



Top Afghan Cabinet ministers and international community meet ahead of Kabul Conference

8 July, 2010, Kabul - Afghanistan's Joint Monitoring Coordinating Board (JCMB) met today, with the Government presenting papers on key priorities and programmes to donors for discussion in preparation for the 20 July Kabul Conference.

"Afghan priorities for the Afghan people," will be the focus of the International Conference on Afghanistan – the Kabul Conference, the Afghan Minister of Finance, Dr Omar Zakhilwal has stated.

Dr Omar Zakhilwal was speaking after a meeting of the 14th Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board (JCMB), co-chaired by Staffan de Mistura, Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Afghanistan.

During the meeting, Afghanistan's international donor partners considered detailed presentations by the Government on its national priorities.

The JCMB meeting aimed at preparing the ground for 20 July Kabul Conference, the first major international conference inside Afghanistan.

The purpose of the Kabul Conference is for the Government to set out its priorities and for donor countries to realign their assistance around these programmes to achieve meaningful improvements in the lives of Afghan citizens through the effective delivery of services, the provision of equitable economic opportunities, and the achievement of national stability, and for the international community to back these aims.

It is not a conference for new promises or funding pledges. It will give an opportunity for the international community to support Afghan-led priorities including fighting corruption, building up self-reliant Afghan national security forces, and undertaking reconciliation and reintegration activities to reach out to opposition and to encourage combatants to lay down their arms.

It follows the London Conference in January, visits to Madrid, Washington and Tokyo, and national outreach activities like the Consultative Peace Jirga to firm-up support for this process.

At the JCMB meeting four main subjects were discussed: economic development (improving job prospects), governance (helping improve delivery of services), security, peace, and reconciliation (follow-through on "Peace Jirga" commitments to reach out to opposition) and regional cooperation (increasing economic, social, and cultural ties with neighbouring countries).

The UN Special Representative Staffan de Mistura welcomed the Afghan Government's leadership in developing 23 national priority programmes in the areas of governance, social and economic development, and peace and security. "These programmes are evidence of the transition to Afghan responsibility and leadership."

The Kabul Conference on 20 July will be co-chaired by the Afghan Government and the United Nations. Foreign Ministers and top officials from more than 70 countries are expected to attend.

**Statement to the UN Security Council
By Staffan de Mistura
Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan**

30 June 2010 - Mr President, Members of the Security Council, Thank you very much, Mr President, it is a great pleasure to see you here again after your mission.

I would like to take this opportunity to elaborate on the UN's activities in Afghanistan and the priorities in the current Afghan environment. I will be briefer than usual because we had the privilege of having the visit of the members of the Security Council to Afghanistan and therefore you have seen with your own eyes and heard with your own ears what the current situation is on the ground.

I want, in this connection, to thank you for your visit. It came just over three months since I took up my own new assignment, and was very timely.

This is indeed a crucial year in Afghanistan, and I think that anyone of you who was there must have had the same feeling. It is a year in which we are all trying, together with the Afghan authorities and the Afghan people, to reach a form of stabilization of the situation in Afghanistan.

Everybody acknowledges the fact that there is no military solution alone for what is the current situation in the country. There must be a lot more, and that is what we are working together on.

For security gains to be sustained, Afghanistan requires a political vision that is articulated, driven and owned by the Afghans themselves. Efforts must combine to create a sufficiently conducive political environment to counterbalance rising insecurity in a manner that signals that Afghanistan assumes greater responsibility for its desirable end state.

This year has an intense calendar of events and in that sense we are moving in the right direction. We had the London Conference which was very useful. It did indicate a support by the international community to the Afghan authorities during this crucial year.

We had the consultative Peace Jirga, which was equally extremely helpful because it gave the opportunity to everyone, Afghans and its international partners, to actually come to a realization that there is a common understanding on how to address the dialogue in order to have more Afghans inside the white tent where we all were during the period of the Peace Jirga.

And the next step is the Kabul Conference, where many Foreign Ministers will be coming and I understand that the United Nations Secretary-General has also confirmed his own attendance. It will be a stepping stone.

Let me summarize in which direction the organizers of the Kabul Conference are going. I am referring to the Afghans of course; we will be co-chairing, but they are in the lead. The concept is a public contract, I repeat contract, between the Afghan Government and the Afghan people, offering concrete social and economic improvements.

The international community will not be expected to bring new funds but to actually realign, if they feel comfortable with these priorities, the resources that have already be allocated to Afghanistan, bilaterally or elsewhere.

This will have several advantages, one will be to further help the "Afghanization" concept, which should not just be a word but should become more and more a concrete fact. And the Afghans feel very strongly about that. They are proud people, historically proven to be so, and even more so these days. They need to feel that the future is in fact in their hands, and this is a good opportunity.

If they are proposing concrete programmes, they should also feel they can lead them and, at the same time, be accountable for the results. The event will not be putting more pressure on donor countries, because it will be at best a request for a realignment of the current bilateral funding.



The UN, as you know, Mr Chairman, is now focussing on 3+1 priorities. We cannot cover everything, and if we did, we would not be able to make a difference.

The 3+1 areas are elections, the internal dialogue, regional dialogue and constructive engagement, and aid coherence – which is assisting the Afghan authorities and the international community to avoid overlapping and better coordination of the huge amount of aid which is reaching Afghanistan.

Elections: it is the mother of all issues in Afghanistan, and frankly for all of us.

The previous elections did not go well. It would be an understatement to say they went well. They did not go well, and this time we are all trying to work together.

They will not be perfect and they will not be elections that you would see in other countries which do not have the same challenges, but they will be better, and they should be *insha'allah* better.

Why? Because lessons were learned by everyone and secondly because there is much more monitoring taking place, internally, by the Afghans themselves.

UNAMA was able to contribute to one major part of the process. As you probably will remember, because so many things have happened since, in April there was a moment of difficulty. There was an institutional stalemate between the Presidency and the Wolesi Jirga, which could have blocked the electoral process.

And the formula that the UN, with the cooperation of the whole international community present in Kabul, was able to propose and get approval by everyone for the implementation guidelines on elections.

This resulted in: first, a new Chairman for the Independent Electoral Commission and a new electoral team; second, the presence of two international commissioners in the Electoral Complaints Commission with a concurring vote; third, the role of women – the fact that 68 seats were guaranteed for women and if, for whatever reason, a seat would have to be given up, they would be replaced by a woman and not by a man.

All that produced a breakdown of the stalemate, and the elections are now moving in the right direction. The new commissioners have been doing their homework. We now have 2,677 declared candidates, of which 400 are women, and they are working on 6,835 polling centres and 19,942 polling stations. 30,000 new voters have been registered; we are getting close to 12.5 million expected voters.

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Statement to the UN Security Council of UN top envoy for Afghanistan, Staffan de Mistura

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It will not be easy. The main challenge: security. And the second main challenge: security. Because if the elections are tarnished by excessive security problems that may induce closing of voting stations and therefore the disenfranchising of people who could have voted. As we get close to 18 September, we will have to watch this closely in order to assist the Afghan authorities, in the lead of the elections.

The UN and the international community are proactively and actively offering their support, but the Afghans are in the lead. One example has been the vetting process, and some of you who were in Kabul were part of the intense moments related to the vetting. The vetting Commission, lead by the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Defence and the National Department for Security was for a moment unable to come up with any candidates to be excluded from the elections.

The latest news is that a list of almost 40 people has been presented, representing different provinces. A decision is imminent. This is a substantial improvement from the impression we had that the vetting process had been inconclusive. We will be facing difficult moments regarding the elections, but I can certainly tell you that at the moment, the decisions made by the Electoral Commission are reassuring, including to those Afghans who felt the elections could be going in the wrong direction. We will cross that bridge when we get there and I may require your assistance when we get into difficulties, but at the moment, so far, so good.

Dialogue: The second area of priority for our own focus. As you know, this is again Afghan-led and should be Afghan-led, but the UN has the capacity in assisting those types of discussions that may take place, or are taking place. One example was the Hizb-i-Islami visit to Kabul, where the UN in coordination with the Presidency, received the Hizb-i-Islami team. The UN stands ready to facilitate dialogue. We are looking forward to playing a role in confidence-building measures, including on the 1267 sanctions list.

Regional: There is an agreement by everyone that no substantive sustainable development in Afghanistan can take place if we do not have a constant and constructive engagement with all regional players, stakeholders, and beyond. That is why, I myself, with the permission of the Secretary-General have been travelling to several of the regional countries such as Pakistan, Iran and elsewhere, in order to make sure that we would be able to hear their concerns and facilitate these concerns into a right direction.

There are very useful initiatives that are being led by countries like Turkey, alongside other efforts such as the meetings of the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan, the Shanghai initiative, and the Dubai process, which is being supported by Canada. And the UN has been leading the Silk Road Initiative, a very charming name, but in fact it goes beyond charm. It is meant to engage countries that are not necessarily geographically linked to Afghanistan, but which might have a political and historical relationship to the country. We are working on economic issues, also on issues such as drugs, or transport and energy. These topics are all opportunities for regional dialogue, which may then also help the political engagement that is needed.

Aid coherence: It is a part of our mandate and a major necessity. The good news is that our studies have shown that there are no major contradictions, no excessive overlap between multilateral and bilateral support. What is needed is more support for the Afghan authorities to take on themselves the aid coherence approach.

There is a mechanism which is the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board, and it will be meeting insha'allah on 8 July. I myself on behalf of the Secretary General will co-chair. The JCMB needs to be revitalised. The next opportunity for aid coherence is the Kabul Conference. If the international community can go into the Kabul Conference with a donor "realignment contract," I am confident they can achieve aid coherence.

Regarding transition: This means moving from military to civilian control – particularly referring to the PRTs (Provincial Reconstruction Teams) – from military to civilian, and from civilian to Afghan and with Afghan means. This with the support of the UN, which with its 21 provincial and regional offices – staffed by more than 700 international staff and 6,000 national staff -- will work toward squaring the circle to boost Afghan capacity to take over the lead also with regard to security. That is why we are also keen in securing your support for the financial package that will let staff in Afghanistan, but also Iraq, feel they are on par with colleagues working in more secure parts of the world. In that regard, I am grateful and thankful to the Dutch Government in offering their help to establish secure accommodation.

Partnership: You will be rightly asking how are we doing with ISAF, EU, and the ISAF Senior Civilian Representative? The short answer is, excellent. There is a feeling of mutual support, and, although we have different mandates and priorities, the goal is the same; coordination to have a "common messaging" to avoid contradictions. I would like to reassure you that this is moving in the right direction, while each of us are keeping are our independence, neutrality, impartiality but also respect for each others mandates. Our common goal is to help achieve a stable Afghanistan, while respecting Afghan culture, traditions, sovereignty and religion.

In conclusion, 2010 will be a year in which we all need to be resilient, creative, and respectful of Afghan priorities. At the end of the day it will be that Afghans that have to find their own solutions. The Security Council visit was timely and has given a strong boost to UNAMA staff and has also built a strong feeling among Afghan partners that the international community is, indeed, committed to its cause.



Afghanistan's first mobile radio gives voice to isolated populations

5 July 2010 - The first moveable radio station in Afghanistan was recently launched in Bamyan province, covering news in remote districts of the province.

Mounted on a truck, Radio Paik-e-Bamyan travels around the province and reports on local issues in the isolated villages.

"Most of the Kabul-based radio stations cover national news which does not reflect local issues," said Mahdy Mehraeen, head of the Paik-e-Bamyan radio, an FM station. "Radio Paik-e-Bamyan aims to report on local issues to engage the local communities on... developments in their own area."

The mobile radio station is a joint project of Bamyan University and the Netherlands-based media development organization, Press Now.

"The other objective of this radio station is to train university students in radio journalism and community-based messaging skills," added Mr Mehraeen.

Every month, six students – three men and three women – are hired. Each batch gets two weeks training in theory and another two weeks to practice journalism while reporting for the mobile radio station.

The mobile studio is mounted on a truck, complete with a transmitter, a small built-in recording set up, and an editing unit.

Each month the truck is driven to one district and parked for two weeks in a location where local news is produced and aired.

The mobile radio station transmits news up to 20 kilometres away, airing programmes on health, agriculture and education.

"This new initiative is a way to tackle the real issues of Afghanistan at the grassroots level," said Hildebrand Bijleveld, editor-in-chief of Press Now.

Mr Bijleveld added that the project is a pilot for further media initiatives in other parts of the country.

By Jaffar Rahim, UNAMA

Journalists voice safety concerns

7 July 2010, Jalalabad - With violence increasingly gripping the region, journalists of Afghanistan's east have voiced their serious concerns about their safety and their lack of access to information.

In a six-point resolution endorsed at a meeting in the eastern regional hub of Jalalabad on Monday, over two dozen journalists called on Afghan authorities, international forces and insurgent groups to respect the neutral media role to provide timely and accurate information, and to ensure the safety of media personnel.

"Journalists are impartial people. They are not supporting anyone. We ask the stakeholders to ensure security of journalists and not threaten them," states the resolution, endorsed by the journalists of three eastern provinces – Nangarhar, Kunar and Laghman.

"We call on the Government and the coalition forces to allow us to go to and cover the places of incidents before the areas are cleared. We seriously request the parties to the conflict to provide us with accurate information on time."

The journalists, who often complain about their lack of access to information, also decided not to disseminate any more "one-sided" news and propaganda.

They complained that "contradictory information" on security incidents provided by insurgents, Government authorities and international forces place media workers in trouble.

Abdul Mueed Hashemi of the Pajhwok Afghan News agency called on the United Nations to support media workers to address these challenges.

By Tilak Pokharel and Shafiqullah Waak, UNAMA