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Kubiš: elections are responsibility of all Afghans

INTERVIEW with the United Nations Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan, Ján Kubiš

Ján Kubiš was appointed the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan and head of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in late 2011.

A Slovak national, Mr. Kubiš has more than three decades of experience in diplomacy, foreign security policy and international economic relations. He served as his country's foreign minister from 2006 to 2009, and has also held the posts of chairman of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers, Secretary-General of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE).

UNAMA's United Nations Security Council mandate centres around support for Afghan-led political processes, human rights, and promotion of development coherence. Specifically on elections, this includes support for the inclusiveness, integrity and sustainability of what is an Afghan-owned and Afghan-led process and ensuring coherence in international assistance. At the request of Afghan authorities, the United Nations Development Programme provides technical assistance. With the landmark Presidential and Provincial Council elections to be held on 5 April, the envoy spoke about the process.



UN Special Representative Ján Kubiš. (Photo: Fardin Waezi)

UNAMA: From a historical perspective, both recent and going back further, where do you see the Presidential election in that context? What's its importance for Afghanistan?

Jan Kubiš: I believe that this election is a hallmark of past achievements as well as a very important event that would help

pave the way towards the future. For Afghanistan, it is a historic transfer of power from one elected president to another elected president. For me, this is a major achievement of the Afghan people and of the democratic system of Afghanistan – I am looking forward to elections. It is both a promise and a heavy responsibility for the authorities and institu-

tions of Afghanistan. It is also the responsibility of the people of Afghanistan to vote and I hope that they will use that right.

UNAMA: How satisfied are you with the preparations for the Presidential elections?

Jan Kubiš: I would say that the preparations are much better than at any time before over the past 12 years. This is not only my assessment – my two years here would not be enough for me to make such a statement – this is the opinion of experts who have been engaged in Afghanistan during the past two election cycles.

That is why it is very reassuring when they say that the preparations and the electoral framework is in place, that the technical preparations are much better and that the security plan is much more developed than before. On top of everything, it is obvious that the people of Afghanistan are full of energy and would go and vote. For me, this is perhaps a demonstration of their confidence that indeed the conditions will be there for them to vote.

UNAMA: What about the security arrangements for the elections? Are you satisfied that they will be conducive to voter participation?

Jan Kubiš: I would say that at this point of time, yes. Of course we know what the security situation in the country is like. It is not simple. Although in this process of transitioning the responsibility for security to the Afghan Nation-

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the wider international community. What are you hearing from them in relation to the Presidential elections?

Jan Kubiš: I believe that they share the same attitude and opinion as the people of Afghanistan: that election is a critical development in the life of the country. They see the criticality of the election for the future stability of the country. They also consider this from the perspective of adding new elements that would then help pave the way for the stable and prosperous development of Afghanistan as part of regional cooperation arrangements.

They also very much hope that the elections will bring a new leadership to the country that would be able to become good partner, a strong partner with the necessary degree of legitimacy and support of the people and with whom they will be able to cooperate – and cooperate in a real way, not only politically but also with regard to economic development. They have a lot of plans on how they would continue working and enhancing their cooperation with Afghanistan in the future, starting from trade facilitation, economic cooperation and infrastructure and energy-related projects, etc.

So I believe that they take this as a very strong opportunity and pledge to continue working with Afghanistan, while also looking forward to working with the new government of Afghanistan.



Mr. Kubiš with Russia's Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, in Moscow in January. (Photo: Russian MoFA)

UNAMA: What would you expect from Afghanistan's new leader?

Jan Kubiš: First of all, before elections there are pledges, slogans, programmes, promises and so on. But they [candidates] should not only come out with slogans. They should honour their slogans and programmes in real life. I would say that I hope that their programmes reflect the wishes of the people and we know what the wishes of the people are: security, justice, the fight against corruption and nepotism, development, healthcare, education, jobs, the fight against poverty, and

stable and equal relations with neighbours, as well as a strong and united Afghanistan.

The candidates need to be serious with regard to pledges and their implementation – this is what, I believe, we should not only wish for, but we should even commit the candidates to. In the process of elections, there are sometimes more slogans and less willingness to implement them. I hope that this will not be the case here in Afghanistan in regard to the future leadership of the country.

UNAMA: What is your message to those standing for President?

Jan Kubiš: It's always a competition and there can be only one winner. But there should be no losers in this competition. In a way all of those – and it does not matter whether they are on the winning side or on the losing side – should work together before the election to deliver a good election as well as after the election, when they should help the country to be stable, to go ahead and prosper based on their support for the newly-elected leadership.

They should all support and pledge to work with the newly-elected leadership, to commit their knowledge and expertise to building a new Afghanistan after the election, for the sake of stable, prosperous and united country.

UNAMA: What is your message to the people of Afghanistan in relation to the Presidential elections?

Jan Kubiš: Use your right, go and vote. This is indeed the most important thing at this point of time. If you would not vote under whatever circumstances, and sometimes perhaps for good reasons would decide that it is not good for you to go and vote, then you cannot be replaced [at the polling stations]. Voting is also the way how you [voters] pass a message to the new leadership: here we are, we gave you our support, now you must listen to our wishes. Remember, the higher participation, the stronger the voice of the people. What is important is not only to select the leaders but also to tell them what they should do after the elections. ■



The Secretary-General's Special Representative, Jan Kubiš, meets with the Governor of Nangarhar, Ataullah Ludin, during his visit to the province in February. (Photo: Fardin Waezi)

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al Security Forces we have seen a lot of successes, there have also been setbacks and problematic developments. We cannot expect miracles between now and the elections.

So yes, the security situation will be sometimes be challenging but it should be sufficient for the majority of the people to cast their vote and for the majority of the polling stations to be open and accessible for those that would wish to vote. I believe that I see real progress there as well. For months now the respective Afghan security institutions have cooperated and coordinated very closely. They constantly review the situation and, at this point in time, I am rather confident that the (security) conditions will be there for the people to go and vote.

UNAMA: In terms of candidates and the number of registered voters, what are your thoughts on the participation of women in these elections?

Jan Kubiš: I would say, first of all, that we should never forget that women represent perhaps more than 50 per cent of the eligible voters and 50 per cent of the population. How could you think that you could have good elections without the strong participation of the women of the country?

I was very happy to see that the Independent Election Commission, from the very beginning, decided to place special attention to the rights of women and to create the required conditions for them.



UNAMA's Sayed Mohammad Shah interviews Special Representative Kubiš. (Photo: Fardin Waezi)

I am also happy that when we talk about security arrangements – including that of the polling stations – they are taking into account Afghanistan's culture, tradition and religion and, on that basis, they are preparing the right conditions for women to participate. It is, for example, things like providing special polling stations for women or identifying female searchers that would help ensure security and also women's access to polling stations without any problems.

From the point of view of voter registration, in relation to the top-up registration process, I was encouraged to see that approximately 33 per cent of newly-registered

voters are women. From that perspective, I would like to see more women involved. But even this in itself is not a bad result at all given security conditions and perhaps some traditions that might stand in the way of more pronounced participation of women.

I see this as a good step in a process because building democracy is a process, and elections are a process as well. We cannot prescribe or decree that the people take part in elections. It is a process which includes voter education and then instilling enough confidence in the people to help them feel sure that they can go and vote, including that women

can go and vote in conditions that respect the traditions of the country.

UNAMA: What sort of mood have you sensed from the Afghan public towards the Presidential elections?

Jan Kubiš: We see a lot of hope when colleagues speak with Afghans, and also when we exchange opinions with foreign embassies. People are politically active and interested in the elections.

I remember my own meetings in different parts of the country. Even a year and half ago people were asking me about election preparations – how the UN can assist as well as the international community. People were delivering very clear statements: “we would like to have the elections, we would like to have fair and free elections, we would like to have elections without fraud. This is our right and we would like to have this right in the conditions which allow us to implement them.”

So I would say that I am encouraged. Of course we will also see in the elections campaign period how the candidates will be able to get the attention and engagement of the people. I would say that we have very strong interest from the majority of the people in the country in regard to participation in the election. This is also something we have seen in different opinion polls on the mood of the people, not only recently but over the past year as well.

UNAMA: You have met over recent weeks with senior officials from neighbouring countries and



Special Representative Kubiš during a field trip to Kunduz province in February. (Photo: F. Waezi)

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Safi: women can play key role in political life

Mrs. Gulalai Safi wears several hats in her activities in Afghanistan. Well-known as an activist for women's rights in the country, she is also a member of Afghanistan's High Peace Council and a member of the Afghan Parliament, representing the northern province of Balkh – where she has family roots – since 2005.

Prior to her election, Mrs. Safi worked on a health project for an international non-governmental organization, Medica Mondiale. This employment followed her return to Afghanistan in 2004 – she had settled in Germany in 1990 after leaving Afghanistan during its civil war. This was not her first experience abroad. Mrs. Safi graduated from the Suriya High School in Kabul in 1973, and soon after undertook medical studies in the Ukraine, where she had been offered a scholarship. Returning to Afghanistan in 1981, Mrs. Safi joined the Noor Hospital in Kabul in the same year as a doctor and specialized in the field of ophthalmology before her departure for Germany.

In addition to her other roles, Mrs. Safi is also a leading member of the Advocacy Group for Political Rights of Women, an activist group working for the political rights of women in Afghanistan.

Mrs. Safi recently spoke about the group and issues relating to women's political rights in Afghanistan.

UNAMA: What are the objectives and activities of the Advocacy Group for Political Rights of Women?

Gulalai Safi: Its members are mostly women's right activists and women members of the Afghan Parliament, from both the lower and upper houses. In order to move our agenda forward, we should act together to make the voices of women stronger and louder. In this critical period for Afghanistan, when the political leadership of the country is being changed through democratic elections, women should make the utmost effort to integrate their demands in the programmes of the presidential candidates with a special emphasis on the socio-economic and political development of women.

The immediate priority is to make sure that all Afghan women and women's groups come together and raise their collective voice for their rights. If we do not redirect the attention of the presidential candidates towards women's issues, they may not include us in their priorities and we might remain isolated. In the political arena, women are not given priority despite the fact that they



Parliamentarian and women's rights activist, Gulalai Noor Safi, during her interview with UNAMA. (Photo: Fardin Waezi)

make up half of the population [of the country]. Attention goes more towards warlords, ethnic leaders and religious leaders. I think women will support any candidate – regardless [of his or her] ethnic, lingual and religious affiliation – who will present a better programme for the development of Afghan women.

Our group recently invited presidential candidates to a conference in Kabul, in which some of them participated, with the objective of presenting to them our recommendations and to hear directly from them on their programmes regarding the development of women in Afghanistan.

UNAMA: What problems are Afghan women facing in relation to their political rights?

Gulalai Safi: The biggest problem is illiteracy because the majority of Afghan women are illiterate. This is the reason for the lack of awareness among women about their rights. We should not look only at the cities. If we go to the villages, we will find that the majority of women have accepted the right of men to beat them –

they even don't know their basic Islamic rights. There is a need to raise awareness among the people regarding their basic social, civic and religious rights. Unless they know what their rights are, how can we fight for their rights?

The second biggest issue is economic dependency. Women should become self-reliant financially in order to gain a stronger social position and not to consider themselves compelled to obey any irreligious, unrealistic and unacceptable orders.

While women have totally equal rights from a legal perspective, with the Afghan Constitution clearly stating that all citizens have equal rights, another problem is with the implementation of the relevant laws. Since the majority of women are illiterate, they are not aware of their rights. We do not want our rights only on paper – we also want our rights in practice.

UNAMA: How do you evaluate the participation of women in the current electoral process?

Gulalai Safi: I think there are

problems. The biggest problem is insecurity. Women do not feel safe enough to participate in the elections. A man can easily go and register himself as a voter, but a woman does not feel safe to do so in the first place, and, secondly, she might not have enough money to travel to a voter registration station. So their weak financial status also prevents them from participating in the elections and there is a need for better security conditions.

Also, in many parts of Afghanistan, husbands still direct their wives to vote for a specific candidate despite ongoing awareness-raising programmes. At this stage, we cannot make all Afghan women aware in such a short timeframe. We should work slowly and gradually to educate women so that they can understand candidates' programmes and cast their votes based on their own understanding of them. In the cities, there are women who vote for the candidate of their choice; but in remote areas women do not have the required awareness regarding the elections, the importance of their votes and candidates' programmes. They should be able to distinguish between bad and good.

UNAMA: What is your message to the women of Afghanistan?

Gulalai Safi: My message to all women is that they should ensure their maximum participation in the elections and cast their votes on the polling day so that the candidates realize how many votes came to them from women at polling stations. If candidates get more votes from men, then their programmes will then be man-oriented, with less attention towards women's issues. The candidates should know that women's votes could be decisive. ■



Mrs. Safi addresses the media during a rally for Afghan women's rights. (Photo: Sayed M. Shah)

UN reaffirms Afghan commitment after attack

In the wake of a deadly terrorist attack in January which left four of its staff amongst the victims, senior United Nations officials – as well as the UN Security Council – reaffirmed the world body’s commitment to Afghanistan.

“As the United Nations mourns this terrorist attack and its victims, we remain committed to work for the peace, stability and development of Afghanistan,” said the UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, in a message delivered to UN staff in the capital, Kabul, by his Special Representative for the country and head of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Ján Kubiš.

“We fully support the transition of Afghanistan toward a better future in peace, development and security,” the UN chief added. In another message, he also described the attack as “completely unacceptable” and “in flagrant breach of international humanitarian law.”

In his own statement, Mr. Kubiš strongly condemned “the targeting of civilians in any form, and, in particular, the continued use of suicide bombers.”

A suicide bomber and two gunmen attacked La Taverna du Liban, a restaurant in the capital, Kabul, on the evening of 17 January. Amongst those killed were Vadim Nazarov (Russian Federation), a Senior Political Officer with UNAMA; Basra Hassan (United States), a Nutrition Specialist with the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF); Dr. Nasreen Khan (Pakistan), a Health Specialist with UNICEF; and Wabel Abdallah (Lebanon), the Resident Representative of a UN-affiliated



The UN lost four staff members in the attack on a Kabul restaurant on 17 January. (Photo: F. Waezi)

specialized agency, the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Besides the UN personnel, 17 others also lost their lives in the attack for which the Taliban claimed responsibility. The victims included both Afghans and foreigners from a range of countries and international organizations.

The UN Security Council joined Mr. Ban and Mr. Kubiš in condemning the attack, and restated its support for the role of the United Nations and UN-affiliated organizations in Afghanistan.

In its statement, the Council noted that that no terrorist act can reverse the path towards Afghan-led peace, democracy and stability in the country, “which is supported by the people and the Government of Afghanistan and the international community.”

The last time the UN in Afghanistan experienced violence

resulting in major human losses, was in April 2011 when a mob stormed a UNAMA compound in the northern Afghan city of Mazar-e-Sharif, killing seven UN personnel. Last year, a suicide attack on the Kabul office of another UN-affiliated specialized agency, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) left one person dead and others injured.

Victims remembered

Two days after the attack, on 19 January, the UN system in Afghanistan held a memorial service in Kabul to pay tribute to their fallen colleagues.

“Among the 13 foreigners [killed in the attack] were different nationals coming from different countries around one mission and one dream to work for Afghanistan: to work for peace in this country, for development, for human rights and humanity,” said Mr. Kubiš, in his

remarks at the ceremony.

In a speech to the gathering, speaking of UNAMA’s Mr. Nazarov, who had served with the mission since 2005 and worked in the region for decades, the Secretary-General’s Deputy Special Representative for Afghanistan, Nicholas Haysom, said Mr. Nazarov was “much-valued by the UN because of the depth of his knowledge and understanding of Afghanistan,” in addition to speaking of personal qualities such as his integrity and compassion, and the esteem he was held in.

Mr. Haysom also noted that his death had “deprived Afghanistan of a champion and supporter who had committed much of his life to the welfare of this people.”

Speaking of the two UNICEF staff members, the agency’s Country Representative, Akhil Iyer, said Ms. Hassan was instrumental in developing and starting its Nutrition in Emergency programme “from its early stages into the successful programme that it is today, saving the lives of children.”

He said that Dr. Khan was a highly experienced and respected specialist in reproductive health, and in public health in general, “with a passion for saving the lives of new born children and pregnant mothers.”

Another of the Secretary-General’s Deputy Special Representatives for Afghanistan, Mark Bowden, spoke about IMF’s Mr. Abdallah, describing him as “a quiet and unassuming man.”

“I felt that Wabel was one of Afghanistan’s unsung heroes. It was Wabel in his IMF role that helped untangle the Kabul Bank mess and made the constructive suggestions that were needed to restore confidence in the monetary economy,” said Mr. Bowden. ■



Members of the international community at the memorial service in Kabul. (Photo: Fardin Waezi)

VOX POPULI

In this issue, UNAMA asked the following question to Afghans in different regions of the country: *“Will you vote in the upcoming elections? Why?”*

Bamyan

Sakhi Mohammad, car washer:

“I will cast my vote because I know my vote will have an impact. Participation in the election is important and it is the duty of every Afghan to choose someone for President who is better than others and is capable to run the affairs of our country. I will vote for someone who can bring peace and create work for us.”



Kunar

Hamdullah, sewing machine technician

“I will use my right to vote to elect suitable and capable leaders through the elections. Participation in the election is very important, and the government should conduct public awareness campaigns so that people know the significance of election and value of their vote. People should vote for capable and honest people. As was seen in the past, candidates promised a lot during their campaigns but they did not deliver to the people afterwards.”



Nangarhar

Mauhamad Isa Meskin, money changer

“I will definitely take part in the election, and will vote for a capable person. Elections are good opportunities to shape our future and to determine the destiny of this country and its people. I think, all the eligible people should vote so that we can elect our President in the first round of elections. If many people do not vote, none of the candidates will acquire enough votes to succeed and it will go to the second round of voting which will waste time and resources. The security situation at the time of the elections will be critical but people should do their best to participate in the election. I hope our next leaders will remain loyal to their promises and plans they presented during the election campaign.”



Kunduz

Haji Muhammad Azim Bashi, community elder

“Yes I will vote. I will vote for my preferred candidate. I will vote for the return of peace and security to my country. Lots of people are unemployed, the majority of people live in poverty and are vulnerable. I am going to vote to elect a real Muslim as the president, someone who can provide employment opportunities and facilities for poor people.”



Balkh

Mohammad Kamal Rahimi, civil society activist

“Voting is not only a right but also a responsibility of every Afghan citizen. I will vote for a candidate that I believe is competent to bring change, peace and stability. Democracy is very young in Afghanistan and not many people truly understand that as part of a democratic process, an election gives them the power to choose their leader. It is an opportunity for the people to contribute in rebuilding of their country.”



Paktya

Ikramuddin, office cleaner

“I will vote because this is my right. I have obtained a voting card and will give my vote to a candidate who is committed to bringing peace and maintaining security in my country. I will vote for a candidate who can fight against corruption and provide job opportunities. Corruption is widespread in our country and most of the jobless youth are getting addicted to drugs and leaning towards insurgency. I will vote for a candidate who would establish vocational training institutions, construct roads for us and who would come to Paktya to see our problems up close and take effective measures for their solution.”



Kandahar

Bilqis Ehsan, student

“We should use our votes because Afghanistan has been suffering from a lot of challenges and miseries. There are problems with security, with the economy and with human rights. For example, women are not given their due rights. So we vote to elect a president who can overcome these problems and provide services to the people. A president who can bring security, improve the economic situation, provide better education and bring peace and security to the nation. We want to vote for a good leader who doesn't think of his own interests and instead thinks of his nation and works to create peace and harmony. We are the future of this country and it is our right to cast our votes. If this right is taken away from us, our future will be destroyed. So we vote for a leader who can put an end to these problems and can bring peace and prosperity to our nation.”



Herat

Safdar Timoori, street vendor

“I will vote because I believe in the change that the next president of Afghanistan would bring. I want change in terms of education, health and financial support for senior citizens. I spent all my life being a street vendor and have seen no good in my life at all, but I will vote to make sure a better future for my grandchildren.”



UN political chief in first visit to Afghanistan

The United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Jeffrey Feltman, visited Afghanistan from 13 to 14 February 2014 – his first visit to the country since assuming the UN's top political position in July 2012.

During the visit, he largely focused on familiarizing himself with the work of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and different aspects of UN support for the Government and the people of Afghanistan.

At the end of his visit, Mr. Feltman said that the integrity and inclusivity of the upcoming Presidential and Provincial Council elections, slated for 5 April, are key factors for ensuring the credibility of the polls.

"I know you have security challenges here but that inclusion question is very, very important... The second issue, besides inclusion, is integrity of the system," said Mr. Feltman. "Right now you have 11 candidates [for the President]. Ultimately, only one candidate is going to win. The other candidates and their supporters need to accept the results and need to see that the results are credible – that credibility rests on the inclusion of voters and the integrity of the system."

The UN political chief, who oversees and coordinates UN



Mr. Feltman at a meeting with IEC Chairman Ahmed Yousuf Nuristani. (Photo: Fardin Waezi)

electoral assistance globally, added that the elections are an opportunity for the people and the Government of Afghanistan "to send a signal internationally that we will maintain the focus on the type of partnership that Afghanistan likes to see going forward."

While in Afghanistan, Mr. Feltman held meetings with officials from the Independent Election Commission (IEC), the Independent Electoral Complaints Commission, the

Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission and the diplomatic corps present in Kabul. He also paid a brief visit to the northern city of Mazar-e-Sharif, where he met with the Provincial Governor, Atta Mohammad Noor, as well as UN staff.

In his meetings with Afghan officials and representatives, Mr. Feltman discussed different aspects of UN support to the country and its people as the country undergoes its political and security transitions. He

stressed that the UN will continue to be a close, reliable and sincere partner of the country.

"The [UN] agencies, funds and programmes; various parts of the [UN] Secretariat, the political mission itself, UNAMA – all of these UN components are committed to a long-term partnership with the people and Government of Afghanistan," he said. "I do go back to New York with a personal commitment to do what I can to maintain strong partnership between the UN and the people of Afghanistan." ■



Accompanied by Special Representative Kubiš and other UN officials, Mr. Feltman arrives in Mazar-e-Sharif. (Photo: Fardin Waezi)

UN report finds 14% rise in civilian casualties in 2013

Reversing a decline in civilian casualties recorded in 2012, the number of civilians killed or injured in Afghanistan's armed conflict increased by 14 per cent in 2013, according to a United Nations report released in February.

The 2013 Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, prepared by the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in coordination with the Geneva-based Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), also found that it was the worst year since 2009 in terms of the number of women and children killed or injured as a result of conflict-related violence.

The 2013 report documented a total of 8,615 civilian casualties with 2,959 civilian deaths and 5,656 injured in that year.

The figures mark a seven per cent increase in deaths and a 17 per cent increase in injuries compared to 2012, when the UN reported for the first time a drop in the number of casualties since the world body started such documentation in 2007.

The latest findings are similar to record high numbers of civilian casualties documented in 2011, when UNAMA recorded 3,133 civilian deaths and 4,706 injuries.

In his comments on the findings – at a news conference in the capital, Kabul, to release the report – the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan and the head of UNAMA, Ján Kubiš, said the country's armed conflict took an "unrelenting toll" on civilians in 2013.

"At the start of 2014, it is imperative that all parties, but particularly anti-Government elements (AGEs), halt the worsening impact of the conflict on Afghan civilians," Mr. Kubiš added.

The AGEs, which accounted for 74 per cent of the total civilian casualties in 2013, include all individuals and armed groups involved in armed conflict with or armed opposition against the Government of Afghanistan and/or international military forces. These groups include those who identify as 'Taliban', as well as individuals and non-State organized armed groups taking a direct part in hostilities and assuming a variety of labels, including the Haqqani Network, Hezb-e-Islami, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, and other militia and armed groups pursuing political, ideological or economic objectives including armed criminal groups



The UN Secretary-General's Special Representative, Ján Kubiš (right), and the Director of UNAMA's Human Rights Unit, Georgette Gagnon, launch the report in Kabul. (Photo: Fardin Waezi)

directly engaged in hostile acts on behalf of a party to the conflict.

The report attributed 11 per cent of the casualties to pro-Government forces (PGFs), with eight per cent to the Afghan National Security Forces and three per cent to international forces, as well as ten per cent to ground engagements between AGEs and PGFs.

Five per cent of civilian casualties, resulting mostly from explosive remnants of war, could not be attributed to any side.

UNAMA's mandate includes, among other responsibilities, monitoring the situation of civilians, coordinating efforts to ensure their protection, promoting accountability, and assisting in the full implementation of the fundamental freedoms and human

rights provisions of the Afghan Constitution and international treaties to which Afghanistan is a State party.

The latest UN report on the Afghan conflict's toll on civilians once again confirmed the trends observed in previous years with the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) by AGEs being the leading cause of civilian deaths and injuries. In 2013, according to the latest UN report, the AGEs' use of IED tactics caused almost half of all civilian casualties in 2013.

"Indiscriminate use of IEDs by AGEs increased in 2013 and remained the leading cause of civilian deaths and injuries," the report stated, adding that it documented 2,890 civilian casualties – with 962 civilian deaths and 1,928 in-

jured – from IEDs, up 14 per cent from 2012.

The report found that 2013 was "the worst year for Afghan women, girls and boys" since 2009, with the highest number of deaths and injuries recorded from conflict-related violence.

"It is the awful reality that most women and children were killed and injured in their daily lives – at home, on their way to school, working in the fields or traveling to a social event. This situation demands even greater commitment and further efforts by the parties to protect women and children from conflict-related violence," UNAMA's Director of Human Rights, Georgette Gagnon, told the news conference.

The report documented 746 women casualties with 235 deaths and 1,756 child casualties with 561 deaths, registering an increase of 36 per cent and 34 per cent from 2012 respectively.

IEDs used by AGEs again killed the most women and children, causing 177 women casualties (up 20 per cent from 2012) and 511 child casualties (up 28 per cent from 2012).

"Behind every civilian casualty is a man, woman or child's life and immense suffering and hardship for an Afghan family and community," said Ms. Gagnon. "Reduced civilian suffering and fewer civilian casualties together with improvements in human rights protection should be the core benchmarks of improved stability and efforts toward peace in the security and political transition in 2014." ■



The UN report documented a total of 8,615 civilian casualties, including 2,959 deaths, during 2013. (Photo: Fardin Waezi)