

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

Strategic Communication and Spokespersons Unit, Kabul, Afghanistan

**Transcript**<http://unama.unmissions.org>

## TRANSCRIPT

### Media Encounter with the United Nations Secretary-General's Deputy Special Representative for Afghanistan, Nicholas Haysom

(near verbatim; edited for clarity)

Kabul – Saturday, 21 June 2014

#### Participants:

- **UN Deputy Special Representative for Afghanistan Nicholas Haysom**
- **UNAMA Strategic Communication and Spokespersons Unit Deputy Director Ari Gaitanis**

**Ari Gaitanis:** Ladies and gents, as per the email, Nicholas Haysom, the deputy head the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), is to give a few remarks about the current situation and will also take a few questions afterwards.

**Nicholas Haysom:** We thought this would be useful just to find an occasion to address you collectively as a number of you have asked as to what the UN's attitude would be to assisting in the resolution of this current political impasse, particularly as both Dr. Abdullah Abdullah and President (Hamid) Karzai have suggested the full involvement of the UN.

So to clarify the UN's position, and I think the position of the international community, is that we want to reassure the Afghan people that we stand ready to assist them and to support them in resolving this political impasse. Subject to this reservation – that this is a process which we respect as an Afghan-led process, Afghan-managed process and we would not want to take steps which would be seen as interfering or substituting the UN for Afghan leadership – but subject to agreement by stakeholders on a role for the UN and the ways in which we would perform that role, we of course stand ready to assist in any way.

I should emphasize that we have been and are continuing to engage with the candidates, the candidates' teams, observers, politically influential people, the Government and all other relevant stakeholders in trying to find ways of bringing the parties closer together and in forging an agreement and building trust between the election management bodies and the candidates and the public.

In regard to our position, which was clearly stated the other day, that we believe that the task ahead of us is to have the candidates re-engage fully in the electoral process. We would want to emphasize that there is no other way of electing a legitimate leader. There is an electoral process, which was enacted by parliament, a framework that has been agreed by stakeholders and subscribed to by the candidates.

In our view, the Afghan people can feel proud of their record on June the 14<sup>th</sup> and turning out to vote. The task of the process is to protect and ensure that their opinions are properly respected through that process.

Having said that, it's clear that the electoral process has itself to work with certain electoral timelines. In our view, that does not mean that there shouldn't be steps taken to ensure the greatest transparency, the greatest integrity and work of the Commissions in the fullest consultation with both candidates. We would look to the Commissions to demonstrate clearly the lessons which can be learnt from this process so far.

In regard to the demonstrations which were planned for today, I think expressing one's self publicly, expressing one's concerns is a perfectly democratic right. Although, in honesty, we should share with you our concerns that should any violence emanate from the demonstrations it could set back the process, make the task of the trust-building more difficult, it could lead to spiral of instability; it could be corrosive for the morale of the Afghan National Security Forces, whom we urge to act with full neutrality and professionalism at this difficult time.

We would also note that we think the public itself have some responsibilities and draw attention to what we think is a disturbing tone in some of social media, and we would call upon supporters of the candidates to refrain from inflammatory statements or statements which promote a divisive ethnic mobilization.

Just to emphasize once again: going forward, we are going to be encouraging the candidates and the candidate teams to engage with each other, and with the election management bodies, hopefully, in the task of building trust and confidence in the process. We understand that the announcement of the partial preliminary results will be withheld today, for the next few days, and we hope that this would be such a confidence-building measure.

### QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

**BBC News:** When you talk about assistance, what options are available to you to assist?

**Nicholas Haysom:** We think the most important assistance we can give now is to provide a bridge between those who need to be talking to each other. Clearly, what is required in this case is not only a conversation but some agreed modalities on going forward, not at the insistence simply of one party or the other, but something that is agreed between them.

**BBC News:** We are not talking about the recount, just to be clear?

**Nicholas Haysom:** We don't rule out anything that the Afghans decide upon... there hasn't been a count. So as yet the issue of a recount hasn't risen.

**Shamshad TV [translated from Pashto]:** You talked about assistance. When are you going to start that and how? At the end of the day, if one of the candidates again loses and then doesn't accept the results, what would be your reaction?

**Nicholas Haysom:** We are talking to the candidates even as we speak, and to their teams. And at least part of the message that we have for them – and have had really since the outset – is that there will be a winner and there will be a loser and what we expect of the candidates is to exhibit statesmanship, not gamesmanship.

But, for all that, it is also important when candidates express concerns and have worries, that one is seen to address them, we will also be looking at ways in which extra scrutiny can be brought to bear on the ballots to give people confidence in the results itself.

Can I just respond to the BBC question, just to add a reflection, and that is this: these elections were one of the most intensively observed – but observed essentially by candidate agents. Both candidate teams had 50,000 or more observers covering the vote.

As such, it's a system which really relies on the candidates observing the election and complaining when there is a fraud committed and so on. That essentially happens not through the recount as such – although a recount can be important, and auditing, and the way in which you tally to try and detect fraud – but essentially a very important part of that process is adjudication on the what the observers allege they have seen. Of course, we would be anxious that both parties must be involved in that process because it relies essentially on the parties to drive and ensure justice is done.

**New York Times:** In late 2012, President Karzai pretty much kicked internationals off the electoral complaints commission. Seems like a sudden reversal to ask the UN in, to essentially help adjudicate the fraud of what should be an Afghan-led process. If you guys do get involved to some extent, in adjudicating the fraud, are you worried that undermines the Afghan sort of democratic system because it couldn't [inaudible] handle on it itself?

**Nicholas Haysom:** When the issue arose as to whether the UN should participate in the complaints machinery, we made our view clear, which is that this was not a role that we were asking for, that it is not unusual for countries as an expression of their sovereignty to demand that only nationals participate in the complaints machinery. However, we also made it clear that if Afghans on their own made the choice that they wanted us to play a role, which would somehow help in the process, we would do that. I think that remains our position.

**New York Times:** Are you worried that in having to get involved, are you worried about what that says about Afghans' capacity have a free and fair elections?

**Nicholas Haysom:** Quite frankly, we have very firmly stated that we will walk with Afghans down this difficult road in this political transition. If it's their decision, and they tell us what we can do, and provided it has broad agreement – it's not a role which has the support of only one party – then we would do what we could do to assist. Let me just, as a final statement on that question, say that it would be much better for Afghans to find the solution themselves and we would respect that, of course.

**TOLONEWS [translated from Dari]:** I have two questions. First of all, how rightful, in your view, are the demands of Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, and secondly, what are your suggestions to put an end to this impasse?

**Nicholas Haysom:** Our first suggestion is for the campaign teams to agree on the best way to reassure each other that the vote will be properly counted, detecting and excising fraudulent votes. In regard to his other demands, there's a demand which relates to the Chief Executive Officer of the IEC [Independent Election Commission], we will make it clear that the international community has always supported the impartiality of that Commission, and the accountability of its senior officials for the way they do their work.

Having said that, the way to resolve disputes over any official's conduct is through due process, it can't be simply the demand of one or other candidate, cherry-picking which of the officials it wants to work there. So we always wanted to see a due process in this. But having said that, we would of course respect an Afghan decision on how to resolve it and will continue to insist on impartiality and the highest standard by the senior officials of the IEC.

In regard to the second demand, that there be an explanation given as to how the figure of seven million estimated voters was arrived at, I understand a full explanation, together with a formula used, was

provided to both candidates' teams some days ago and I would have hoped that the candidates teams would have acknowledged that, but they don't seem to have.

**Wall Street Journal:** Mr. Haysom, with one of the candidates out of the country, does that make the process of building bridges more difficult?

**Nicholas Haysom:** I understand he is out of the country for medical reasons and he's due back tomorrow night. So, I don't see that as an impediment. Both of them have leadership embedded in their electoral campaign teams and we are engaging with those electoral campaign teams as well as with the leaders when we can get hold of them.

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