

## 37 DAYS TO ELECTION DAY: STATEMENT ON THE ELECTION PROCESS

BY SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL, STAFFAN DE MISTURA

12 August 2010 - The *Wolesi Jirga* elections are now only a little over one month away – and we can see the country's attention focusing on this event. Campaigning of the significantly large number of candidates has become more active and we are particularly encouraged by the active campaigns of women candidates. We maintain complete neutrality in this process, and we are committed to helping the Afghans have the best possible elections, which they deserve.

The Independent Election Commission (IEC) is continuing to operate according to its electoral timetable and the Chairman of the IEC, Professor Mannawi, and the Commissioners are working hard and effectively towards the election date of 18 September. The last of the sensitive materials (ballot papers) arrived in the country last week. Operationally and administratively the IEC is on track. United Nations support to the elections has been as we promised – substantial but with a light footprint in deference to the growing capacity of Afghanistan's electoral authorities.

We want to highlight some challenges ahead – the primary challenge being elections security which could be the real spoiler of the whole process. We have already seen widespread intimidation with regard to female candidates, the killing of three candidates and other violence directed against a number of other candidates. This is unacceptable and we call upon the Afghan security forces to be on heightened vigilance over the coming two months.

We all know that security challenges will be a significant obstacle and we must ensure that poor security in parts of the country is not used to manipulate the votes of the people.

We note that the IEC has received the assessment from the security institutions on the polling centre locations and that they are now conducting their own verification to ensure the final list is a realistic one. This should be completed on 15 August. We are in agreement with the IEC that it is of paramount importance, including for operational reasons, and for the credibility of these elections that they be in a position to make this list public by 18 August. Making this list public one month in advance of the elections is essential for the transparency of the electoral process. It will also show a marked difference and progress compared with the same stage of last year's Presidential elections.

We are also pleased to learn that the Ministry of Interior (MoI) has undertaken to recruit, train and deploy additional female security searchers to ensure the security of female polling stations. It is imperative now that no further time is lost in this regard. We want to encourage election observation missions – both international and national. We also encourage candidates to register their own candidate and party agents – these agents can make a significant impact in observing the whole election process.

The Electoral Complaints Commission has suggested that the voter registration exercise might be extended. The IEC, however, has taken the position not to extend this process any further because it could reopen the door for multiplication of fraudulent voter ID cards that we witnessed during the 2009 elections. Furthermore, the IEC considers two months for the voter registration period, as allocated, ample time. We fully support the decision of the IEC and its continuing efforts to take difficult decisions aimed at mitigating possible fraud and other potential electoral irregularities.

Our final message is to the voters themselves. These elections are your elections. Follow all the candidates' campaigns and their political messages to ensure that you can make an informed vote on 18 September. Your vote is the final decision maker in this important process in determining your country's future.



### Message by Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan Staffan de Mistura on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan

12 August 2010 - **Ramazan is a month of worship. Muslims are encouraged to be charitable and forgiving, and to practise goodwill towards others. In Afghanistan, Muslims continue to face challenges towards peace due to conflict and suffering.**

Islam is a religion of brotherhood, providing messages of peace, harmony and cooperation. Followers are encouraged especially in this holy month to focus on and practise these values.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) welcomes the arrival of Ramazan and asks all parties to respect this month for the sake of stability, tranquillity, peace and the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

With the highest respect for the beliefs of Afghanistan's Muslim population, we trust that Afghan citizens will harness the power of Ramazan to help achieve lasting peace and stability in this beautiful country.

### UN special envoy on the medical workers killed in Badakhshan

9 August 2010 - **I would like to express my condolences to the families, friends and colleagues left behind after the tragic incident on 5 August. All staff working for the United Nations in Afghanistan were shocked and appalled at the loss of life of ten medical workers in Badakhshan.**

The United Nations condemns this serious crime and apparent cold blooded execution.

These were individuals who came to Afghanistan or were Afghans working in their own country to help the poorest and most vulnerable people.

Health workers must have access to treat those in need and must be able to do so without fear. Under international law health workers must be protected while they carry out their life saving work.

All those involved in this and other incidents targeting health workers should respect the value of human life.

The International Assistance Mission has had an office in Badakhshan for many years and is known for bringing medical services to remote villages across Afghanistan.

- *Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Staffan de Mistura*



## Afghan civilian casualties rise 31 per cent in first six months of 2010

**10 August 2010 - Tactics of the Taliban and other Anti-Government Elements (AGEs) are behind a 31 per cent increase in conflict-related Afghan civilian casualties in the first six months of 2010 compared with the same period in 2009, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) said today in releasing its 2010 Mid-Year Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict.**

Among those killed or injured by the Taliban and other AGEs were 55 per cent more children than in 2009, along with six per cent more women. Casualties attributed to Pro-Government Forces (PGF) fell 30 per cent during the same period, driven by a 64 per cent decline in deaths and injuries caused by aerial attacks.

"Afghan children and women are increasingly bearing the brunt of this conflict. They are being killed and injured in their homes and communities in greater numbers than ever before," said Staffan de Mistura, Special Representative of the Secretary-General.

From 1 January to 30 June 2010, UNAMA Human Rights Unit documented 3,268 civilian casualties including 1,271 deaths and 1,997 injuries.

AGEs were responsible for 2,477 casualties (76 per cent of all casualties, up 53 per cent from 2009) while 386 were attributed to PGF activities (12 per cent of all casualties, down from 30 per cent in 2009).

Analysis by UNAMA Human Rights Unit identified two critical developments that increased harm to civilians in the first six months of 2010 compared to 2009: AGEs used a greater number of larger and more sophisticated improvised explosive devices (IEDs) throughout the country; and, the number of civilians assassinated and executed by AGEs rose by more than 95 per cent and included public executions of children.

"The devastating human impact of these events underscores that, nine years into the conflict, measures to protect Afghan civilians effectively and to minimize the impact of the conflict on basic human rights are more urgent than ever. All those concerned must do more to protect civilians and comply with their legal obligations not to attack civilians," said Georgette Gagnon, Director of Human Rights for UNAMA.

IEDs and suicide attacks killed 557 Afghans and injured 1,137 in the first six months of 2010. IEDs alone accounted for 29 per cent of all civilian deaths in the period, including 74 children, a 155 per cent increase in IED-related deaths of children in the same span in 2009.

Aerial attacks by the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) remained the most harmful PGF tactic, causing 69 of the 223 civilian deaths attributed to PGF in the first six months of 2010 (31 per cent) and injuring 45 Afghan civilians.

However, civilian deaths caused by PGF aerial attacks decreased 64 per cent from the same period in 2009, reflecting growing implementation of ISAF's July 2009 Tactical Directive regulating the use of air strikes and other measures to reduce civilian casualties.

On a regional basis, civilian casualties grew the most in southern Afghanistan in the first six months of 2010. More than half of assassinations and executions occurred in the southern region, where more than one hundred Afghan civilians were killed in such incidents.

Overall, conflict-related civilian deaths in the south increased by 43 per cent. Civilians assassinated and executed included teachers, nurses, doctors, tribal elders, community leaders, provincial and district officials, other civilians including children, and civilians working for international military forces and international organizations.

"This intensified pattern of assassinations and executions reinforced the widespread perception of Afghan civilians that they are becoming more and more the primary target in this period of conflict," said Staffan de Mistura, Special Representative of the Secretary-General.

Releasing the 2010 Mid-Year Report, UNAMA underscored the 7 July 2010 statement of the United Nations Secretary-General that stressed ensuring greater compliance with international law by all concerned remains a "huge common challenge" in Afghanistan.

Basic human rights and international humanitarian law principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution that apply to all parties to an armed conflict, requiring them to minimize civilian loss of life and injury must be reinforced at this critical period.

UNAMA Human Rights Unit issued recommendations in the report, including:

- The Taliban should withdraw all orders and statements calling for the killing of civilians; and, the Taliban and other AGEs should end the use of IEDs and suicide attacks, comply with international humanitarian law, cease acts of intimidation and killing including assassination, execution and abduction, fully respect citizens' freedom of movement and stop using civilians as human shields.
- International military forces should make more transparent their investigation and reporting on civilian casualties including on accountability; maintain and strengthen directives restricting aerial attacks and the use of night raids; coordinate investigation and reporting of civilian casualties with the Afghan Government to improve protection and accountability; improve compensation processes; and, improve transparency around any harm to civilians caused by Special Forces operations.
- The Afghan Government should create a public body to lead its response to major civilian casualty incidents and its interaction with international military forces and other key actors, ensure investigations include forensic components, ensure transparent and timely compensation to victims; and, improve accountability including discipline or prosecution for any Afghan National Security Forces personnel who unlawfully cause death or injury to civilians or otherwise violate the rights of Afghan citizens.



## High rates of suicide and domestic violence against Afghan women, new reports show

**7 August 2010 - Women in Afghanistan suffer “extremely high rates of domestic violence” which include forced marriages and physical attacks, Afghan and United Nations officials announced one week after a report by a top Afghan health advisor revealed that suicide among Afghan women had increased about 20 times since the 1970s.**

Nearly 2,000 cases of violence against women were reported between October 2006 and mid-2009, according to an updated Violence against Women Primary Database Report launched on Thursday by the Afghan Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), with support from the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the Afghanistan Information Management System (AIMS).

The database includes information on incidences of physical attacks and emotional abuse, rape and kidnapping, forced sexual intercourse by a husband, polygamy, forced engagement and forced marriage, and restricted mobility and curtailment of women's participation in public life.

Of the reported cases, nearly a quarter showed that women had temporary physical injuries; in more than 20 per cent of the cases, the woman ran away and 2.5 per cent of the cases resulted in death or attempted suicide. Approximately 40 per cent of the reported cases in the database showed that no follow up was done and the outcome of the violence was “unknown.”

Among the recommendations, the authors of the report based on the database findings called for “zero tolerance” of men in positions of power who mistreat or abuse women, particularly those in police and military who are approached for assistance by women already victimized.

Speaking at the report launch, MoWA Acting Minister Dr Husn Banu Ghazanfar and UNIFEM Country Director Christine Ouellette praised the revised database and the resulting report. “The availability of this database...in addition to the special emphasis given to gender equality and empowerment of women during the recently held Kabul Conference, are testimony to the concerted efforts of the Government and other stakeholders to address violence against women,” Ouellette said, noting the 20 July conference where the Government of Afghanistan launched a series of national priorities and programmes in the areas of security, governance, social and economic development and better service delivery to citizens.

The launch of the revised violence against women database comes one week after a report authored by a health affairs advisor for President Hamid Karzai revealed that suicide among Afghan women had increased by some 20 times over the past 40 years, counter to the international suicide rates which have remained stable. “Evidence suggests an increasing trend of suicide in Afghanistan, especially among women, and using the method of self-immolation,” Faizullah Kakar wrote in *The Elevated Prevalence of Depression and Risk of Suicide among Afghan Women*.

Nearly one-third of Afghan women between 15 and 35 years of age suffer from depression and psychological problems, Kakar said. He blamed “war-related stress, displacement stress, repatriation stress, insecurity and addictions to hashish and opium,” as well as a culture of traditional marriage. “For these women, social stresses such as forced marriages turn into the proverbial ‘straw that broke the camel's back,’” Kakar concluded.

Among his recommendations to the Government of Afghanistan to counter this trend is an “effective and coherent national strategy” which provides social support to high-risk individuals.

By Aurora V. Alambra, UNAMA

## In Herat, female candidates for the Parliament share campaign experiences

**12 August 2010 - Female political candidates from Ghor, Badghis, Farah and Herat provinces in western Afghanistan discussed their rights and shared their experiences campaigning for the parliamentary elections scheduled for 18 September at a gathering held at the initiative of the Ministry of Women Affairs and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) gender equality programme.**

Kushwaya Sarwari is a former provincial council member in Farah. She decided to run for a seat in the Parliament in order to have more influence on the Government's actions. She wants to improve justice, specifically regarding women, and development. A chemistry teacher for 25 years, Kushwaya finds the training she received regarding the electoral law and the parliament's powers helpful. In charge of women affairs for the Afghan National Party or Afghan Mellat, she shared her experience campaigning in a conservative area.

“Insecurity is our main concern. We requested bodyguards from the Government and international forces,” she said. Kushwaya, who intends to travel to a few secure districts surrounding the provincial capital, also relies on a network of volunteers - men and women - who will campaign on her behalf. She said she hopes that the insurgents, who have a strong hold on parts of the province, will let her travel and not tear down her posters.

A similar three-day seminar to the one which ended on Monday will next be organized in Nangarhar province and include the three surrounding provinces there.

By Fraidoon Poya & Henri Burgard, UNAMA

## Trekking for Peace in Afghanistan

**6 August 2010 - The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has launched an environmental awareness campaign in Afghanistan which will feature a range of outdoor nature-sharing activities for schools and local communities over 100 days in the lead-up to World Peace Day on 21 September.**

The first event – "Trekking for Peace" – took place in the Central Highlands province of Bamyan on July 30th.

World Peace Day is following a theme of peace, youth and the environment this year.

Children from local communities, together with officials from the local and national government, walked together in the pristine high-alpine areas of the Shah Foladi Conservation Area in Bamyan province.

UNEP has been supporting institutional capacity building for sustainable environmental management in Afghanistan since 2002.

The UNEP conservation programme, including the Shah Foladi field project, will encourage community management of natural resources, the conservation of biodiversity as well as the sharing of nature and environmental education programmes for all Afghans.

Further events celebrating the wonderful Central Highlands environment, youth and the journey towards peace in Afghanistan will take place over the coming months.



## Afghan, UN officials send aid to flood-affected Pakistan

**9 August 2010 - The Government of Afghanistan, with support from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), today sent aid for the flood-affected victims of northwest Pakistan, which has been ravaged by heavy rain and rising waters since last week.**

Following approval of government officials, UNICEF sent about 35,000 kg of high-energy biscuits (HEB) and 5,250 kg of oral rehydration salts (ORS) to its office in the capital city of Islamabad to be distributed to the affected communities around Pakistan.

"Our office in Islamabad got back to us identifying the need for biscuits and rehydrations salts. We got in touch with the UN Resident Coordinator [Robert Watkins] to obtain permission from the Government to re-export supplies we originally got into the country for Afghanistan to send to Pakistan," said Peter Crowley, UNICEF Representative for Afghanistan.

UNICEF, however, insists that the aid given to Pakistan will not compromise its ability to respond to emergencies in Afghanistan. "We have been careful to make sure we have enough stock here to be able to cover potential needs in Afghanistan. Also, we have enough stock and supplies on the way to Afghanistan within the next few weeks. We are confident of covering needs here and offering support to our colleagues in Pakistan," said Crowley.

Meanwhile, UN agencies continue to disperse aid through the Afghan National Disaster Management Agency (ANDMA) in areas of Afghanistan hit by floods in recent weeks.

The UN World Food Programme (WFP) provided the worst-hit central areas with a three-month supply of food rations, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

In Afghanistan's north, UNICEF and the International Organization on Migration (IOM) provided 10,000 water purification tablets, 150 family survival kits, blankets, jerry cans, clothing and emergency tents.

UNICEF, WFP, IOM, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the UN World Health Organization (WHO) are coordinating efforts in the south to provide food and non-food items, including clothes for children and hand pumps to provide clean drinking water.

"Fortunately, we had propositioned supplies with our government partners at the beginning of July in anticipation of emergencies. We therefore had supplies on the ground to respond to this flood emergency and began its distribution to the affected communities," Crowley added.

By Aditya Mehta, UNAMA