort of higher alert in central Kosovo on the roads that UNMIK cannot travel freely at night, where there is no freedom of movement for UN?

Col. Sabetta: We do not comment on internal business of UNMIK, but what I want to say is that we do not change anything in our situation.

Express: Has an international prosecutor in Kosovo issued an indictment against, for war crimes, against a KLA member? There is information that there should be arrest made by the end of this week.

Neeraj: Very speculative media report based on "sources" and I certainly cannot comment on such reports. Whenever there is an indictment, we certainly inform you, you know that. Before there is an indictment, before there is an arrest, these kinds of reports, I don't know what kind of sources it is coming from, are highly speculative. There is nothing I can say on that.

Q: You announced, actually there is deployment under way of German special unit, German operational unit and they are going to join the Italian battalion, and an American KFOR commander raised the alert of his troops. How do you then explain the security situation in Kosovo and what is the reason for the raising of alert of the American KFOR?

Col. Sabetta: To be ready for any situation. We do not see any need to raise the alert status in this moment.

Kosova Sot: Are you thinking of postponing the negotiations for the year 2006 and, if so, what are the preparations?

Sven: We are not taking a lead on negotiations. We've been merely asked to help provide , for example negotiation training to participants of, in this case, the technical dialogue working groups.

Translator: Is the OSCE thinking of actually, sorry, for postponing the elections for 2006 and if so what are the preparations being made? Sorry, my bad translation.

Sven: They are two very different things, except of course political parties do need to negotiate to get votes. No, the planning is still to have elections next fall, the municipal assemblies have a four year mandate and that ends next fall.

Neeraj: No more questions? Thank you.