

UNAMA

United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

Strategic Communication and Spokespersons Unit, Kabul, Afghanistan

Press Conference

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PRESS CONFERENCE (near verbatim transcript)

Speakers:

Ambassador Ertuğrul Apakan, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Turkey to the United Nations

Ambassador Thomas Mayr-Hanting, Permanent Representative of Austria to the United Nations

Ambassador, Zahir Tanin, Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to the United Nations

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

Kabul – 24 June 2010

Opening remarks by Ambassador Ertuğrul Apakan, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Turkey to the United Nations

Distinguished members of the press,

The visit has been very productive, thanks to the excellent organization of UNAMA. It was also thanks to the sincerity of our interlocutors.

We held substantive talks with members of the executive and legislative branches, meeting with President Karzai, Foreign Minister Rassul, Speaker of the *Wolesi Jirga* Mr Qanuni and Chairs of the Standing Committees of Parliament, as well as members of the Cabinet. These included extensive interaction with Afghan institutions, including the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) and the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC). We also held useful discussions with civil society. We visited the NATO training mission. We also met with the main international stakeholders, including UN agencies, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and the European Union. During our visit to Jalalabad today, we met with local authorities, UN colleagues and families located in a returnee settlement.

During our contacts we reiterated the United Nations Security Council's support and enduring commitment to the people of Afghanistan and its Government in furthering peace, development and stability. We emphasized the central role of the United Nations in Afghanistan and expressed full support to and solidarity with the efforts of the United Nations Secretary-General, in particular through his Special Representative for Afghanistan, Staffan de Mistura, and UNAMA.

The visit was conducted at an important period after the Consultative Peace Jirga and before the Kabul Conference.

We were briefed on various challenges related to the legislative elections scheduled for 18 September. Free and fair elections are necessary. We welcome the strong participation of women candidates.

We emphasized the importance of economic and social development for the future of Afghanistan.

Afghan officials indicated their strong commitment to improve governance. We also welcomed the trend to improved local governance.

The 1267 (al-Qaeda and Taliban) Committee is in the process of finalizing its review of the consolidated list. This process includes all the entries concerning individuals and entities linked to the Taliban. The review is conducted on a case-by-case basis.

We encouraged the Afghan authorities to further their efforts to uphold the rule of law, human rights, in particular, women's and children's rights.

We stressed the importance of regional cooperation in political, security and economic areas. It was underlined by several Afghan authorities that regional cooperation is a central part of Afghanistan's foreign policy.

We also stressed the importance of combating the narcotics industry and trade.

We would like to thank the Afghan authorities and UNAMA for all the arrangements they made.

The international community will continue its solidarity and engagement with the Afghan people in furthering peace, development and stability.

Thank you.

Questions and Answers:

Staffan de Mistura: Thank you very much, Mr Ambassador. This statement will be distributed to all of you, both in English and in other languages. It is a little more extensive on the 1267 point. Now if there are any questions to any of the members of the Security Council or to the coordinator of the visit or to the current President of the Security Council, the Ambassador of Mexico. You are very welcome.

McClatchy Newspaper: Can you tell us how many people on the blacklist there are at the moment? And the second question is, the Peace Jirga decided that the Afghan Government must ask the UN Security Council to remove the leadership of the Taliban and Hezb-i-Islami from the blacklist. Is the UN Security Council going to de-list these individuals from the list, or not?

Ambassador Ertuğrul Apakan: Now I give the floor to Ambassador Thomas Mayr-Harting of Austria, who is chairing 1267 Committee.

Ambassador Thomas Mayr-Harting: Thank you Ambassador Apakan. I will briefly explain the procedures under which the Committee operates. The Committee is in the process of

conducting a review of all the entries on the list, of all people and all entities linked to al-Qaeda and the Taliban. This is a process that is not linked to present-day developments. It is a process that the Security Council asked the Committee to conduct in a decision at the end of 2008, and this is the process that we are now going through. In principle, this process is meant to be concluded, this review of all the entries, in the next few days or in the very next weeks. As the Ambassador of Turkey already said, it operates the review on a case-by-case basis. The Committee does not treat categories of people or groups of people. It deals with individual cases. And in this process, especially when it comes to the de-listing of people, the Committee bases itself on the following guiding principles: people who are to be delisted have to convincingly renounce violence; they have to lay down arms; have broken all links with al Qaeda; and fully accepted, in the cases of Taliban, the Afghan Constitution. For any de-listing to happen this requires the censuses of all 15 members of the Security Council. And it is evidently very important to have exact information that these criteria have been fulfilled, and in this instance of course the information that can be provided by the Government of Afghanistan is of paramount importance.

Tolo TV [translated from Dari]: How did you find the situation in Afghanistan during your visit? Are you concerned? The second question is with regard to de-listing. If the Government of Afghanistan provides the Security Council with enough evidence and meets the criteria that you mentioned earlier, will the de-listing take place? The third question is referred to the SRSG de Mistura about the final list of the candidates for the parliamentary elections. You expressed somehow your disappointment. Would you like to a little bit elaborate on that?

Ambassador Ertuğrul Apakan: Thank you. As I have already indicated in my remarks the visit took place in a friendly atmosphere. We also discussed how the continued international community support and commitment to the Afghan people, in cooperation with the Afghan Government and institutions will move forward. In that respect I believe that an Afghan-led process is going on, and it seems that after the Peace Jirga there is going to be the Kabul Conference. And there will be transition to an Afghan-led process. And there is a commitment from the part of the international community to support this process.

Ambassador Thomas Mayr-Hanting: To your question, there is no automaticity in this process. In every case in which a de-listing is demanded, by the Afghan Government or by another Member State of the United Nations, the Security Council committee has to evaluate the information before it. It is evident that in this process the information that the country of residence and nationality can provide in these cases, Afghanistan, is of very great importance. So the information we can get from the Afghan authorities is of great importance in this context. And at the end, of course, this information will be evaluated by each and every of the 15 members of the Security Council. So each of the 15 members has to be convinced by this information, because as I already explained the de-listing can only take place if there is consensus amongst the 15 members.

Staffan de Mistura: Regarding the vetting issue I think you saw the press release. And I do not have much to add to that. It showed the disappointment, showed concern but showed also that we are acknowledging the fact that President Karzai himself is concerned about it and is seriously trying to understand how the vetting by the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Defence and the NSD took place. These elections are important. Transparency is important. And therefore vetting is an important step. I will stop there.

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE): As the United Nations Security Council is visiting Afghanistan, this delegation happens every two years. If you compare today's Afghanistan with

two years before, what do you see? Do you see any development in terms of security and don't you think that the parliamentary elections will be postponed due to the insecurity in Afghanistan? And a question to the Austrian Ambassador, could you tell us specifically about the leaders of the dissidents, especially about Hekmatyar and Mullah Omar, is there any possibility for the removal of their names as well?

Ambassador Ertuğrul Apakan: With regard to the first question, I have to say that I was not present in 2008 with the Security Council trip. But what I recognize is that Afghanistan is going through a delicate period, but there is a fact that there is progress, and that progress is going on is my impression. For example yesterday we went to the military training centre and there is also a police training centre. These are the two good examples which Afghans efforts can build on.

Follow up from RFE: Is the security deteriorating or there is any development?

Ambassador Ertuğrul Apakan: I think it is improving. The situation in Afghanistan is improving. I am not speaking in one sector, I am speaking about Afghanistan.

Staffan de Mistura: I understand why you raised the point, because you are referring to the 94 per cent increase in incidents in the Security Council report of the Secretary-General. It referred to a statistical increase during this period. I would like to qualify it, because I know how the ambassador was referring to progress, because we need to qualify it. There is no contradiction between the two things, because the 94 per cent is a reality but it is connected to an increase of the military activities and insurgency activities. At a time when this is increasing, normally you see more incidents. There is another period, once this has increased, when the situation stabilizes. So when you look at it statistically it looks very big. Wait three months and we will talk about it again.

Whereas the improvement which is seen in the preparedness by the Afghan military, by the Afghan police, as the Ambassador was referring to, was very impressive- the increase of preparedness by Afghan police and Afghan army in order to defend their own country.

Ambassador Thomas Mayr-Hanting: I will not comment on specific cases. I will only once again explain the system under which we operate. In the ongoing review, every single entry on the list is reviewed; all names on the list are reviewed. For the Committee to consider the possibility of a de-listing, such a de-listing must have been requested either by the Afghan Government or by another member of the United Nations. In the case of such a de-listing being considered, the Committee bases itself on the criteria that I have already mentioned, and then every single one of the members of the Committee has to come to a decision, a national decision, on this issue and the decision can only be taken if there is consensus among all 15 members.

Wall Street Journal: I was just wondering – is the UN pulling back or cancelling help with the elections scheduled for September? I'm wondering considering the massive fiasco of last year's Presidential elections, why are you positive? Are there concerns or are you confident that there is going to be transparency in these elections and that they will run smoothly? Any thoughts?

Staffan de Mistura: Thank you. I will qualify that too because you are right to raise it. It was a question in the Security Council report – there was a mention of a UN sort of withdrawal. There is no UN withdrawal. What we have done is actually keep more or less the same number – we are close to 1,000 at present – that means international [staff]; 6,000 national [staff] who are as

important for us and as effective as internationals. The only thing is that what we have done, and this would have been done by anyone, is that when we have a peak of attention on elections we will bring more people dealing with elections – and those who are working on the computer, on the travel or on the payroll can do it from Kuwait, like any other organization. This is nothing to do with re-deployment or reduction. I just want to qualify this because I will do it also in New York when I will present the report.

Regarding the future elections – the last elections were not good. We know and everybody accepts that. The next elections need to be better. They are going to be led by the Afghans. The United Nations and the international community are going to work with them. And as you can see when there are issues that concern us we raise them – not at the last moment but in advance. We have two international commissioners, highly accepted, highly respected, who are part of the team. These elections are not going to be perfect but we are all working to make them much better than the previous ones. We cannot guarantee it – we will have to see on the security issues, which are a concern. But so far, so good. Thank you.

Agence France Presse: There are some reports that President Karzai presented to you a small group of Taliban on the blacklist that he wants to see de-listed. Do you confirm that, is that true?

Staffan de Mistura: The answer is – shall we say that at this moment there is no comment on that one. The Ambassador is waiting, like everyone else, for names and the qualifications about them. That is the status at the moment – waiting for it.

Ariana TV [translated from Dari]: Another question related to the list. The international community and 1267 Committee know that the people who are on the list are there on the basis of evidence that they are criminals. If these people are de-listed don't you think that the people of Afghanistan will lose their confidence in the United Nations Security Council?

Ambassador Thomas Mayr-Hanting: Let me explain the purpose of the list. It is not of a punitive nature. The purpose of the list is of a preventive nature. And the point of that kind of list is, and its nature, is that it has to be kept up to date. And it has to reflect the actual threat. That means that in cases where the need for this preventive action is no longer there, entities or people can be taken off the list. On the other hand where there is a new threat, new entries should be made to the list. It should always be seen in this balance. Names which are no longer necessary can be taken off and entries which are necessary but are not yet on the list should be put on.

Channel One [translated from Dari]: The question is to Ambassador Tanin, the Permanent Representative of the United Nations in New York. Has the Government of Afghanistan presented any list or identified any people to this delegation?

Ambassador Zahir Tanin: As far as the issue of people being de-listed is concerned, we of course have the names of the people on the list. To be de-listed they have to renounce violence, quit their links to al-Qaeda and respect the Constitution of Afghanistan. This issue has been something that has been pursued by the Government of Afghanistan on several occasions, including at the Consultative Peace Jirga. At the recent meeting with the UN Security Council, President Karzai raised this issue with the members and also asked their assistance with regard to those individuals who are driving the peace process and have denounced violence.

President Karzai expressed his willingness and support regarding this issue and any decision that might lead to de-list those people who can join the peace process. He will be behind that and he will support that process. Also on the issue of de-listing or the black list, it is not a political decision. It has to do with the criteria as the Austrian Ambassador laid out, it has to do with the information provided by the Government and during this visit there was no list submitted by President Karzai to this delegation, but the issue was raised. The Afghan authorities are going to work with the Committee and are ready to give the list when it is necessary.

Ambassador Ertuğrul Apakan: Thank you for your attendance, for your attention and for your questions. We wish you all the best and a better Afghanistan in the future.

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