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**Transcript**

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## TRANSCRIPT

### Press Conference by the United Nations Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan, Ján Kubiš

(near verbatim; edited for clarity)

Kabul – Thursday, 3 October 2013

#### Participants:

- **United Nations Special Representative for Afghanistan Ján Kubiš**
- **UNAMA Spokesperson Nazifullah Salarzai**

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**Nazifullah Salarzai:** Good morning, I welcome you all to today's press conference of Ján Kubiš, the United Nations Special Representative for Afghanistan. With no further ado – over to you.

**Ján Kubiš:** Good morning to everybody. Asalaam Alakoom. I am very happy that we can have another meeting here. The main topic, the main pieces of information, I wanted to share with you are an assessment of the deliberations of the Security Council of the United Nations in New York, in which it discussed the report of the Secretary-General on Afghanistan, some 10 days ago.

Let me start with an expression of my congratulations. If I am not wrong, in this building over the past two days, or even three days, there was a major conference of the Afghanistan National Journalists' Union (ANJU). It was discussing very topical issues, important for the country, important for the ongoing processes, notably, the process of the elections. I would like, first of all, to congratulate all of you [involved] with this meeting, with the elections of the officials of the Union, but also with very important messages that this meeting transmitted to the people and authorities of Afghanistan and with regards to the international community.

Freedom of the media is critically important for every country. It is critically important for every democracy. It is critically important in the time of transition for Afghanistan, and I was encouraged that this meeting reinforced the message that the country has reached a number of achievements in this area. At the same time, the country and the media also face challenges and there is an urgent need to look into the challenges of the media.

The situation with the media signals the general situation, the general health of society. If the media are developing well, it is a good signal that the health of the society is more or less okay. But even the healthiest person has some problems and, if someone is ill, then it is even more serious. For the media, of course, what is important is freedom of expression, freedom from pressure, freedom from persecution, freedom from being targeted for the professional work the media must deliver.

First, what is needed is to have a sound legal framework. I am happy that now the Parliament is discussing the [Mass] Media Law, but the framework should be sound and should provide for the freedom of the media. I noticed certain points that were raised at the meeting of the journalists' union, and I hope that even more seriously the MPs [Members of Parliament] in the Wolesi and Meshrano Jirgas [the lower and upper houses of Parliament, respectively] took good note of what is considered by the journalists as critically important for them to be able to deliver what is expected of them.

I raised issues, made assessments and also expressed concerns with regard to the media situation in my statements to the Security Council in September in New York.

Now to the Security Council. I was encouraged, because in spite of all the attention that the Security Council, and the broader international community, is giving to issues like Syria, Iran, and the Middle East, Afghanistan remains in the focus of attention of the international community, of the UN Security Council.

Secondly, very cautiously – because it is still not the time, it is still in the middle of the transition process, still one year plus before the withdrawal of ISAF [International Security Assistance Force] from the country – the international community is giving first assessments of how the transition process is going in Afghanistan; and these assessments are balanced, and while not neglecting problematic parts of the developments, they are also, in a way, not bad.

So, the Security Council and its members also, in all [their] statements, addressed the issue of the security transition. While they were not closing their eyes on problematic developments, on instances of problems that are popping up in different parts of the country, they also recognized progress including the increased capacity and capability of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) to deal with the situations in spite of heavy losses. They admitted and acknowledged their courage and increased effectiveness in handling the situation.

But I would say that the most important topic that was addressed by all those that were taking the floor, and also in my bilateral discussions, is the issue of the elections in Afghanistan. It was visible in the statements and it was also encouraging to see that it is not the other parts [which were the most important topics being addressed] but [instead] the political processes and transition of political power from the current President to the next team, as per the Constitution, within the constitutional framework and through the process of fair, transparent and inclusive elections.

The progress of Afghanistan in election preparations – both on the technical side but also on the political side - was highly acknowledged and was highly praised and was marked very clearly as encouraging. The international community registered that the process of preparations is much better in comparison with previous processes in the cycles of 2004, 2005, 2009 and 2010.

The international community registered markedly clear improvements in the legal framework. For the first time the election would be on the basis of two pieces of legislation – on the basis of the law.

The International community registered this, and it is again very encouraging that there are two independent electoral bodies that are responsible for steering the process of elections on the side of Afghanistan: the Independent Election Commission (IEC) and the Independent Electoral Complaints Commission (IECC).

The international community also registered that the process of the top-up registration of voters is going on with speed – that 1.7 million, and now maybe 1.8 million, new voter cards were delivered and that the participation of the women in the registration up until now, and it is not at the end, exceeded 30 per cent.

To mention some of the points why the Security Council was encouraged – the international community, while registering questions in regard to security for the elections, also noted with appreciation an increased effort of the Government, of all the respective ministries, to deal with the issue in a resolute way, in much better coordinated way, and, of course, pledged support, also financial [support], and otherwise to help the country to deal with this issue as well.

And the support of the international community was reconfirmed and, perhaps, these are the best arguments Afghanistan can bring to the table when requesting continuous, long-term support. Arguments that we, on our side, do everything possible to deliver. For example, at this point of time, concerning the election preparations and conduct according to the Constitution.

It was the progress on the election preparations that, in a major way, gave good arguments to the members of the international community in support of their resolve to continue with long-term support for Afghanistan.

There were also many other topics. Prominently among them, the Security Council spoke about the issues of human rights in the country, women's rights. I would say [they did this] in much more focused way than in the previous three or four meetings I attended. [The Council] expressed strong support for the United Nations and UNAMA, and expectations that we will be supporting Afghanistan now and also after 2014 with increased vigour and attention, and with increased, very increased, focus on the priorities of the country.

I would say that this steady progress of transition, in spite of the problems that are there – and no one is trying to close their eyes or hide them, or run away from recognizing the problems – is critical in mobilizing more regional support and attention to the needs of Afghanistan, and willingness of regional countries to engage, not only to speak about potential problems after 2014 but also to engage with Afghanistan now and in the future.

This shift of regional countries from expressing concerns about possible future developments to displaying willingness to engage with Afghanistan in finding solutions through economic cooperation, regional cooperation, through support for political processes, through support for future peace and reconciliation [efforts] was visible, for example, during the summit meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in Bishkek some three weeks ago, or if you wish during the visit of His Excellency, the President, Hamid Karzai, to China, just couple of days ago.

One would say that the election in Afghanistan is definitely important for Afghanistan, but as you can see – this is our assessment, my assessment – the quality of the preparations, conduct and

the acceptance of the results of the elections is what is now being registered; I mean, at least from the point of view of preparations, this is already creating a more positive environment for Afghanistan and is adding arguments for those that are committed to providing long-term support to Afghanistan after 2014.

Thank you.

**Nazifullah Salarzai:** Now it is time for your questions. Please introduce yourself and ask one question at a time. Since we have consecutive translation, we want to give everyone time to ask their question.

### QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

**TOLO TV [translated from Dari]:** My question is about the transition process. You said that the Security Council is looking at the transition process and is doing an assessment of this process. What kind of assessment is being done and what if there are deficits in the process? What will be the actions afterwards to address these deficits? My second question is about election observation. You know that there are no international members, as in the past, in the composition of the electoral bodies. How would the UN manage to observe the election process?

**Ján Kubiš:** Thank you very much. First, I try to give you the feeling of the assessment of the Security Council, in a sort of in a condensed way, based on some 20 statements. At this point in time, it is a positive acknowledgement of progress. This is not how members of the Security Council are characterizing it. But, this is my reading of the messages without closing any eyes on problems in the security transition, the insecurity in many parts of the country, any problems with human rights. And they raised, for example, the issue of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission and the risk that it might lose its status accreditation in the process of revision in November.

Nevertheless, the assessment is cautiously optimistic and with very critical element. It is because of this very steady progress on election preparations that has lead now to the registering of improvements, marked improvements, in comparison with the previous cycle.

The Security Council – in subsequent meetings, and there are, as you know, quarterly meetings of the Security Council on Afghanistan – they will continue providing or giving assessments, and giving messages to Afghanistan. Eventually, I would say, the assessment of the successful transition will be given in the new mandate of UNAMA and the United Nations for the post-2014 period. Because, whoever will continue working with you, I know one thing: the United Nations will continue working with you as we were here before the international engagement and intervention of the previous 12 years, and we assume that we will be requested to assist Afghanistan after 2014.

To your second question, I would say that there are two main avenues and I will try to address these issues. First, we will provide, and we are ready to provide urgently and immediately, support for the Independent Electoral Complaints Commission, as necessary – technical assistance, logistics support – anything that is needed for the Commission to start functioning as soon as possible. A part of this support is the sharing of best international practices to help the Commission to act as a truly independent, impartial body. This is the declared objective of the Commission and we are more than ready to help it to work as a truly independent and

impartial body through providing best practices advice, through the process of its creation and, then, its functioning.

I am pleased to inform that the international community, the donor community, is ready to provide the necessary amount of financial support, to be able to provide this kind of technical and logistics support, as well, to the Commission. We are already discussing – myself and my colleagues, notably from UNDP [UN Development Programme] – with the IECC, their needs, their requirements and the way how we will be able to support them.

The second critical element of, if you wish, quality control of the election processes and preparation is the engagement of domestic and international observers. The international community is ready to provide support for domestic observation efforts. And it, with our support and engagement, has been mobilized to deploy international observation of the elections. I am encouraged to learn that, for example, the European Union, most likely the European Parliament, intend to seriously consider deploying an international observation mission.

There are many other international organizations and bodies that are ready to do so. Next week, I will continue my work, with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe – Afghanistan is one of the partner countries of this organization – and will encourage this organization to deploy election support teams as they did during past electoral cycles.

And the third element is the free media and your role in monitoring and encouraging election participation – for example, the registration of women candidates for the Provincial Councils is lagging behind. I would like to encourage you, through your dispatches, to do the best to see that women are registering as candidates, for working in the Provincial Councils. It is still not late. [I would also like to encourage you] be a quality-controller of the election processes, and you will have our support in this as well.

**Radio Free Europe [translated from Dari]: Are you concerned about the presence of human rights violators and war criminals? And what is your advice to the Government in the elections?**

**Ján Kubiš:** I would say that it is for the people of Afghanistan to express their attitude in regard to presidential candidates and vice-presidential candidates. Also, from this perspective, what they represent, what kind of programme they will defend, what kind of future for the country they will promote and on what fundamentals. So, I would say that it is not necessarily for me to make a judgment. The best judgment is the verdict which I assume will be delivered through the process of the elections. That's why it is so important to make sure that the elections will be inclusive, with good participation throughout the country and that people will have choices. We are still not at the end of the registration process, so I don't think that any of us is in a position to make an assessment. We will soon be there, on the 6<sup>th</sup> of October. Then, it will be the start of real thinking here in Afghanistan because it's the elections in Afghanistan.

I hope that the candidates, their teams, will not only try to present themselves as individuals, but will also try to win the confidence and support of voters through their programmes and through their clear commitments and pledges in regard to economic and social development, justice, the fight against corruption, the promotion of human rights and women's rights. And I hope to see discussions more around substantive issues determining the future of the country rather than just individuals.

**German Press Agency: I would like to know the new figures on civilian casualties. Thank you.**

**Ján Kubiš:** Although this conference doesn't have its focus on the situation of civilian casualties, I can only confirm, without going into specifics, that this year we have registered an increase in civilian casualties. The patterns are similar to those we reported after the first six months of the year.

Basically, since the beginning of the year until the end of August, we have a 16 per cent increase in civilian casualties. We don't have the figures for September. So yes, it's higher than the year before, and yes, it's lower than in 2011.

**New York Times: Can you let us know how much the United Nations and the international community are planning to spend to support these elections and is this same as 2009 or an increase?**

**Ján Kubiš:** I don't want to mislead you by giving you a figure that is not precise, but you can get it from my office after the conference. I would like to be precise on that. But what I can say is that the international community provides sufficient financial support for the process of the elections, as requested by the Afghan authorities and institutions. There is no gap. There is no lack of willingness to support Afghanistan in the process of elections.

The key UN vehicle to provide support, the support of the international community through the UN channel is the so-called UNDP ELECT II [Enhancing Legal and Electoral Capacity for Tomorrow II] project, and these are the figures that we can give you. But we must understand that, on top of this, there are many bilateral efforts. Many donors are channelling funds to support the different institutions of the country that are engaged in the process of the elections; to support domestic NGOs [non-governmental organizations] and organizations that are engaged in the process of the elections; to support the media; to support many other activities that are clearly election-related. So, the amount is much bigger than, or bigger than pledges simply registered through the UN and through the UNDP ELECT II project.

And, what is also important to notice is that this support of the international community – notably the UNDP ELECT II – is not only for the 2014 Presidential and Provincial Council elections. It also covers the 2015 parliamentary election. And in regard to support for, for example, to the Independent Electoral Complaints Commission, the whole support is going to be provided in such a way that it strengthens this institution as a permanent body, something that will not disappear after the elections, as it was in the past.

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