

UNAMA

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Speech of SRSG Ján Kubiš

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As prepared

Speech of Special Representative of the Secretary-General Ján Kubiš at the Second Conference of International Islamic Cooperation for Peaceful Afghanistan 19 June 2012

Excellences,

Distinguished scholars, Ulema,

Representatives of civil society,

It is a honour and privilege to participate at this second conference on International Islamic Cooperation for Peaceful Afghanistan.

I have been working here in the country for some five months. Every day I start my day with news about the developments in the country. Every day my day starts with very sad news, how many civilians were victims of violence, how many Muslims were killed by mostly Muslims. Last week we registered 200 civilian casualties, 57 civilians killed, 143 injured. The week before it was even worse - 244 civilian casualties with 90 civilians killed and 154 injured. On one single day of that tragic and at the same time typical week, on the sixth of June 40 civilians were killed, including 10 children and 67 were injured in four cases, three cases of suicide bombings, explosive devices, one case of aerial bombardment by international military forces. In one horrible day 107 civilian casualties, all of them Muslims, most of them killed by Muslims.

This is not only sad and tragic, this unacceptable. We must say it very clearly and loudly. Therefore this meeting is indeed important, very timely. You, Islamic scholars, the Ulema from Afghanistan and many other Islamic countries discuss ways and means how to prevent continuation of the killings, how to stop this conflict, how to prevent that Muslims and Afghans are killed in this country, in vast majority by other Muslims and Afghans.

Your cycle of conferences is also timely because it is coming in the period of transformation and change. The international military is leaving the country. Relatively soon, by the end of 2014, there will be no foreign forces fighting in Afghanistan. And I hope that there will be no Muslims, Afghans fighting each other in Afghanistan by that day. We must do everything possible to reach that transition and that target as well.

We keep witnessing terrible actions done in the name of Islam. We keep hearing reports of suicide bombings, intimidation, targeted killings, assassination of elders, religious leaders, teachers and scholars, burning of schools - all done in the name of Islam.

Yet we also keep hearing other, different interpretations of these ideas, based on the Holy Quran and the traditions of Islam. We hear of those who reject such acts as being un-Islamic, in contradiction of the spirit and teachings of Islam.

I am sure there are questions in the minds of many Afghans, especially the younger generation, as to where the truth lies. That is why your conference, this process is so important. Unfortunately, at least in my impression, the young generation of this country after 30 years of war in the name of different ideologies, interests and beliefs is disoriented. They are not anymore sure what is the truth, what is right, what is wrong, what is Islamic, what is non-Islamic, therefore your discussion is so important. Thirty years of war, of preaching war and jihad as only killing of your opponent has eroded the Afghan traditional culture of peace. It is time to start teaching and preaching a culture of peace.

It is so essential, so useful for the young, for the general public, for the non-academic ordinary person to hear from you, from Islamic scholars, from the Ulema your interpretation of Islam with regard to these activities. What do you think should be the way the young people analyze and interpret these actions for themselves? I have no doubt many young people in Afghanistan are looking at these daily aggressive acts with doubts and revulsion and seek a deeper analysis of the daily confrontations they have had to witness for all of their life.

For me it remains a major question – when for example I get daily reports of suicide bombings, civilian casualties done in the name of Islam. What is Islamic in suicide killings? Is the intention of Muslims killing Muslims permitted by Islam? What is Islamic in when an improvised explosive device blew an ambulance that was bringing a pregnant mother to the hospital to deliver her baby? That blast a few days ago killed the mother with her unborn baby and several other relatives. Let's not forget – while we talk people, civilians, Muslims are being killed, are dying in Afghanistan, by the hands of mostly other Muslims.

I admit - my knowledge of Islam is minimal but I have full respect for Islam and want to learn what is right and what is wrong, what is Islamic and what not. The same is valid for the United Nations. We represent Islamic countries; we are a community of Nations, bringing all nations together. I would ask here from you, the Ulema, Islamic scholars to tell me - is suicide, are suicide killings permitted by Islam? Is the killing, intentional killing, and indiscriminate killing of Muslims, civilians by other Muslims permitted in Islam? Most of the Islamic scholars I have spoken to say it is not. But then should we not hear their, your voices more loudly, here in Afghanistan? That is a question for me, but also for you. We need your help. Afghanistan needs your help now and here, at this point of time when things are changing. You have a major role, a major responsibility to help.

Islamic philosophy is intertwined with the concepts of peace and justice. It says hurt no one so no one would hurt you. Seek for mankind that which you seek for yourself. Here is where the UN and Islam find a mutual language of peace and tolerance. This is why Islamic countries of the world form such an important part of the United Nations family. UN is about peace. Islam is about peace. Let's join forces here in and for Afghanistan, for its people. Let's help Afghanistan deliver and achieve peace.

My impression after these five months in the country, of this country and its people is that they are truly pious, they sincerely believe in Islam and they cherish their traditions and their religion, maybe more than in many other Islamic countries. My impression is that Afghanistan is a colourful land of ethnic and religious groups that managed to live together for centuries mostly peacefully, who are all proud to be Muslims and proud to be citizens of Afghanistan. A land of long and rich history, poetry, Sufism and high culture of tolerance, peace, hospitality and honour. So let's help the people of Afghanistan find a way out of this situation where I don't find any honour in suicide bombings, in killing civilians.

Most importantly, my impression after talking to so many Afghans is that they are tired of war and would want nothing more than peace. The children, the young, women and men are simply tired of constant war over 30 years – imposed upon them in the name of this or that belief, ideology, interests. They do not want to hear aggressive language or war, killing, intolerance, hatred and distrust. They are thirsty for what they see as true Islam, the religion of non-violence, peace and tolerance.

I can speak a lot about activities of the United Nations in support of peace. The UN, UNAMA has no other mandate than peace. We are a party of peace, not war. We support, facilitate, promote all peace efforts. At political level, but equally importantly at the level of Afghan society – the traditional society, modern civil society, urban and rural society, in Kabul and in the provinces.

I can illustrate our activities in support of peace by giving some examples. Such as our support for the work of the High Peace Council (HPC). Or another example - we helped organize relatively recently the regional Ulema Peace Jirga in the southern region where representatives, Ulema, of some six provinces got together and discussed ways toward peace. The Regional Jirga brought together some 450 Ulema and religious figures from Kandahar, Helmand, Uruzgan, Nimroz, Zabul and Dai Kundi provinces together with senior representatives of the Afghanistan Ulema Shura from Kabul. Yet another example of our engagement with the people, with the civil society is the Afghan Peoples' Dialogue. There some 1500 representatives of civil society participated, out of them 500 women in some 80 discussion forums all around the country, in all provinces, in the wake of the Bonn II Conference five six months ago. They delivered the message of peace but also identified major obstacles to peace.

And we are ready to support an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned inclusive peace and reconciliation process. The time has come for peace, for inclusive peace talks. We stand ready to facilitate, support, promote such efforts. In the country and reaching out, engaging in and with the region in support of Afghanistan.

We will continue with these activities, we will work in each and every part of the country; we will reach out towards notably the neighbours of Afghanistan that should support peace, because it is also in their interest. Violent, unstable Afghanistan means violent and unstable region and eventually means unstable world. This is not acceptable. We will work actively and strongly but we need your help, we need your advice, we need your voice. We need you to deliver the true meaning of Islam to the people of Afghanistan, the meaning of peace, tolerance and national accord. Without this we will fail together, we will let down Afghanistan and its people.

Thank you very much for your attention.

United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA)