

**UNAMA****United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan**

Strategic Communication and Spokespersons Unit, Kabul, Afghanistan

**Transcript**<http://unama.unmissions.org>**TRANSCRIPT****Interview with the United Nations Secretary-General's Deputy  
Special Representative for Afghanistan, Nicholas Haysom**

(near verbatim; edited for clarity)

Kabul – Sunday, 1 June 2014

\*\*\*

**Can you say a few words about the first round of Presidential elections?**

**Nicholas Haysom:** Let me just, first of all, underline how important the elections are as a whole. I think the elections are very important for Afghanistan's transition. They will give them a new government, fresh legitimacy inside the country, which in turn will allow it to tackle the very significant challenges Afghanistan faces. But secondly, I think also that will address the levels of international support – if there are good elections we can anticipate that there will be a continued international commitment to Afghanistan through the transitional period.

The first round [of elections] exceeded our expectations not only on account of the surprisingly high turnout – and a high turnout in the context in which armed opposition groups had quite openly threatened voters with violence if they did turn out to vote. I think we took note of the way in which Afghans voted, which was to demonstrate really quite considerable commitment to the democratic exercise. When there were attacks on voting stations people would leave the area but return an hour later to show their determination to vote and that they wouldn't be intimidated into not voting.

I think, generally, all the observer groups felt that the organizational arrangements were good – certainly an improvement on previous elections. Those who followed closely alleged fraud thought that there was fraud in various parts of the country. But it was significantly less than in previous elections. We noted, in particular, high female turnout in the elections, which we think is very positive. I think, in general, the Afghans themselves commended the Afghan security forces for demonstrating a clear capacity to protect them.

I need to comment though that there was as high a number of security incidents on election day as there had been in previous elections. So, it was as if there wasn't a very real threat; there was. But people clearly indicated that they wanted to vote [despite the threat].

**How are the preparations for the second round going?**

**Nicholas Haysom:** The preparations for the second round are advanced and I think they are in good stage. We are monitoring very closely the preparations of the security forces to establish safe and secure conditions for voters to turn out. I think they have learnt the lessons that were to be learnt from the first round. We think that the election management bodies, i.e., the IEC (Independent Election Commission) and the IECC (Independent Electoral Complaints Commission), have also conducted a strong and thorough lessons-learnt exercise. I think there were shortcomings, notably in the distribution of ballots – in many polling stations, there was a shortage of ballots in the first round. I think issues like that will be addressed in the second round. That's the advantage of having a second round, largely to tackle all the problems from the first round.

We do note that there is evidence of low levels of trust between the election management bodies and the candidates, and we would hope that those would be addressed by all the parties before the election.

**Previously you touched upon the issue of allegations of fraud. What has been done to address them and safeguard the integrity of electoral process?**

**Nicholas Haysom:** I think there are two issues that are most relevant to the question of fraud – one is the general level of transparency. In other words, candidates, their agents and observers should have access to every critical part of the voting process and also the counting of the votes, tallying. I think steps have been taken to improve access by observers and candidates' agents.

Secondly, of course, there is the security aspect. The security aspect amounts to this – where the voting takes place in insecure areas, monitors and observers are less likely to be in attendance or to be able to reach those areas and that means that fraud can take place, particularly ballot box stuffing more liberally. I think that's in area where the IEC, the IECC and the security institutions will be working to ensure that where voting stations are established [and] they will be able to guarantee that the vote will take place and that observers will be able to attend.

**How is UNAMA assisting the national authorities with these elections?**

**Nicholas Haysom:** The UN system as such, particularly through UNDP-ELECT (UN Development Programme – Enhancing Legal and Electoral Capacity for Tomorrow), provides direct technical assistance. We in UNAMA see our role more as coordinating international support for the elections, ensuring common messaging amongst the international community, engaging with and, as far as we can, supporting the election institutions to conduct the best possible elections that can take place in Afghanistan, under the circumstances here.

**What message would the UN like to send to candidates and the people of Afghanistan?**

**Nicholas Haysom:** We have been engaging with the candidates. We stress that they also have responsibility for ensuring that the election is the best possible election that can take place – both with regard to the way in which they campaign, keep a level of decency as between the candidates and the way in which the candidates engage each other – also in a way in which they engage their supporters.

We stress that candidates are the most important source of giving a guide as to how people should behave during the elections, making sure that people don't mobilize on the basis of race and ethnicity and that they encourage to not to commit fraud. We want candidates to say 'we don't want to benefit from fraud' and say that clearly to their supporters.

I think it's also important for the candidates to make it clear to the public that they will accept the outcome of the elections. We would be particularly concerned if the elections were very close and there were allegations of fraud that the candidates would choose not to accept the result. We are encouraging them not to give the signal to their supporters to take laws into their own hands but to use the mechanisms and machinery provided in the electoral framework to resolve their complaints and, at the end, accept the result determined by the electoral authorities.

### **What's the big picture? What's at stake with these elections?**

**Nicholas Haysom:** We are aware that, in the second round, we would want to at least match the expectations that were generated by the first round. We are aware that the turnout – it would be difficult to get the same level of turnout as in the first round, partly because of concerns around security. The elections are taking place in the middle of the fighting season. It will also take place in a context in which the Presidential elections will be the only decision that is being required of voters to make. In the previous election, a number of voters would have turned out to vote for Provincial Council candidates as well. Provincial Council candidates would have encouraged their friends and families, the people from their own tribe to participate in the elections. That won't be present on this occasion.

In addition, we are also aware that it's in the planting season, which means people will have to leave their agricultural work to go and vote. All of those will limit the turnout. On the other hand, the weather will be better and we think the people will be animated by the debates and by the issues at stake, and by the sense that they will be able to shape the destiny of their own country. We hope that that will encourage people to go and vote.

\*\*\*