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Strategic Communication and Spokespersons Unit, Kabul, Afghanistan

Speech

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**STAFFAN DE MISTURA
SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UNITED NATIONS SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR
AFGHANISTAN**

Opening address on the occasion of the launch of “Art for Peace”: the joint United Nations-Turquoise Mountain youth art exhibition for International Peace Day

Babur Garden, Kabul Afghanistan 7 September 2010

Near verbatim transcript

Besmillah Rahman Raheem, Ramazan Kareem

Thank you Excellency, thank you dear Director [Turquoise Mountain], also, for the opportunity of being here today. The 21st of September is an important date for the international community, for the United Nations, and Afghanistan is an old, dignified, and respected and Member of the United Nations.

I am grateful to your Excellency to want to pay attention to the 21st of September which is the International Peace Day and also to the Turquoise Mountain Foundation and through you, Director, to actually help us to give special attention to this day.

Of course there is not much peace yet in Afghanistan. We all know it. But we also know that this is a crucial year in which we can together try to help Afghans to find their own peace. So the 21st of September can not be a celebration day, but a day of thinking and re-motivating ourselves in order to help Afghans to find peace after so many years, so many years of violence and of difficulties.

The 21st of September will be three days after the national parliamentary elections in Afghanistan - an opportunity for Afghans to actually use democracy and their own free will in order to indicate in what direction they would like this country to go.

We know that some violence takes place in every election, and that it has taken place in the past in Afghanistan. Our prayers and hopes are that in fact these elections will not be violent. And that Afghans will have the right to move from what they have so often, bullets, to the opportunity of casting ballots in order to show their own willingness about the future.

Many years ago, 22 years ago, I was in Afghanistan. That was war time, again. And I remember I was looking for a carpet to bring to the United Nations headquarters in Geneva in order to show the culture and the strength of the culture of Afghanistan. At

that time the carpet I found reproduced air planes, war, fighting. I brought that carpet to the Geneva to show how war can change culture and can affect art, unfortunately. The contrary is also true. Art can also send a signal when there is a time of non-peace about the wish, the urge, the hope, the prayer for peace. That is why it is so good and so important to see this exhibit today.

Seventy per cent of the Afghan population is young, below 25 years old. A peaceful Afghanistan is going to be their future, should be their future. And having 12 young Afghan artists telling us through their own art a wisdom and a vision of peace is a strong signal, not only to Afghans but to the all of us.

That is why I am grateful for this initiative and to your Excellency, Mr Minister, to you, Director, and to each of the artists for helping us even at a time when there is no peace to celebrate, to be actually able to remind ourselves that young Afghans are, through their own creativity and their own art, telling us what type of vision we should all be having for the future of Afghanistan.

And finally, if you will allow me to change the protocol a little, I think instead of us being seen thanking the artists, we should be having them with us being thanked publically. So I would like, if you allow me, to ask the artists to come here so that we can shake their hands, and thank them publically for their own message to all of us which we can see around us.

Thank you very much.

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