

Stories inside include...

## New Leadership:

UN chief appoints Nicholas Haysom as his new Special Representative for Afghanistan Page 3



## Music Concert:

Prominent Afghan singer, Farzana Naz, performs at live TV concert to mark UN Day Page 10



# United Nations

## Afghanistan Quarterly

Volume 4, Issue 2 | Summer / Fall 2014

## Kubiš: Let's learn from Afghan resilience

UN special envoy speaks about the UN's assistance to Afghanistan.



United Nations Special Representative Jan Kubiš during an interview in Kabul. (Photo: Fardin Waezi)

The United Nations' top envoy for Afghanistan lauded the Afghan people and authorities for their tenacity in successfully completing a peaceful and democratic transfer of power this year, as well as for their vision for the future of the country.

Ján Kubiš, shortly before completing his term as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) for Afghanistan and head of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), said the millions of Afghans who voted have been honoured through the agreement to form a government of national unity.

During his time in Afghanistan, Mr. Kubiš has been working

to implement UNAMA's Security Council mandate, which centres on support for Afghan political institutions, authorities and people in many different areas of activity.

In an interview, UNAMA's outgoing chief talked about his time serving in Afghanistan, discussed the aspects of his work that have been personally meaningful to him and outlined the UN's assistance to the country during a time that he described as a period of ongoing parallel transitions.

UNAMA: How would you characterize the almost three years you've worked as SRSG for UNAMA and as the top UN official in Afghanistan?

Kubiš: I would say that this

is one of the most enriching experiences I've had in my professional life. I was very happy that I was given the opportunity to be here during this important phase of development in the country, in this period of transition. Indeed, Afghanistan is becoming a true sovereign. Sovereignty means taking responsibility for everything happening here in the country, and contributing to global development.

This challenging period of ongoing parallel transitions—security transition, military transition, economic transition and of course political transition—was critically important for the country. I was pleased that I was given a

chance to be here and to support the authorities and the people of Afghanistan in this.

UNAMA: Could you describe UNAMA's and the UN's main achievements in Afghanistan during the past two years?

Kubiš: What we need to do is work to support Afghanistan through different concrete activities, projects mostly delivered by UN agencies, funds and programmes. UNAMA, as a special political mission, has a very broad mandate; we are covering the work of the whole UN system but with a focus on certain specific areas related to human rights, women's rights, development of institutions and systems of democracy.

For example, in the human rights area, UNAMA has helped Afghanistan and the Afghan people advocate for their rights, protect people from abuse and promote accountability where abuses have taken place. We monitor what is happening with civilian casualties, not only for the sake of monitoring, of course, but also in seeking to reduce those casualties. Although I can't say that the figures are good, at least we are managing to bring to the attention of all the respective parties our key concerns, and we are relentlessly working with them to see a reduction of civilian casualties.

Issues relating to women's rights are important for every society, and for this society as well; therefore, I was happy that we were actively engaged on these issues.

Given our mandate, and given

*Continued on page 8 >>*

# Unprecedented Afghan political transition

The conclusion of the Afghan presidential elections and subsequent move to form a government of national unity represent an unprecedented political transition.

Afghanistan passed a notable milestone in 2014, as the country began the process of forming a new government of national unity through a United Nations-supported election process, marking the first-ever peaceful transfer of power in the country's history from one elected president to another.

Following the inauguration on 29 September of Dr. Ashraf Ghani as the new president and Dr. Abdullah Abdullah as the Chief Executive Officer of Afghanistan, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the Security Council hailed the inauguration, while reiterating the world body's commitment to supporting Afghanistan's new administration.

"Both President Ghani and Dr. Abdullah carry the nation's expectations," said the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan, Ján Kubiš, in a statement following the inauguration.

"The many challenges facing Afghanistan can only be overcome through unity and statesmanship," added Mr. Kubiš, who represented the UN chief at the inauguration.

The formation of the national unity government, which the UN called "an embodiment of the wishes of the people of Afghanistan to live and work together,"



Afghan President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani presides over the oaths taken by the Chief Executive Officer Dr. Abdullah Abdullah and his deputies at the presidential secretariat in Kabul. (Photo: Fardin Waezi)

*"The national unity government is necessary in Afghanistan's development to create a level of stability in the country."*

—Nicholas Haysom

was part of an agreement reached on 12 July by the two presidential candidates, Dr. Ghani and Dr. Abdullah, breaking an impasse that emerged after the announcement of preliminary results from the election's run-off on 7 July.

The agreement followed an intensive UN-supervised audit of 100 per cent of ballots cast in the 14 June run-off vote—roughly eight million ballots and 23,000 ballot boxes—in the presence of the candidates' agents and domestic and international observers.

In the run-off vote, Afghans

had a choice between Dr. Ghani and Dr. Abdullah to replace incumbent Hamid Karzai as the country's leader. The two candidates emerged after the first round of polling on 5 April, but with no candidate garnering the number of votes needed to become president.

The UN, mandated to support the organization of the elections, was jointly requested by the two presidential candidates and also separately by the authorities of Afghanistan, to coordinate international supervision of the audit.

As part of this support, the UN and the International Security Assistance Force transported all ballot boxes to the Independent Election Commission headquarters in Kabul. The UN brought in international observers and elections support staff to supervise the comprehensive vote-audit process.

This political transition coincides with the country's security transition, with the Afghan forces taking over full responsibility from international partners, who are expected to end their missions in December 2014.

The Secretary-General's Deputy Special Representative in the country, Nicholas Haysom, said the formation of the national unity government is necessary in Afghanistan's development to create stability in the country. He noted, however, that the transition will be difficult to manage.

"The war, in many senses, is unsustainable in the long-term, and Afghans need to find a way to live together in peace and harmony," Mr. Haysom said. "It is up to them to find processes that would enable them to do so."

Speaking about the UN's role in the process, Mr. Haysom said the world body will continue to support efforts designed to ensure that a spirit of collaboration is part of the process. He called attention, in particular, to Afghanistan's pressing economic situation, as well as its peace and reconciliation efforts, as challenges the country will face in the months and years ahead.

"The UN will be looking to donors to make up something in the fiscal gaps, something between the money that they need and the money that they have in the short-term," said Mr. Haysom.



The UN and ISAF transport ballot boxes to the Independent Election Commission in Kabul. (Photo: Fardin Waezi)



## Haysom appointed as UNAMA chief



On 25 September 2014, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon announced the appointment of Nicholas Haysom as his Special Representative and Head of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

A South African national, Mr. Haysom currently serves as one of the UN chief's Deputy Special Representatives for Afghanistan, a post he took up in 2012.

He will succeed the current Special Representative, Ján Kubiš, to "whom the Secretary-General is grateful for his dedication and leadership of UNAMA," Mr. Ban's spokesperson said at a news briefing at UN Headquarters in New York.

Mr. Haysom is a lawyer with a long international career focused on democratic governance, constitutional and electoral reforms, reconciliation and peace processes. He held several positions with the world body prior to his current role as Deputy Special Representative.

These posts include serving as Director for Political, Peacekeeping and Humanitarian Affairs in the Executive Office of the UN Secretary-General and Head of the Office of Constitutional Support for the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq.

His previous service includes work with the Government of South Africa, where he was the Chief Legal and Constitutional Adviser in the Office of the President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela.

In addition, Mr. Haysom was the chair of the committee negotiating constitutional issues in the Burundi Peace Talks, and the principal adviser to the mediator in the Sudanese Peace Process.

## UN highlights mental health at Youth Day events in Afghanistan

International Youth Day is observed annually on 12 August, with this year's observance focusing on the global theme of "Youth and Mental Health."

Highlighting the need for improving mental health among Afghan youth, a United Nations official on 12 August said that mental health conditions—driven by decades of insecurity, violence, poverty and unemployment—have left their mark on generations of the country's youth.

"More than one million of our young people in Afghanistan are suffering from mental health conditions each year," said the then Acting UN Resident Coordinator in Afghanistan, Annette Sachs Robertson, at an event organized to mark International Youth Day in Kabul.

International Youth Day is observed annually on 12 August, with this year's observance focusing on the global theme of "Youth and Mental Health." According to the world body, young people with mental health conditions can often experience stigma and discrimination, which in turn can lead to exclusion and discourage people from seeking help for fear of being negatively labelled.

This year's theme was designed to raise awareness on the topic, as well as highlight the experiences of those who have chosen to speak out about the issues with the objec-



Musicians perform at an International Youth Day event in Kabul on 12 August. In his message for the Day, UN chief Ban Ki-moon called for enabling youth with mental health conditions to realize their full potential. (Photo: Sayed Muhammad Shah)

tive of overcoming stigma and discrimination to ensure that young people with mental health conditions can lead full and healthy lives free from isolation and unnecessary shame, and openly seek the services and support they need.

In his message for the Day, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called for enabling youth with mental health conditions to realize their full potential.

"Wide-ranging efforts at all levels are needed to raise awareness about the importance of investing in and supporting young people with mental health conditions," Mr. Ban said. "Increased education is crucial in reducing stigma and in changing how we talk about and perceive mental health."

In her comments at the event in Kabul, organized by the Ministry of

Information and Culture (MoIC) with the assistance and coordination of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Dr. Robertson said, referring to a recent survey of Afghanistan's young people, that more than half of all participants reported that they need psychological or counselling support.

"Suicide and self-immolation, in particular of young girls, have become a growing phenomenon in Afghanistan," she noted.

She commended the Afghan Government for integrating mental health into its Basic Package of Health Services as early as 2003 and psychosocial counselling into the national health care system in 2010. Mental health is one of the key areas in the UNFPA-backed National Youth Policy, which has been submitted to the Council of Ministers for approval.

The UN official announced that the UN Country Team has established an Interagency Network on Youth Development, currently chaired by UNFPA, with the aim of better coordinating youth-related programmes and providing more efficient and accountable support to the government in implementing the policy.

In his comments at the Kabul observance, the Deputy Minister for Youth Affairs at the MoIC, Taimoor Shah Eshaqzai, said that once the policy gets approved and implemented, "it will significantly improve the lives of youth in the country."

Outside of Kabul, International Youth Day was marked in different regions of Afghanistan through a range of activities, including panel discussions and musical and theatrical performances.



A panel discussion held at an International Youth Day event in the Southern province of Kandahar focuses on mental health issues. International Youth Day is observed annually on 12 August, with this year's observance focusing on the global theme of "Youth and Mental Health." (Photo: Mujeeb Rahman)



## Tadamichi Yamamoto appointed as UNAMA deputy chief




United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on 7 October appointed Tadamichi Yamamoto of Japan as his Deputy Special Representative for the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). He succeeds Nicholas Haysom of South Africa.

Mr. Yamamoto is a Japanese diplomat with 40 years of professional experience in political affairs, international cooperation and economic development, spanning several continents. Most recently Mr. Yamamoto served as Ambassador to Hungary.

From 2010 to 2012, he was the Special Representative of the Government of Japan for Afghanistan and Pakistan. In that capacity, he facilitated preparations of the Tokyo Conference on Afghanistan in 2012, which resulted in the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework, a mechanism to review progress towards Afghanistan's sustainable development.

Mr. Yamamoto has held several positions with Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ranging from Director-General of the Public Diplomacy Department to Ambassador in charge of International Counter-Terrorism and Reconstruction Assistance to Iraq. He also served as the Permanent Delegate of Japan to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Mr. Yamamoto holds a B.Sc. degree in engineering from the Tokyo Institute of Technology and a bachelor's degree from the University of Oxford (United Kingdom).

Born in Japan in 1950, he is married and has two children. 

## Police supported by literacy project

A country-wide, United Nations-backed project is addressing the large number of illiterate Afghan National Police personnel, and in doing so is improving their livelihoods and contributing to more effective police work.

Born and raised in Afghanistan's central province of Logar, Sgt. Qadeer joined the Afghan police some three years ago. At the time, he was unable to read or write, as were nearly one-third of the country's 147,000 police officers. That has changed, thanks to a United Nations-backed literacy programme.

Following attendance in the programme, Sgt. Qadeer can write names and read the various signs around Kabul. He is one of the many police officers who have benefited from taking literacy classes organized by the Literacy for Empowering Afghan Police (LEAP) programme of the UN Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (UNESCO).

"I attend the class every day from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m.," he says. "We are trying hard to solve our problems and the problems of our fellow citizens."

The UNESCO-backed project, funded by Japan, was set up to address the large number of illiterate Afghan National Police (ANP) personnel. According to the spokesperson of the Ministry of Interior, Sediq Sediqqi, some 30 per cent of ANP personnel are illiterate; this figure climbs to 70 per cent if partially literate police



Students and teachers participate in a UNESCO-backed literacy class called Literacy for Empowering Afghan Police (LEAP). The UNESCO-backed project, funded by Japan, was set up to address the large number of illiterate Afghan National Police (ANP) personnel. (Photo: Fardin Waezi)

*"Our police officers are eager to learn; even at the level of police check-posts we have literacy classes and our police are learning."*  
—Mohammad Asif

officers are included.

The LEAP project is designed to provide intensive literacy training to police officers to sustain and advance their literacy skills, with the ultimate goal of improving their livelihoods and contributing to more effective police work.


The LEAP project started in September 2011, with the first

phase concluding in November 2013. During the first phase, the project team worked with 500 facilitators in 19 provinces and a fully-fledged Ministry of Interior literacy unit that guided the training in the provinces. The second phase, which started in November 2013, involves training some 10,000 illiterate police through June 2015.

"We trained the police volunteer teachers on lesson preparation, classroom management, conducting group work and delivering lectures," said one of the trainers, Mohammad Tahir.

UNESCO's training programme is in line with the Ministry of Education's literacy curriculum and teaching and learning projects. To support the work of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Interior, the UN agency is printing textbooks and providing stationery for 10,000 illiterate police personnel, as well as 500 kits for police literacy volunteer facilitators.

"Our police officers are eager to learn; even at the level of police check-posts we have literacy classes and our police are learning," says Maj. Mohammad Asif, who is in charge of education and training for a police brigade located in Kabul. The officer added that with the literacy training, he expects the officers to be able to perform their work more effectively in line with their regulations.

To supplement this Afghanistan-wide literacy work, UNESCO publishes thousands of newsletters and magazines each quarter on topics such as protection, justice, human trafficking, riot control and criminal investigations. The publications also contain sports pages and jokes, enticing readers with entertaining content so they continue refining their skills. 



The UNESCO literacy project is designed to provide intensive training to police officers to sustain and advance their skills, with the goal of improving their livelihoods and contributing to more effective police work. (Photo: Fardin Waezi)



# Children's circus provides education, inspiration

In an interview, Ahmed Nazari describes how he joined the circus in 2002 when he was only eight, and started learning circus arts as he proceeded through his schooling. Later, he became a trainer.

Ahmed Nazari, age 20, is a trainer in the Afghan Educational Children's Circus, which was established in 2002 under the umbrella of a non-profit organization dedicated to empowering young people. Mr. Nazari joined the circus in 2002 when he was only eight years old, and started learning circus arts as he proceeded through his basic schooling. Later, he became a trainer himself.

In his many years of working in the children's circus, Mr. Nazari has performed in hundreds of circus shows in Afghanistan, and has demonstrated his skills in several foreign countries. Following a performance on the occasion of the International Day of Circus Arts in Kabul, UNAMA interviewed Mr. Nazari about how he developed his skills and how he is using them to work with Afghanistan's youth.

UNAMA: Could you tell us how you became a circus trainer?

Nazari: The Afghan Educational Children's Circus started in 2002 in Kabul, with the objective of giving children the tools they need so they themselves could develop creative ways to spread entertaining education across Afghanistan. Initially, the children's circus was started in Aschiana, an Afghan orphanage in Kabul. Later on, it was moved to the Kart-e-seh area of Kabul.

I was only eight years old when I joined the circus. It was very exciting for me because I had a lot of opportunities to play and learn skills along with my basic education. Four years later, I had learned enough to train other children, so I started teaching other students. It has now been 12 years since I joined the circus and eight years since I have been training children.

UNAMA: Could you tell us a bit about the students at the school?

Nazari: Children from all different backgrounds are learning at the school. We have children from different Kabul schools and any other children



Circus trainer Ahmed Nazari guides his students during a performance in Kabul. (Photo: Fardin Waezi)

*"We want to make the circus arts more social, and we certainly want everyone to know that the circus exists in Afghanistan and that it is entertaining. We see ourselves reaching all corners of Afghanistan."*

—Ahmed Nazari

who are interested. Our main focus is on challenged children, such as orphans, disabled, street children and displaced children.

During the past three years, we have been training children from 18 camps for displaced people. Currently, we have 120 students in the morning, and in the afternoon 150 students attend classes. We have started an additional programme for young people to train them on circus and media skills—filmmaking, editing, dubbing, camera skills and so forth.

UNAMA: Do you train children in the provinces?

Nazari: We have training centres in Herat, Bamiyan, Mazar-e-Sharif, Badakhshan and Jawzjan. We are trying to open new centres in Baghlan and Kunar so that children in these provinces can learn circus skills. Because many children live in rural areas, our circus artists have tours across the country and perform for the children.

UNAMA: What skills do you

teach the children in these schools?

Nazari: Circus performances are a kind of art, and in this respect Afghanistan is trying to meet international standards. We are therefore training children on theatre, acrobatics, gymnastics and painting. This training is conducted during the summer. During the winter, we have a three-month course that consists of 32 classes as a whole. We have educational, art and sports classes. During the winter, we train 300 students, three days a week. Some of the most talented camp children become part of a trainer programme.

UNAMA: How many performances have you conducted inside and outside the country?

Nazari: Since 2002, we have performed in four foreign countries: Denmark, Germany, Japan and Italy. In Kabul, we have performances almost every week. Each year, we perform at 70 to 80 schools. We have had performances all over the country, with the performances

focusing on critical issues, such as landmine awareness. Our aim is not only to spread happiness, but also to educate people.

UNAMA: How important is the circus for Afghanistan's children?

Nazari: It is important for the children's growth and progress. The first day I came to the circus, I did not know anything. When I got into it, I knew that being part of the circus is an identity, a way of expression and an excellent art. Being in the circus enables you to show your skills to others. It is important for children. It keeps them alert and happy. We provide them with all possible opportunities and resources to play freely and to learn. Anyone can come here and learn the circus arts.

UNAMA: How do you see the future of circus arts in Afghanistan?

Nazari: So far, the circus arts have progressed well and have successfully attracted the attention of many people. In the future, we would like more opportunities to perform in public venues so we can have more direct contact with more people.

We want to make the circus arts more social, and we certainly want everyone to know that the circus exists in Afghanistan and that it is entertaining. We see ourselves reaching all corners of Afghanistan. We also look forward to being able to perform at more international venues for more people.





# UN booklet on protecting children launched

New UNAMA document highlights obligations for all parties to armed conflict in respecting and promoting the rights of children under international law and the tenets of Islam.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) released a new booklet highlighting the obligations of all parties to armed conflict in the country to respect and promote the rights of children under international law. The booklet also highlights the complementary teachings and fundamental tenets of Islam related to protecting children.

"There is no higher duty for every human being, every parent, every citizen, than to protect the future of the country: children," said the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan and head of UNAMA, Ján Kubiš, at the booklet's launching ceremony, which took place in Kabul on 12 May 2014.

"They deserve normal lives and normal childhoods; they deserve to be able to play wherever they want without being threatened by improvised explosive devices, without being threatened by unexploded remnants of war," he added, noting that, unfortunately, during the past 30 years, the children of Afghanistan have been living their lives, and often ending them, under the condition of war.

"Every life of a child wasted, every future of a child unmet



United Nations Special Representative Ján Kubiš launches the booklet on protection of Afghan children in conflict. UNAMA documented 1,694 child casualties—545 killed and 1,149 injured—in 2013 alone. (Photo: Fardin Waezi)

*"Every life of a child wasted, every future of a child unmet and destroyed by this war is one too many."*

—Ján Kubiš

and destroyed by this war, is one too many," the Special Representative stressed. "But what I find particularly appalling is to brainwash children and then to use them as suicide bombers; in my two-and-a-half years here, there are many cases of children being misused as suicide bombers."

The conflict in Afghanistan has led to thousands of civilian casualties each year, with the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) registering 5,710 civilian casualties, 2,284 of which were deaths, from March 2013 to March 2014. "Civilian casualties have

increased by 2.9 per cent in 2013 compared to 2012," said Mr. Sima Samar, AIHRC's chairperson.

Out of the total number of civilian casualties, the number of Afghan children injured, maimed or killed each year is disproportionately large. UNAMA documented 1,694 child casualties—545 killed and 1,149 injured—in 2013 alone. Improvised explosive devices (IEDs) were the leading cause of death and injury of children; IEDs do not distinguish between combatants and civilians, and account for the largest number of civilians killed in Afghanistan each year.

The booklet—entitled "Protecting Afghanistan's Children in

Armed Conflict," with editions in Dari, Pashto and English—comes from a series of discussions and collaborations between UNAMA and Afghan religious leaders, scholars and experts from different religious and academic institutions.

"The use of children by armed opponents in the conflict is a matter of serious concern," said AIHRC's Samar. "We appeal to the armed opponents to strictly follow the Islamic Sharia and international conventions."

Mr. Samar highlighted several of the book's recommendations, which include focusing on the six grave violations of child rights in armed conflict, namely: the killing and maiming of children; the recruitment, use and association of children with armed forces and armed groups; the abduction of children; attacks against schools and hospitals; rape and other forms of sexual violence against children; and the denial of access to humanitarian assistance.

The booklet is designed to become not only a resource but also an advocacy tool for those working on child-protection issues, according to UNAMA, with the ultimate goal of helping to protect Afghan children from the scourge of war and support the efforts of Afghan civil society and the AIHRC.

The launch of the booklet during the month of May coincided with the start of a campaign at UN headquarters in New York. The campaign, "Children, Not Soldiers," is focused on mobilizing support to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by national security forces by 2016. Jointly initiated by the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Leila Zerrougui, and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), the campaign is running in eight countries, including in Afghanistan.

"I particularly welcome the Government of Afghanistan's endorsement of this campaign and its commitment to take further action to ensure that children are not recruited into the ranks of the Afghan national security forces," Mr. Kubiš said.

During the campaign, the UN's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, along with UNICEF personnel, will work with their UN and nongovernmental partners to strengthen their engagement with the eight countries, with the ultimate goal of ending and preventing recruitment and use of children in their country's security forces.



Out of the total number of civilian casualties, the number of child casualties is disproportionately large. (Photo: Fardin Waezi)

# Afghan history archive draws hundreds daily

The Afghanistan Centre at Kabul University is stocked with a collection of more than 80,000 items that cover the Afghan civil war, the Taliban era and the recent period of international intervention.

At the heart of Kabul University's campus, a large information archive resides in the newly constructed Afghanistan Centre. The Centre, famous now for being the richest source of information on Afghanistan in the region, each day draws hundreds of Kabul University students, in addition to scholars and journalists seeking information about Afghanistan's history.

The Centre was inaugurated for public use on 27 March 2013, but the archive has existed since its formation in 1989 in Pakistan by the Centre's founder and current director, Nancy Hatch Dupree. Ms. Dupree came to Afghanistan in 1962, but later became involved with Garzandoi—the Afghan Tourist Organization—and started writing guidebooks.

She wrote books on several Afghan provinces, along with a guide to the country's museums. She did a significant amount of travelling in the country, because, as she indicates, she would not write about anything she had not seen. During her travels, she met with Louis Dupree, a renowned archaeologist and scholar. Later, they married in Kabul.

"The two of us worked very closely together because he was an archaeologist and was always looking for caves where prehistoric people used to live; he was a very good photographer," recalls Ms. Dupree. "It was a time when most Kharijis [foreigners] would not believe things we could do; we would set off in our Land Rover and would go anywhere, with no escort, no armoured cars, nothing."

During Afghanistan's 1970s conflict, the couple moved to Peshawar, Pakistan, and started working with Afghan refugees. This is where the idea of the Centre was first conceived.

"Actually, the idea of this Centre is not mine," says Ms. Dupree. "Louis thought it would be valuable information for those who would go and work with Afghans after refugee repatriation, and thought that a central repository should be established to collect all of the reports and



The founder of the Afghanistan Centre at Kabul University, Nancy Dupree. (Photo: Sayed Muhammad Shah)

*"I am delighted that the young Afghans during the past few years have learned to raise their voices."*

—Nancy Dupree.

surveys of the nongovernmental organizations, the United Nations and the bilateral agencies."

One nongovernmental organization, the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief, embraced the idea and in 1980 established the initial repository, called the Afghan Resource and Information Centre, in Peshawar. The books and other materials were later moved to Kabul after the fall of the Taliban and the establishment of the interim government.

In 2006, Ms. Dupree returned to Kabul with some 36,000 documents, but with no space to store or show them. Kabul University's Chancellor at the time, Mohammad Ashraf Ghani, provided a temporary space in the university's main library. Soon, Ms. Dupree realized that the space would not be enough, especially given the number of documents Afghanistan's government, along with national and international organizations, were sending to her.

She talked with the Minister of Higher Education at the time, Fayyaz Sharif, who agreed with the university to provide a space in the middle of the campus. Former President Hamid Karzai authorized development funds in 2007 for the construction of a new facility. The construction work took almost seven years.

The new building at Kabul University, the Afghanistan Centre,

was inaugurated on 27 March 2013. Operating with funding from the government, with some contributions from foreign donors, the Centre personnel signed an agreement with the Ministry of Higher Education that it would operate independently inside the university campus.

Today, the Centre is stocked with a collection of more than 80,000 items related to Afghanistan's modern history. The collection's books and other documents, which are in Dari, Pashto, English and other languages, cover the Afghan civil war, the Taliban era and the recent period of international intervention.

The collection is fully catalogued, with its records now indexed in an online database to make it accessible online. More than 800,000 pages have been scanned, and some 4,000 volumes are accessible on the Centre's website at [afghandata.org](http://afghandata.org), which is jointly maintained by the University of Arizona. For those coming to do research, the Centre provides a reading room along with 38 workstations connected to the Centre's database.

To reach Afghans outside of Kabul, the Centre runs a programme designed to spread knowledge and encourage a culture of reading by making materials available through portable lending libraries.

"As part of our outreach component, we publish books, and now have 150 titles specifically written for new readers," says Ms. Dupree. "These portable boxes hold 250 books and go into communities and belong to them. They decide where they put them; sometimes they put them in schools, sometimes in clinics and sometimes in mosques. The mullahs like these very much."

Ms. Dupree says she believes that these books are helping those who have recently graduated from literacy classes. "I began to go and see some of the literacy courses for the army and police, and I said if you don't give them something to read, they will lose what you have taught them," she recalls.

Through its boxed library extension programme, the Centre has supplied nearly 250,000 books to more than 200 schools and community libraries across Afghanistan, and is planning to establish 40 new mobile libraries between 2014 and 2017, updating the more than 200 libraries with new materials.

In addition to its outreach programme, the Centre provides a facility for conferences, public events, debates and cultural activities. Ms. Dupree says she believes that it is important for Afghan's young people to engage in debates. "I am delighted that the young Afghans during the past few years have learned to raise their voices," says Ms. Dupree.

"In Afghan society, it is impolite to speak up in front of your father or other elders; but now young people have learned that they are a big power," she says. "I want them to use their power not for individual things but for the country."



*“This challenging period of on-going parallel transitions—security transition, military transition, economic transition and of course political transition—was critically important for the country.”*

<< Continued from page 1

the political transition, the core of our work has focused on preparing the country's institutions to develop best practices and apply them. And then, of course, we had to support the electoral process, including when faced with a deadlock by supporting a 100 per cent audit process. That was a major part of our work; it started more than two years ago when we were helping Afghanistan's electoral institutions prepare.

We also worked to help instill a culture of peace and cooperation and reconciliation by supporting local efforts to kick-start dialogue through activities in different provinces. I would also like to highlight our support for development coherence and humanitarian assistance, but of course there are many other aspects of our work as well. As always, there are some successful stories, but also some failures. Nevertheless, I believe that the UN firmly supports Afghanistan as a reliable, unbiased and dedicated partner and will be here, working for the benefit of Afghanistan according to its wishes and national priorities, for years to come.

**UNAMA:** How would you describe the current state of political affairs in the country?

**Kubiš:** Promising. We should not forget the bigger picture that the country managed to go through a successful political transition. Many were sceptical. Many did not believe that it would happen, that the elections would bring a new government, and, in the event, a government of national unity. We should not forget this is indeed the first time Afghanistan had a democratic and peaceful transition from one elected president to another elected president. Let's understand



United Nations Special Representative Ján Kubiš receives a copy of the political agreement signed between Dr. Mohammad Ashraf Ghani and Dr. Abdullah Abdullah following the completion of the vote audit process. (Photo: Fardin Waezi)

how big an achievement this is in the life of the country and in the life of the region.

All those millions of men and women who voted have had their votes honoured through the government of national unity, led by the president elected with the majority of votes. There are no losers; there are only winners. The people of Afghanistan are the winners here. That is a major achievement in spite of the rather understandable discussions in the process of forming the new government of national unity and challenges in promoting the urgently needed deep reform agenda. It's an ongoing process.

We already see some important steps being taken by the president to strengthen security and promote regional and international cooperation, to combat corrup-

tion and to improve justice for all in more effectively ensuring lives of dignity. With broad dialogue already underway with the people of the country, including in video conferences and meetings of both the president and CEO with elders and other representatives of the people across Afghanistan, and also in meetings with the international community, I believe the leadership is taking the right steps to identify and address the concerns of the people. Even with many problems, the country can expect a better and more stable future.

**UNAMA:** In the wake of Afghanistan's recent elections deadlock, what would you characterize as the most challenging part in helping the process move to completion?

**Kubiš:** All the options were

tried and discussed, and eventually the parties agreed to form a government of national unity. This prolonged period of confrontation created a lot of problems in the security, economic, political and social areas. So that was the most difficult—the protracted nature of this effort to come to a good solution, the government of national unity. That is what I will definitely remember.

On the other hand, discussions and disputes are normal; they are natural, and in every situation of this kind and in any country of the world, it takes time to come to a solution. From that perspective, it was handled relatively well, with leaders and their campaigns showing responsibility, maturity and an ability to find compromise. I am confident this will characterize their work relationship in future years.

**UNAMA:** Afghanistan now has a new president, but there are doubts about the sustainability of the national unity government. What is your view about the future of the government?

**Kubiš:** The government of national unity led by President Ghani is a product of intensive prolonged discussions. Parties indeed came to the conclusion that this partnership is the best solution for the country, and is supported by the people. So I have no doubts. Yes, there will be problems in the way forward; it is natural. In many governments that include different factions, there are almost daily discussions and sometimes disputes. Yet if there is a shared objective and shared strategic goal as it is in the case of the government of national unity, then I have no doubt they will be able to work



Special Representative Ján Kubiš visits a warehouse during the vote audit process in the Afghan presidential elections. The UN, mandated to support the organization of the elections, was jointly requested by the two presidential candidates and also separately by the authorities of Afghanistan, to coordinate international supervision of the audit. (Photo: Fardin Waezi)



*“All those millions of men and women who voted have had their votes honoured through the government of national unity, led by the president elected with the majority of votes. There are no losers; there are only winners.”*

together.

The people of Afghanistan, during the whole election and political transition, have proven all the sceptics constantly and continuously wrong. Scepticism is a safe bet. If something will not work, they will be able to say, “Oh, I knew it; I told you so.” This is not to suggest we should close our eyes to the many problems. There are problems, and they are massive. The new government will have a difficult job in addressing them. And they may fail in certain areas. But again, let's not be only sceptical.

Let's learn from the resilience and determination of the people of Afghanistan. I am sometimes surprised how international analysts and also some local analysts are unable to understand the real resilience and determination of the people of this beautiful country.

**UNAMA:** What would you characterize as the key challenges ahead for Afghanistan and the UN working to support the government? And do you anticipate any changes in the work of UNAMA now and in the long-term?

**Kubiš:** We will have, first of all, to define our new mission. That will be done for us by Afghanistan and the members of the Security Council. We will have to define clearly our new mission after the completion of the transition and after the withdrawal of the International Security Assistance Force.

The country is on a different line; the country is now sovereign. We cannot simply continue businesses as usual, so now is the time to determine the elements of our mandate and then the modalities for implementing it, to work with and for Afghanistan, to listen to the wishes of this sovereign country and not only



United Nations Special Representative Ján Kubiš walks with the Governor of Nangarhar province, Attaullah Ludin, during a visit to the eastern region to assess the situation in the area. (Photo: Fardin Waezi)

to come with our ideas but indeed to be helpful where Afghanistan will need us most.

Every part of the UN system has certain visions, certain ideas, certain programmes and projects, and certain inertia. The donors have certain visions and inertia as well, so it will be a challenging period of adjustment. But I am confident we have a lot to offer in all the areas of the UN mandates and activities. Afghanistan will need our assistance and engagement, and we are ready to provide it. We will have to adjust to the new realities and needs of the country. Improved accountability and good governance on the side of Afghanistan are a part of the process and also will take time. So the adjustment will necessarily be gradual.

**UNAMA:** On a personal level, what has made the biggest impact

on you during your service as the top official of the United Nations in Afghanistan?

**Kubiš:** My partners—the Afghan people. I had had short visits before in different professional capacities and came with certain understandings, mostly based on reading stories, not only professional literature, but also poems and novels. But of course you meet people, you talk to them, you see how they live, you see how they act, and you correct or reinforce preconceptions. I am glad that I was given a chance to work here with the people of Afghanistan. That is what has made the strongest impression on me; it has corrected and reinforced certain positive attitudes I already had.

I am proud of the strong partnership of the UN with the

international community, notably the countries in the region. When I started, they were not very active, not in a way that I would have liked them to be. But now they are here and increasingly would like to work with, and in support of, Afghanistan. This is encouraging.

**UNAMA:** What would you like to say to the country's new political leaders?

**Kubiš:** Stay on course. If I look at the inauguration statement of President Ghani, the intensions are good. The speech was full of substance; it was not a protocol statement, nor did it just gloss over the issues. And the statement of Chief Executive Abdullah gave an indication that indeed the whole government shares objectives as a common vision for the future.

So stay on course, quickly develop this common vision into a series of practical steps and convince the people that their votes were right. It is a heavy responsibility that they have acquired now. So it is for them now to convince the people indeed that their votes were cast for the right candidates.

**UNAMA:** And to the people of Afghanistan, what would you like to say?

**Kubiš:** Give trust to your leaders and support them, work with them and understand that miracles will not happen from one day to another. It will take the long work of many years, but the president is clear on the way forward, and the CEO is clear on the way forward. They share the same vision, so give them your trust. Continue supporting them now that they work together as you supported them when you voted for them.



Ján Kubiš at the second annual high-level meeting between the Government of Afghanistan and the United Nations Country Team to strengthen partnerships through the 2015-2024 period. Senior Afghan and UN officials said the support of the world body should continue in a coherent manner by reinforcing an Afghan-led development agenda. (Photo: Fardin Waezi)



# Afghan talents perform at UN Day concert

A live music concert, one of a series of events held across Afghanistan to mark UN Day, featured prominent Afghan musicians who sang songs of peace and urged listeners to work together in harmony.

A concert held in Kabul, broadcast on Afghan television and carried on satellite around the world, showcased some of the country's top singers and highlighted the United Nations' work in support of the people of Afghanistan.

The concert, one of a series of UN-backed events organized across Afghanistan to mark UN Day, celebrated annually on 24 October, featured prominent Afghan musicians who sang songs of peace and urged listeners to work together in harmony and mutual respect for the sake of the country's future.

Performers at the Kabul concert included Shehzad Adeel, Mostafa Sufi and Farzana Naz. Each sang a set of songs, in Dari and Pashto, drawing on nationally known favourites along with popular tunes. The musicians, cheered on by several hundred audience participants, spoke between their songs to congratulate Afghans on UN Day and urge everybody around the country to work for peace.

"I call on all Afghans to work for the stability and prosperity of Afghanistan," said Ms. Naz, a well-known talent and the con-



Singer Farzana Naz performs during a UN Day musical concert held in Kabul on 23 October and broadcast live globally. (Photo: Fardin Waezi)

*"UN efforts in the reconstruction and political processes in Afghanistan have been significant in improving the livelihood of the people."*

—Obaidullah Obaidi

cert's featured singer.

Observed since 1948, UN Day marks the anniversary of the entry into force in 1945 of the UN Charter, the world body's founding document. Afghanistan has been a member of the UN since 1946, and has participated in the work of the organization for the benefit of the Afghan people and others around the world.

In his message for the Day, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon noted that poverty, disease, terrorism, discrimination and climate change are exacting a heavy toll on millions of people, who continue to suffer "deplorable exploi-

tation" through bonded labour, human trafficking, sexual slavery or unsafe conditions in factories, fields and mines.

"The founding of the United Nations was a solemn pledge to the world's people to end such assaults on human dignity, and lead the way to a better future," Mr. Ban remarked. "There have been painful setbacks, and there is much work still ahead to realize the Charter's vision."

Speaking at an official UN Day event held at Kabul University, the UN Secretary-General's Deputy Special Representative in the country, Mark Bowden, called

on the country's youth to help address the challenges facing the South Asian nation.

"When I look around today, I'm happy to see so many young people who are able to pursue higher studies," said Mr. Bowden, addressing an audience of scholars and hundreds of students gathered at Kabul University to mark UN Day.

Mr. Bowden said the world body is needed now more than ever to lend support to the young people working for change in Afghanistan. "You, I hope, will become the lawyers, scholars, teachers and politicians on whom the country's future depends; but also, I should say, the United Nations depends on you as well," he added.

"In the 69 years of its existence, the goals of the United Nations to help foster and sustain peace throughout the world have not changed," the UN Deputy Special Representative said.

Also speaking at the university event, Zamira Sayedi, a Kabul University law student, said the Afghan people are grateful to the UN for playing "a significant role for peace in recent years," helping to support democracy and working with millions of Afghan refugees to assist them in returning home.

At the Kabul event, hosted by the university's Faculty of Law, Afghanistan's Minister of Higher Education, Obaidullah Obaidi, said the UN can be more effective when all countries work in close partnership with the world body.

"UN efforts in the reconstruction and political processes in Afghanistan have been significant in improving the livelihood of the people," said Mr. Obaidi. "The Ministry has always been cooperative with the international community, particularly the UN."

Other events marking UN Day across the country included panel discussions and quiz contests to highlight the world body's work in support of the government and the people of Afghanistan.

Events in the provinces of Paktia, Balkh, Bamyan and Kunduz, in the country's southeast, north, central and northeast, respectively, marked UN Day by highlighting the world body's role in Afghanistan, in general, and in helping to address the challenges encountered during the recently concluded presidential elections, in particular.

"I would like to highlight the United Nations' profound role in helping the Afghan election problem reach a solution," said the Deputy Governor of Balkh, Mohammad Zahir Wahdat. "The people of Afghanistan acknowledge the efforts of the UN in breaking the stalemate."



Kabul University students go through a security check to attend a UN Day event on the campus. (Photo: Fardin Waezi)



# Afghan women rise in politics, peace

At events attended by men and women representing civil society and government institutions, a top recommendation from many participants was that more women be involved in decision-making at all levels.

Against the backdrop of a significant gender gap in Afghan civil society and state representation, the United Nations hosted several events across Afghanistan to mark the annual Global Open Days and discuss the role of women in the country's political and peace processes.

At the events, attended by men and women representing civil society and government institutions, a top recommendation from many participants was that more women be involved in decision-making at local, regional and national levels.

At one event, held in the Afghan capital of Kabul on 8 October, two senior UN officials—the Secretary-General's Deputy Special Representative for Afghanistan, Nicholas Haysom, and the Deputy Country Representative for the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), Pamela F. Husain—called for the incorporation of women's perspectives and experiences, at all levels of Afghan society, to help foster lasting peace in the country.

Noting that women are both the victims of conflict and the beneficiaries of peace, Mr. Haysom said Afghanistan's current political transition represents an opportunity to institutionalize the role of women to ensure their perspectives and experiences can be a platform for peace.

"Let me acknowledge the progress that has been achieved over the past 12 years in Afghanistan in the protection of Afghan women and girls and their participation in national political life," he said, noting that the number of women in leadership positions and in electoral institutions has increased.

In addition to highlighting the progress made in recent years, the Deputy Special Representative called attention to the challenges that women in Afghanistan continue to face.

"Conservative norms discourage women's participation in public life," he stated, adding that



The Secretary-General's Deputy Special Representative, Nicholas Haysom, chairs a gathering of Afghan women as part of the Global Open Days observance in Kabul. (Photo: Sayed Muhammad Shah)

mechanisms designed to address violence against women have in some cases been ineffectually implemented.

"I want to reiterate and reaffirm the UN's commitment to doing what we can to promote women's inclusion in all political and peace processes," Mr. Haysom said. "I want to acknowledge, specifically, the role played by women and by civil society organizations in promoting women's participation in the peace and security agenda."

For her part, Ms. Husain underscored the remarks made by the Deputy Special Representative and called attention to the UN's ongoing work in supporting civil society and government institutions to consolidate gains in women's rights and secure a peaceful and inclusive future for all Afghans.

"We are at an optimal moment to increase the momentum of women's participation in all spheres of life," she said. "It is therefore critical that we focus on key issues that not only will set the tone for the next few years but also are fundamental to gender equality and women's empowerment."

Global Open Days provide a forum for dialogue between UN senior leadership and women's organizations worldwide on the implementation of UN Security Council resolution 1325, adopted in the year 2000. The Open Days were launched in 2010 to mark the tenth anniversary of the resolution, which outlines the role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflict and stresses

the importance of their equal participation in maintaining and promoting peace.

At the Kabul meeting, Afghanistan's Deputy Minister of Women's Affairs, Sayeda Mojgan Mostafavi, identified gains made during the past year for women participating in politics.

"We are at an important point in history to look back at our achievements and identify areas that require focus in the future," she said. "With a new government, we have to review the achievements of the last government and we have to design a new plan."

Ms. Mostafavi went on to explain that the Ministry of Women's Affairs, in collaboration with other ministries and civil society groups, has developed an action plan related to resolution 1325.

While the plan is designed to enhance women's participation in Afghan political and peace processes, she said, much more remains to be done. "We need to work together to identify gaps and the best possible ways to address them," she concluded.

Following the opening remarks at the Kabul meeting, participants deliberated about the obstacles facing women in Afghanistan, made recommendations about the way forward and asked the UN for increased technical and financial support in light of the upcoming 2015 parliamentary elections and the implementation of Afghanistan's action plan for resolution 1325.

Mr. Haysom and Ms. Husain reiterated the commitment of

the United Nations in supporting the work of government and civil society institutions to enhance women's contributions in Afghanistan.

"There is a unique opportunity to set out, once again and with clarity, the agenda of women and the importance of women's participation," said Mr. Haysom, encouraging civil society groups to work closely with the new government. "A new government means an ability to reschedule or to set out once more the imperative of women's participation and to find fresh ears to listen to what you have to say."

Other events, sponsored by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) to mark the Global Open Days, were held in the central province of Kapisa, the north-eastern province of Kunduz and the eastern city of Jalalabad, the capital of Nangahar province, among other areas.

With the goal of helping to close the gender gap for the women and girls who remain disempowered and marginalized at all levels of Afghan society, the UNAMA-backed events drew hundreds of participants to discuss a wide range of women's issues, including the progress made in the country with regard to the elimination of violence against women, the Afghan legislation that criminalizes acts of violence against women and harmful practices such as child marriage, forced marriage, rape and beating.



# Roses replace poppies in Nangarhar



The Orzala perfume factory offers higher prices for roses than farmers can typically earn for growing poppies, thereby encouraging farmers in Nangarhar to give up poppy cultivation and plant roses instead. (Photo: Shafiqullah Waak)

**With strong demand for roses in Afghanistan, the Orzala perfume-manufacturing company has encouraged farmers in the eastern province of Nangarhar to give up poppy cultivation and plant roses.**

As in many other parts of the world, roses are symbols of love in Afghanistan. In Afghan literature, poets use roses as metaphors for the beauty of their beloveds. In daily life here, roses are given to dear ones as expressions of love, respect and humility. They embellish wedding venues and beautify the vehicles that carry brides and grooms. Roses are used not only for decorative purposes in houses and offices, but also to show affection for political leaders and to express reverence at the shrines of saints.

Against the backdrop of a strong demand for roses in Afghanistan, the Orzala perfume-manufacturing company has encouraged farmers in the eastern province of Nangarhar to give up poppy cultivation and plant roses.

Mohammad Omar, a farmer in the Achin district of Nangarhar, originally grew poppies, but eight years ago began cultivating roses. He says he is happy with the income. In fact, he says, his income increased significantly after switching from poppies to roses.

"I used to collect three kilo-

grams of opium from 2,500 square metres of poppy fields, resulting in 50,000 Afghanis," he says. "Now, I collect about 2,400 kilograms of roses from the same land, resulting in 120,000 Afghanis."

The perfume factory purchases roses from nearby farmers at a significantly higher rate than farmers can earn from cultivating poppies. "We buy roses from hundreds of farmers throughout the province," says the owner of the factory, Abdullah Arsala.

Once purchased from the farmers, the factory extracts rose oil for producing Orzala perfume. The signature blend of essential oils and other natural ingredients are first prepared in Jalalabad, then shipped to France for final production. The perfume is an Afghan-French venture named after a feminine first name "Orzala," which means sunshine in Pashto and gold in French.

The head of the Agricultural



Opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan reached record levels during 2013 and 2014. Reports from UNODC indicate that the country is still the largest producer and cultivator of opium in the world. (Photo: Eric Kanalstein)

Extension section of the Achin district of Nangarhar, Muhammad Tawfeeq Naseri, says poppy cultivation has drastically decreased in certain Nangarhar districts as a result of farmers turning to roses. "Rose plantation is an easier job and more cost-effective than poppy cultivation," he says.

The Orzala perfume factory provides jobs to more than 250 men and women in the area. Mr. Arsala says that the trend of farmers transitioning to roses not only has helped many boys and girls attend school, but also has had a direct impact on the crime rate.

While such business initiatives are affecting the overall poppy production in Afghanistan, reports from the United Nations Office for Drugs and Crimes (UNODC) indicate that the country is still the largest producer and cultivator of opium in the world.

Last year, in addition to this year, opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan reached record highs. UNODC's Opium Survey in 2014 indicated that farmers grew poppies on some 224,000 hectares of land, outstripping the earlier record in 2013 of 209,000 hectares, and representing a seven per cent increase over the previous year.

Nangarhar, once a poppy-free province in 2008, is one of the largest poppy-growing province in Afghanistan.

As some farmers are benefiting financially from the transition to roses, the Afghan government's Good Performers Initiative (GPI) programme is designed to benefit entire provinces. GPI was launched in 2007 with funding provided by the United States. Provinces that show progress in their poppy-eradication efforts are rewarded with US\$1 million each year for development projects.

## UN police adviser wins global award for work with Afghans



A police adviser serving with the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Shakti Devi, has won the International Female Peacekeeper Award for what the judges called "exceptional achievements."

In an environment in which the fate of women is entwined with and determined by complex political and social forces, Ms. Devi has worked not only to help victims of sexual- and gender-based violence, but also to establish Women's Police Councils, which serve as active forums for women police to seek professional support and advice.

Based in Afghanistan's western province of Herat, Ms. Devi has focused on cultivating principles of democracy in policing at the institutional level, and also on helping victims of sexual- and gender-based violence receive justice, either by arrest of suspects, by trial in court or through mediation.

The award, given to an outstanding female police peacekeeper serving in a UN peace operation, is organized in collaboration with the International Association of Women Police (IAWP) and delivered during IAWP's annual conference.

The objectives of the award include promoting an understanding of police in peace operations, highlighting the efforts of female police and increasing an understanding of the roles of women officers in various countries.

Ms. Devi, a police inspector from India, has served in Afghanistan since 2013.



# Afghanistan strengthens press freedoms

In addition to the rise in the number of Afghan media agencies, there has been rapid growth in the number of journalists' associations and networks designed to defend the rights of media personnel and advocate for press freedoms.

In the Shahr-e-Naw area of Kabul, new signs reading "Freedom of Speech Road" went up as part of an initiative of the Ministry of Information and Culture (MoIC) and media watchdogs ahead of the celebration of World Press Freedom Day and in recognition of the work of Afghan journalists.

"Freedom of speech is now institutionalized in Afghanistan; this will never be reversed," said Sayed Makhdoom Raheen, the Minister for Information and Culture, during the ceremony to inaugurate the new street signs. "This wouldn't have been possible without the relentless and brave struggle of our journalists and media organizations."

As in other parts of the world, press freedoms in Afghanistan are the lifeblood of democracy, not only encouraging social, political and economic deliberation, but also fostering accountability for good governance. As such, press freedoms are tightly linked to basic human rights.

The Afghan Constitution allows for freedom of the press and of expression. The country's Mass Media Law, which came into effect in 2009, prohibits censorship and guarantees the citizens the right to obtain information.

The draft of another significant law, Access to Information, has been approved by the Cabinet Council and the Lower House of the Afghan Parliament. Drafted by civil society organizations and human rights networks, the legislation, if made law, will be applied to state institutions at the national and subnational level.

During the Taliban regime's rule, the media sector was restricted to one radio broadcaster and a limited number of newspapers and magazines. Since 2001, the sector has grown dramatically. According to Afghan media watchdog Nai, nearly 100 television channels are currently registered with the Ministry of Information and Culture, with more than 50 of them actively broadcasting. There are now 172 radio



The Minister for Information and Culture, Sayed Makhdoom Raheen, addresses the media after naming a Kabul road "Freedom of Speech" as part of a series of events to celebrate Press Freedom Day. (Photo: Fardin Waezi)

*"The presence of such a huge number of media institutions, hundreds of journalists, relevant legislation and the active performance of the media are the biggest achievements during last 13 years in Afghanistan."*

—Mujeeb Khilwatgar

stations, and some 300 newspapers and magazines currently in print or online.

"The presence of such a huge number of media institutions, hundreds of journalists, relevant legislation and the active performance of the media are the biggest achievements during last 13 years in Afghanistan," says the Executive Director of Nai, Mujeeb Khilwatgar.

In addition to the rise in the number of media agencies, there has been rapid growth in the number of journalists' associations and networks designed to defend the rights of media personnel and advocate for press freedoms. Nine of these advocacy institutions last year formed an umbrella organization, the Afghanistan Journalists' Federation.

Along with these developments, social media use is growing in the country, particularly among young people. Smartphones have made it easy to receive news headlines on mobile devices and share opinions on Facebook and Twitter. The prevalence 3G services and the availability of less expensive internet access have fostered eyewitness citizen reporting in the country.

However, journalists and affili-

ates of media organizations continue to be threatened in the ongoing military conflict. According to Nai, in 2013 alone there were 78 cases of violence against journalists, with 50 of these involving Afghan security forces, eight involving the Taliban and five involving international security forces. The 78 cases include six journalists killed, four wounded and 35 physically assaulted.

"Increased insecurity has taken a toll on freedom of speech in the country," says Nai's director.

The Afghan Journalist Safety Committee (AJSC), in its August report, documented a 60 per cent increase in cases of violence against journalists during the first six months of the year. "If we compare with the first six months of 2013, we have a 60 per cent increase in the cases of violence against journalists in 2014, which is deeply concerning," says Najeeb Sharifi, AJSC's director.

Following the killing of two international journalists, Anja Niedringhaus and Kathy Gannon, in the south-eastern Afghan province of Khost on 4 April, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for the country, Jan Kubiš, said he was "outraged by

this terror attack."

In recognition of increasing threats to journalists, this year's World Press Freedom Day focused on defending the media from attacks on their independence and paying tribute to journalists who have lost their lives in the line of duty.

The world body's chief, Ban Ki-moon, and the Director-General of UNESCO, Irina Bokova, in a joint message for the World Press Freedom Day this year, called for more journalist protections.

"In many countries, journalists and other media workers face systematic obstacles to reporting the truth, ranging from censorship, arrest and imprisonment to intimidation, attacks and even assassination," the two UN officials said. "These outrageous abuses show that press freedom and the human rights it underpins are extremely fragile and must be actively defended."

In the wake of the celebrations of World Press Freedom Day, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan organized several roundtable discussions on media issues and to pay tribute to the martyred journalists. These roundtables were covered by the media in the southern province of Kandahar, the western province of Herat, the northern province of Balkh and the eastern province of Nangarhar.

The discussions involved media experts, academics, governmental officials, civil society representatives and UN officials. They shed light on issues related to press freedoms in Afghanistan, and paid tribute to the journalists for their bravery and sacrifices.





## VOX POPULI

UNAMA asked Afghans in different regions of the country  
*“What are your expectations from the new president?”*

## LAGHMAN

Muqadasa Miraj, medical doctor

“I hope our new president will draw more attention to peace, stability, reconstruction and job opportunities. Also, I hope he will continue to empower women by providing education and employment facilities. During last more than ten years, Karzai’s administration did a lot for women with the support of international community, and I hope the new government will continue to work to empower women.”



## KABUL

Fatana Bayat, construction company worker

“One of the commitments made in the Tokyo Conference was promoting the private sector in Afghanistan. However, the Afghan government has not taken many practical steps to meet this commitment, and no significant achievements have been made in this regard. My expectation from the new president is that he will promote the private sector in the country, keeping in mind gender balance so that women can play a more crucial role. Women make up half of the population, and can work shoulder-to-shoulder with men for improving economic activities in the country so that Afghan society can achieve sustainable development.”



## PAKTIKA

Manawar Khan, shopkeeper

“My expectations from the new president include upgrading my living standard, bringing peace and ensuring security. Most of our people face economic challenges and have minimal financial resources. The new president should provide working opportunities and put plans and policies into place that will increase people’s income and purchasing power. We are suffering. We are starving from hunger and have limited access to health and education services. The new president should eliminate all sorts of corruption. Paktika is a large province with huge economic potential, but the government isn’t using it for the people’s wellbeing. Our new government should develop plans to use our natural resources efficiently and work for peace and security.”



## KUNDUZ

Malang, restaurant owner

“I hope the next president will make our homeland stable, serve our nation, establish companies, rebuild the roads and develop villages. We don’t want a president who achieves power with our votes and then acts as he wishes, forgetting our hopes and expectations. I expect the next president to prioritize security in Afghanistan, disband the illegal armed groups and leave the guns only with responsible people.”



## KABUL

Waheeda Faizi, journalist

“It is true that the media sector has made significant advancements during the last 13 years, but the role women play in this field should be enhanced. My expectation from the new president is, first of all, approving the Access to Information law and, secondly, approving another law that would encourage women to become journalists by requiring media institutions to meet a quota of at least 30 per cent women in the workforce. In addition, people should be taught, through religious scholars and social leaders, that journalism is not a bad profession. This kind of education would help families encourage their women to work in this profession.”



## BALKH

Fraidoon Hemmat, college student

“My humble request to him is to focus on national unity as a first priority, as they’ve promised us a national unity government. I would want them to make a government for the people, not for themselves, and remove ethnic, religious and political divisions, and make a united Afghanistan, a united Afghan nation. This is how we could focus on economy, education, development and so forth. I don’t think any future government will be able to stand on its feet if it doesn’t prioritize national unity as the first thing on its to-do list.”



## KANDAHAR

Shafiullah Khan, student and youth activist

“I hope the new president will work for the welfare of the people and improve the economy. The new government should eliminate corruption because corruption is like a virus that will destroy the whole system. The military and other security institutions are equipped, and they can bring security to this war-torn country. We are tired of ongoing fighting and that is the reason that people came out of their homes in large numbers to cast their votes. Lastly, I would like the new government to provide job opportunities to the young people, especially those who graduate from universities and then become jobless.”



## HERAT

Sakhidat, day laborer

“I am a poor man supporting a family of seven people. I am the only provider. My request for the next president is to think about poverty and unemployment and have a plan for us. We are suffering and need support. Since the beginning of the election, our workload decreased. No one has come to hire us for construction projects. Everybody says it is because of the elections. We come here from early morning, and leave late in the afternoon without being able to buy bread for our family. We cannot earn money these days.”





# UN reports civilian casualties rising in 2014

From 1 January to 30 June 2014, UNAMA documented 4,853 civilian casualties, up 24 per cent over the same period in 2013. Included in the toll were 1,564 civilian deaths and 3,289 injuries.

The UN documented a shift in the nature of Afghan civilians being killed or injured this year, with ground combat surpassing improvised explosive devices (IEDs) as the leading cause of civilian casualties.

The 2014 Mid-Year Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, released in July by the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), indicated that ground engagements and crossfire hit children and women with unprecedented force, with associated child casualties more than doubling in the first six months of 2014, and with two-thirds more women being killed and injured by ground engagements compared to the figures from 2013.

"What the UN has documented over the first six months of 2014 and continuing through July, August and September has been an increase in civilian casualties compared to the previous year, but most critically an increase in civil-



UN reports indicate that IEDs used by insurgent groups are the second leading cause of civilian casualties. (Photo: Fardin Waezi)

ian casualties from what we call ground engagements and civilians caught in the crossfire between the Afghan forces on one hand and the insurgents on the other," said UNAMA's Human Rights Director, Georgette Gagnon.

Ms. Gagnon also said the IEDs planted near civilian communities is "extremely worrying."

"Our message to insurgents has been to cease planting IEDs in public areas and also stop using mortars and other weapons in an indiscriminate way that kills and injures civilians," said Ms. Gagnon.

The UNAMA report, prepared in coordination with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for

Human Rights, noted that from 1 January to 30 June 2014, UNAMA documented 4,853 civilian casualties, up 24 per cent over the same period in 2013. Included in the toll were 1,564 civilian deaths and 3,289 injuries, up 17 and 28 per cent from the same time period last year, respectively.

Ground engagements caused two out of every five civilian casualties in 2014, amounting to 39 per cent of all civilian casualties, which is an increase of 89 per cent over 2013 figures. Total child civilian casualties increased 34 per cent, while total women civilian casualties increased 24 per cent.

IEDs used by anti-Government

elements, the second leading cause of civilian casualties in 2014, were behind 1,463 civilian casualties, up seven per cent from 2013, the highest number of civilian casualties from this tactic recorded in a six-month period since UNAMA started tracking these figures in 2009.

Voicing his concern over the rising toll of the Afghan conflict on civilians, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon noted, in his latest report on the situation in the country, that civilians are increasingly caught in the crossfire, "with alarming increases in the number of deaths and injuries among women and children." The UN chief also said the world body is seeking engagement with all parties to the Afghan conflict "to help alleviate the impact of the armed conflict on civilians."

UNAMA's Ms. Gagnon said the UN has been making "very strong statements" to all parties to address the situation of women and children being affected by ground engagements.

As the international military forces prepare to draw down, the UNAMA human rights chief said Afghanistan's international partners should make sure that the Afghan forces have the directives, resources and training required to protect civilians and are provided "tactical assistance" on counter-IED efforts and efforts to address explosive remnants of war.

## Afghan experts address violence against women

A UN-backed event drew representatives from governmental bodies, civil society and academia to discuss improving mechanisms designed to address violence against women.

Given the major role played by mediation in cases of violence against women in Afghanistan, a range of experts gathered at a United Nations-backed conference in the Afghan capital of Kabul on 16 September to develop recommendations to improve judicial responses to such cases along with mediation guidelines where appropriate.

Hosted by Afghanistan's Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA), and supported by the Ministry of Finance and the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), the event—entitled Development of Mediation Guide-



Participants at a UN-backed conference discuss recommendations to improve judicial responses to violence against women. (Photo: Fardin Waezi)

lines Conference—drew representatives from governmental bodies, civil society and academia.

Informal approaches have offered women victims of violence a more accessible, faster, less expensive and culturally acceptable solution to seek justice and remedies compared to opting for a criminal justice process that is often viewed

as slow, corrupt and distant, according to experts.

Traditional mediation approaches stem from existing practices and are considered to be acceptable within religious and cultural frameworks. However, mediation is typically conducted by various entities without any standards, guidelines or training,

factors that raise concerns regarding women being unfairly treated in the process.

The Afghan Minister of Women's Affairs, Hosn Bano Ghaznifar, was one of the speakers at the Kabul event. She outlined how existing mediation mechanisms have not been effective in criminal cases that involve physical violence, murder or sexual assault. These cases, she said, should be adjudicated in a manner more appropriate than informal mediation.

In particular, the Minister cited changes in Afghanistan's approach to the Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW) law as steps in the right direction.

Enacted in 2009 through a Presidential decree, the EVAW law criminalizes acts of violence against women and harmful practices including child marriage, forced marriage, forced self-immolation, baad (giving away a woman or girl to settle a dispute) and 18 other acts of violence against women including rape and beating. It also specifies punishment for perpetrators.



In her remarks at the conference, the head of UNAMA Human Rights, Georgette Gagnon, outlined findings from the world body's annual reports on the EVAW law. The reports, she noted, identify shortfalls in the implementation of the law by police, attorneys and courts across the country.

Released in December last year, UNAMA's "A Way to Go: An Update on Implementation of the Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women in Afghanistan" indicated that Afghan authorities registered more cases of violence against women in 2013—but prosecutions and convictions under the law remained low, with most cases settled by mediation.

Both Afghan and UN findings indicate that while many cases of violence against women have been addressed through traditional mediation, programmatic changes to judicial approaches to the EVAW law would be more effective in dealing with the issue.

"We expect that the outcome of this discussion today will strengthen the work of all of you, of all the institutions working so hard on eliminating violence against women," said Ms. Gagnon. "Our most recent report found achievements in how the government was implementing the EVAW law in 22 provinces, but there are still problems; too many cases of violence against women are being mediated at all levels."

Citing the use of mediation for cases that do not meet the specific EVAW law requirements, Ms. Gagnon said mediation should only be done when the women involved give consent.

"We hope and expect the process today will lead to some standards that will be implemented by all those people involved in violence-against-women cases," she stressed.

However, she added, while mediation may be appropriate in some cases, the United Nations, together with the MoWA, found that mediation is still being used in some serious cases of violence against women, such as rape, murder and trafficking.

"This is not permitted under the EVAW law," the UNAMA official said. "These very serious cases are to be prosecuted in the courts."

Urging those present to establish common standards and procedures across all judiciary mechanisms for effectively using mediation and applying the EVAW law, Ms. Gagnon said the United Nations stands ready to support all efforts in assisting Afghan women who are suffering from violence.

# UN humanitarian officials meet displaced in Khost ahead of winter

Since June, military operations in Pakistan's North Waziristan Agency, which borders Afghanistan, have caused large scale population displacements, with thousands of people crossing into Afghan provinces.

In a show of support for thousands of displaced families, the United Nations' top humanitarian official in Afghanistan, Mark Bowden, visited the country's south-eastern province of Khost on 29 October to underscore the world body's commitment to them as the Afghan winter approaches.

Mr. Bowden was accompanied by the head of the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Afghanistan, Bo Schack. The UN delegation met with community leaders in the Gulan camp for the conflict-displaced in Khost and discussed their needs, including fuel, power and shelter, for the coming winter.

Since June, military operations in Pakistan's North Waziristan Agency, which borders Afghanistan, have caused large scale population displacements, with thousands of people crossing into Afghan provinces. According to figures from UNHCR, displacements are continuing, with the number of displaced families now estimated at 33,000.

"You have my sympathy, and I understand that this is not the first time that you had to move from Waziristan," said Mr. Bowden, who is also the Secretary-General's Deputy Special Representative



UN Humanitarian Coordinator, Mark Bowden, speaks at a camp of conflict-displaced people in Khost. (Photo: Sayed Muhammad Shah)

in Afghanistan.

"I hope that we can all work toward a situation where a peaceful life in this area and in this region are possible, securing for everybody a better long-term future," he added.

Khost Provincial Governor Abdul Jabbar Naemi asked for help with the newly displaced. He told the UN delegation that the growing number of displaced is putting pressure on Khost's residents and the provincial government.

"In Tanai district, more than 300 families have newly arrived," he said, highlighting the influx of people in one of Khost's many overburdened districts. "We don't have any kind of facilities or any kind of stock in the district to offer these newly arrived families in the cold weather."

The visit follows a meeting between Mr. Bowden and President Ashraf Ghani, who expressed concern and asked the UN to share its plans to support the most vulnerable Afghans in the coming harsh winter months.

In speaking with the displaced families, Mr. Bowden, who later met with civil society groups in the area, expressed the world body's commitment to do everything in its power, with its Afghan partners, to assist those most at risk through the winter.

"We will look, within our means, at how we can support your needs," said Mr. Bowden, adding that he will convey their concerns, in particular, about education and support for their children, to authorities in the Afghan capital, Kabul.

In discussion with camp leaders, UNHCR's Mr. Schack outlined plans for winter support for vulnerable Afghans and said that the UN agency is working with the humanitarian community and Afghan partners to draft a government-led response plan.

UNHCR is prepared to provide assistance, including clothing, roofing, tents, blankets and fuel, for some 16,000 families, and is ready to distribute some 6,500 toolkits that include pick-axes, shovels, wheelbarrows and sandbags to help families winterize their shelters.

The World Food Programme, the World Health Organization and the UN Children's Fund are coordinating relief efforts to deliver tents and other items to the most vulnerable.

Recent reports from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs indicate that conflict and natural disasters have left many Afghans living without proper shelter. These include families who lost their homes during spring floods in the north, refugee families from North Waziristan who have fled their homes to Khost and the neighbouring province of Paktika, and families displaced internally in the last year due to conflict.



Residents of the Gulan camp for conflict-displaced people in Khost province build new shelter ahead of the harsh Afghan winter. (Photo: Sayed Muhammad Shah)