

PRESS CONFERENCE (near verbatim transcript)

Staffan de Mistura, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan

Kabul – 12 June 2010

Staffan de Mistura: Thank you for being here. I would like to start again with what we have been somewhat interrupting for a while: a regular opportunity of talking to each other. Things are going to move faster in the next few months and I think you need to hear the voice of the UN. Each time we will try to have a special theme, but it will depend on circumstances.

So let me start with two main points, but of course questions can come up on any subject.

Apart from one important day which we should not forget today—as you know today is the anniversary of the women’s conference and there is an important opportunity for all of us to remember. We did this earlier the whole morning with senior active women in Afghanistan, in order to devise a strategy on how they can continue bringing forward their message, which is the message of a better situation for women in this country.

We came to the conclusion that the best way for women in Afghanistan to count more is to be more counted, in other words to participate actively in the forthcoming elections.

Now, let me get to two points related to the Peace Jirga which are of political relevance.

The first point is that the Peace Jirga was a success according to everyone internationally and I believe also nationally, but certainly internationally.

The Peace Jirga was a step forward in the right direction. It was also a sign of unity among those who were inside the tent, and a message to those who are outside the tent to come inside the tent.

There were many concrete signals sent by the Jirga. One of them is definitely an active moving on of the Peace Commission, because one has to hit the iron while it is hot and trying to bring the message into concrete movement.

Then, among the several proposals and decisions to move forward, two in particular which we are seeing some movement, or should be seeing some movement, on. One is the sanctions list or what some people call here the ‘blacklist.’ Let’s clarify one point: this is a list of 137 national Afghans, listed as individuals, who are on the sanctions list of Resolution 1267.

The Security Council Resolution says that all Member States should participate actively in maintaining and updating – I repeat updating – the list created following the Resolution. Updating means taking on or taking off names based on additional new information. Towards the end of this month such updating is expected to take place, and it is not a secret that there is currently in Kabul a special group which is coming from the Security Council 1267 to work on this.

We are not going to prejudge the conclusions of this group and neither of the Security Council because, at the end of the day, it is in the hands of the Security Council.

But the fact that it is taking place so soon after the Peace Jirga and so soon after the appeal to look seriously at this list is a sign of pro-activity which we welcome.

There are four points that we need to be bear in mind. The first one is that if we want the Peace Jirga to produce results, we need to keep momentum. Second point, the aim is not war, it is reconciliation. And reconciliation, third point, can only take place through constructive inclusion. And that's what we hope to see taking place in the near future in order to move forward based on clear indications and conditions that the Peace Jirga came up with, such as the respect and acknowledgement of the Constitution and the disconnection from al Qaeda.

Next point, which also came up among operational points related to the Peace Jirga follow-up/momentum is the issue about detentions. There is a special committee which has been established following the Peace Jirga. We welcome that and we are ready to support and help.

The issue about the detentions is an important and urgent one and can be part of those signals of confidence-building that are required in the process of follow-up to the Peace Jirga. Of course, this needs to be done with open criteria so that if and when this takes place – we hope it will take place soon – the criteria applied will also be utilised for those detained without legal basis who are not necessarily politically connected.

The bottom line – and that is the theme of today's messaging – is that the momentum on the Peace Jirga, which was a success, needs to be maintained. And the way to maintain it is to have constant incremental signals that move in the direction of dialogue until we reach the conference of Kabul, which we will discuss the next time we meet.

We are here to help the Afghan authorities to go through this period by helping them to maintain the momentum and supporting it to go on.

Next month will be crucial and therefore every week is an important one. Thank you.

Questions and Answers:

Ariana TV [translated from Dari]: It seems that your remarks show that you are taking this issue seriously and making serious efforts, in particular with regard to delisting of some of the Afghan Taliban leaders who are on the list, like Mullah Omar and Hekmatyar. Do you think this will increase the hopes of the people that these people will be de-listed?

Second, with regard to the prisoners, as you know, the resignation of the head of NDS, who disagreed with President Karzai on the release of such people. Do you think there are some people who want to release such people who dress in suicide vests? Don't you think there are two groups of people within the Government, one who wants peace and the others who don't?

Staffan de Mistura: I will not comment on the internal politics of a sovereign country like Afghanistan. What I can tell you is that the delisting was one of the clear messages coming from the Peace Jirga and that concrete follow-up is taking place on that. The UN is listening to what the Peace Jirga is saying. Some of the people in the list may not be alive anymore. The list may be completely outdated. There has been a long-awaited timing for this and now is the right time.

At the end of day it is the Security Council's privilege.

Regarding detentions, as I said, there was a common feeling even among my human rights colleagues that there were many people who are detained without legal basis, and that could be a possible criteria along which one judges both the deliberation of those who were detained both on the political ground or other ground from both prisons, the national and international ones. Certainly it was a clear message from the Peace Jirga and we cannot ignore it.

New York Times: Could you give sort of interpretation how this sanctions committee is going about the work? Are they talking with the Afghan Government, other stakeholders, or ISAF to get their recommendations? How will that process go forward? I assume that at the end of this they make recommendations to the Security Council. What sort of time frame would that be?

Staffan de Mistura: This group of people is a very serious group of people who have been dedicating their work and high level of professionalism on this – 1267 – for several years.

And they are doing exactly what you were either suggesting or describing. They are doing meetings with Afghan authorities, Afghan stakeholders and with all the international stakeholders in order to be assisted in understanding better the current status and what types of recommendation they can make to the Security Council.

Regarding timing, you are right. I am personally delighted that the timing of the visit coincides with the follow-up to the Peace Jirga and therefore it is also extremely timely from a political perspective in view of the current environment.

The review is due by the end of the month. But in view of an extremely complicated situation and the highly timely aspect of their visit, this may perhaps be prolonged by a little bit - but that is not up to us – in order to have the best possible assessment. Because this is not routine, this is an assessment that takes place at a time where this is linked to a very delicate and important period in Afghanistan. Remember this is the Security Council, but they are obviously hearing a message coming from Kabul.

Noor TV [translated from Dari]: My question relates to your remarks that peace needs to include “others.” Can you elaborate on what you mean by “others?” Is it the Taliban who should be included in power? And do you think the UN will accept those elements who are involved in the killings of the international soldiers as well as innocent people to be included in power?

Staffan de Mistura: Thank you. It is not for the UN to decide that. It is for the Afghan people and the Afghan authorities. One thing we are all hearing, especially between now and next year, that there is no military solution to this conflict. The Taliban will never win the war and the other side will never win either. The only way is some type of dialogue based on clear conditions. I didn't say pre-conditions, but conditions. Thank you.

Reuters: Thank you, Ambassador. I wonder if we can get your comments on the enhanced reconstruction that appears to have been twinned to the latest offensive in Kandahar and a description of any enhanced UN contribution to this effort?

Staffan de Mistura: Everybody is looking at Kandahar as a major example of the future. Kandahar is very important, because it has a lot of symbolism and therefore any type of military activity needs to be associated with a lot of support to the local population, including reconstruction. But Afghanistan is not only Kandahar, and in fact those areas which are calmer deserve and should have even increased assistance just because they have found a way through which they can keep stability. We don't want to reach the point when people may be thinking that instability brings aid. And I think we will talk about it at the Kabul Conference, and this could be one of the messages coming through.

ABC News: I just want to go back to the 1267 Committee. At first, when that committee started [inaudible] that committee was about terrorism, about preventing terrorism. Obviously there are a lot of politics involved, but do you believe that the look at that list, at who's on that list, should be as much about terrorism as it is about politics? Or should politics play a key part in the 1267 Committee's decisions.

I just want to ask a general question about the current state of the Karzai relationship with the West right now. We have seen a lot of reports about the President not having faith in the coalition to be able to bring peace. In general, could you speak about your feelings about the President's trust and confidence in the West?

Staffan de Mistura: Regarding the first point, the political aspect of all this is the sense of urgency of the need of looking at the list following the Peace Jirga and during this crucial period, aiming at dialogue. Having said that the Committee works based on its own criteria which are established by the Security Council. That is the answer to your first point. There is a political urgency and there is a criteria on which it works and it reports to the Security Council.

Sometimes the two sides combine in real life; sometimes one pushes the other one. It is up to the Security Council. The fact that it is taking place now shows a political attention to a political message, but the criteria are really up to the Security Council.

On the second point, you will understand, I will never try to paraphrase or interpret the feelings of a Head of State and particularly a Head of State of a country like Afghanistan. The only two things I can say is, one, the job of President Karzai, in my modest opinion, is probably one of the most delicate, dangerous and complicated ones in the current situation worldwide.

And the second one is that, whenever I have been meeting him, and I have been doing it regularly, I had a feeling of trust on his side but at the same time, rightly so, strong pride like every Afghan has about its own sovereignty.

This is going to be solved by the Afghans – we are guests.

Hasht-e-Subh [translated from Dari]: Has the Government of Afghanistan requested the United Nations to de-list certain people from that list? If so, which categories of those people will be included in delisting from those requested by the Government? Those being de-listed should be under clear criteria. If, supposing those people who are delisted and cannot adapt to those clear guidelines, like accepting the Constitution, and the second one, will they still be on the list?

Staffan de Mistura: I think you should be referring, like I did to, and you can easily do it in the local language, to the conclusions of the Peace Jirga. The Peace Jirga conclusions are clearly addressing the points you are referring to. And I am sure the international community will be, unavoidably, listening and being very careful to respect those

International freelance: You said that it is not the UN that has to decide but it is for the Afghan authorities and the people of Afghanistan to decide on the peace in the country. You also called the Peace Jirga a step in the right direction. Could you give the UN position on amnesty about the major crimes against humanity done by the Taliban and some who participated in the peace Jirga? What is the UN position on that? Does it really support amnesty against major crimes?

Staffan de Mistura: There is a human rights report, yearly, and there are several other occasions where the UN Human Rights Commission that is represented here draws the attention to the very issue you have been flagging. At the same time if we do believe in elections and we believe in better elections – *inshallah* next time – we should also recognise that at the end of the day those who sit in the Parliament are those elected by the voters. And that no one should be excluded from being elected unless they have been condemned by the judiciary, as it happens in our countries.

Peace needs to be made by everyone with everyone. Those accepted to be inside the tent and that accept the Constitution. One day, I am sure there will be a moment when Afghans having reached peace will be able to go through this type of transitional justice process that many countries have gone through. But the priority today is to go towards peace, otherwise we will see ongoing war which a non-option.

Al Jazeera: Can I ask you about the situation in Kandahar at the moment? The security situation, the humanitarian situation in the city and the province? How is security affecting your work there and how important do you think Kandahar is, how key is it, how much is solving the problems of Kandahar in solving the problems of the country?

Staffan de Mistura: Kandahar is very important. It has got a lot of symbolism, a lot of people and a lot of historical references - for the Afghan people and the international community. And we are concerned about potential humanitarian problems in Kandahar during the forthcoming months and about the increasing violence in Kandahar and around, and we are prepositioning assistance in case it is needed. But let's remember that Afghanistan is not only Kandahar. That is why, while we are looking at Kandahar, let us not forget rest of country.

Thank you very much. *Tashakor.*

Strategic Communication and Spokespersons Unit
United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA)
Kabul, Afghanistan

Tel: 079 000 6121; +39 083 124 6121
<http://unama.unmissions.org>

Subscribe online to ensure you receive news from UNAMA.