



UN Day marked in Paktya

4 November 2010 - UN Day was marked on Sunday 31 October in Gardez, the provincial capital of Paktya province.

The event under the banner of "UN Role in the Southeast Region" was aimed at raising people's awareness of the activities of United Nations agencies in the region by providing UN agencies the opportunity to inform the people about their activities.

Organized by UNAMA-Southeast Region Strategic Communication Spokespersons Unit, the event was held at the municipality hall and was attended by students and teachers from Paktya University, Abdul Haya Gardezi Higher Secondary school, media correspondents and representatives of all UN agencies in the Southeast Region.

Addressing the event, Namik Heydarov of UNAMA Southeast Region's Aid Coherence Unit said, "Since the very beginning, UN has remained very active in this country in one way or the other and is playing a major part in developing basic social services, sustainable livelihoods and infrastructure."

"For this purpose, UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), UN Development Programme (UNDP), UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), and UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), UN-Children Fund (UNICEF), the UN World Food Programme (UNWFP) and UN World Health Organization (UNWHO) are ever-present in various aspects of Afghanistan's social and economic life," added Mr Heydarov.

During the event, representatives of UN agencies in the Southeast Region presented their activities to the participants.

Mohammad Ismael Larway, an independent journalist said, "Today's event revealed how much the UN agencies are closely working with the Afghan government, even providing its performance information to the general masses. As an Afghan, I expect other donor agencies functioning in the Southeast Region to coordinate their activities with and support the Afghan government."

"For the first time when I listened during the UN Day celebration, I was delighted to learn about the UN. I learned much about the UN's role and quenched my thirst of UN information," said Islamuddin, a Paktya university student.

By Dilawar Khan Dilawar, UNAMA

Staffan de Mistura Statement on establishing new UNAMA operations centre in Kabul

6 November 2010 - Today the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) established a new operations centre in the capital Kabul.

This new centre will be the hub of UNAMA's mission, and will enable us to increase our support to the people and Government of Afghanistan to help them achieve sustainable peace.

We thank Ambassador Radinck J. van Vollenhoven, who today handed us the keys to the former Embassy of the Government of the Netherlands, to enable UNAMA to open this new operations centre.

We also especially thank the people and the Government of The Netherlands who have generously supported the United Nations in our arrangements to establish this centre.



UNICEF and WHO support Afghan government to immunize 7.8m children against polio

7 November 2010 - The Ministry of Public Health, with the support of UNICEF, the World Health Organization and civil society partners is conducting this year's final round of National Immunization Days during 7-9 November to immunize 7.8 Million children less than five years of age against polio.

So far this year, 19 polio cases have been recorded compared to 28 cases during the same period last year, resulting in 32% decrease. Polio has been eradicated in all but four countries, namely Pakistan, India, Nigeria and Afghanistan.

In 2010, 4 rounds of National Immunization Days and another 4 rounds of Sub-National Immunization Days – targeting mainly the southern parts of the country – were planned in Afghanistan.

An added intervention, during the upcoming round, is administering Vitamin A to children between 6-59 months of age. Seven million children from this age group are estimated to be reached by this initiative.

"Considering the significant decrease of polio cases this year, I urge my compatriots to participate in this year's final round of National Immunization Days, Vitamin A is critical to prevent respiratory diseases during winter," said Dr Suraya Dalil, acting Minister of Public Health.

"Combining Vitamin A along with polio demonstrates ways in which we can reach vulnerable children with simple health interventions while also ensuring that the poliovirus has fewer opportunities to cripple children in this country," said Gopal Sharma, UNICEF OIC Representative to Afghanistan.

"What we are currently initiating and discovering by combining polio eradication efforts with other public health interventions is very interesting. We introduced deworming in the last polio campaign and Vitamin A in the upcoming one. Combining interventions leads to cost savings, increased outreach and greater demand for both.

Polio – with its broad network, resources, political commitment, mechanisms, and momentum – can and should be used as a catalyst to solving other public health problems in Afghanistan," said Peter Graaff, WHO Representative to Afghanistan.

A combination of compromised security and inaccess, particularly in the Southern Region of Afghanistan, has resulted in the ongoing circulation of polio. To combat this, in addition to periodic immunisation activity, the Ministry, supported by UNICEF and NGO partners, is engaging in a range of communication interventions to reach communities. This includes social mobilisation activities and negotiations at the local level with key community influencers, Mullahs, and village elders.

Since the launch of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) in 1988, the largest public health initiative in history, there has been a dramatic drop in the number of polio cases. Compared to 350,000 cases worldwide in 1988, 1,604 cases were registered in 2009.

GPEI is spearheaded by national governments, UNICEF, World Health Organization, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention; and Rotary International. A host of donors and partners are also actively engaged in supporting polio eradication.

Japan provides US\$ 16 million to boost food production in Afghanistan through improvement of irrigation system

10 November 2010 - Japan signed approximately US\$ 16,000,000 agreement with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) today in the presence of the Minister of Energy and Water (MEW).



This is a testimony to the Government of Japan's continued commitment to support Afghanistan's efforts to tackle the root causes of food insecurity through development of agriculture.

The goal of the project is to enhance food security by raising agricultural production and productivity. At operational level, the purpose is to expand irrigation coverage with reliable and adequate water supply through improved irrigation facilities. Ultimately, it will also help increase peace and stability in Afghanistan through food security at different levels.

The project has four main components:

- Water conservation and utilization at river valley level,
- Irrigation rehabilitation covering 24,000 ha of land in selected valleys,
- Community based micro hydropower schemes 500 KW of electricity in selected rivers valley,
- Capacity development for MEW to design and implement irrigation and water resource development programmes.

The project will directly cover 20,000 households (150,000 people) in selected valleys of Kabul and Bamyán provinces of Afghanistan.

Particular efforts will be made to ensure that project design and implementation are fully sensitive to vulnerable groups and returnee farmers and that benefit streams are shared equitably among different farmers groups.

Equal numbers of households are expected to benefit from the project indirectly by participating in construction works and increased labour force requirement to sustain the irrigated agriculture.

The Exchange of Note and Grant Agreement, entitled "Programme for Improvement of Irrigation Systems and Construction of Micro-hydro Power Facilities in Kabul and Bamyán Provinces", was signed today in Kabul by the Ambassador of Japan to Afghanistan, H.E. Mr. Shigeyuki Hiroki, the Resident Representative of Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) in Afghanistan, Mr. Nobuhiko Hanazato, and the FAO Representative in Afghanistan, Mr. Tekeste G. Tekie and the Minister of Energy and Water of Afghanistan, H.E. Mr. Mohammad Ismail Khan the Minister of Energy and Water.

"The Government has set a high priority on national water resources and irrigation development under the Agriculture and Rural Development Cluster Strategy. We are grateful to the people of Japan for providing funds to achieve our goal to expand the national coverage of irrigated land," said H.E. Mr. Mohammad Ismail Khan.

Japan has been dedicated to the development of agriculture in Afghanistan as one of the highest priority sectors of Japan's assistance program.

In June, Japan also provided US\$ 11.1 million of assistance to boost agricultural productivity in Afghanistan with the provision of quality agricultural inputs, training and technology transfer through FAO.

These projects will contribute directly to the Government of Afghanistan's Poverty Reduction Strategy and the new project will also contribute directly to the MEW's ongoing key priority areas outlined in its policies, strategies and master plans.