

UNAMA counts down to Peace Day 2010 with art exhibit by Afghan youth

1 September 2010 - The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) today launched its International Peace Day campaign for 2010 with the broadcast of television and radio spots promoting peace.

"We are reaching out to young Afghans this year," said Kieran Dwyer, director of UNAMA's communications team. "With over 70 per cent of Afghanistan's population under 25 years old, young people hold the future in their hands."

This year's global theme for International Peace Day is "Peace = Future" with a special focus on youth.

"In a year when violence dominates the news in Afghanistan, UNAMA seeks to promote the voices of young Afghans who are working for peace in the communities," said Dwyer.

UNAMA's centrepiece activity this year is co-hosting an exhibition of young Afghan artists with the local cultural group Turquoise Mountain. Twelve young artists will showcase their work at the historic site of the Queen's Palace of Babur Garden, in Kabul.

"I commend the leadership of this group of young Afghan artists, for their beautiful work and for the vision they help to create of a rich, harmonious and peaceful Afghanistan," said Staffan de Mistura, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, about the exhibition.

The week-long Afghan contemporary art show will open on 7 September, and includes photography, cartoons, paintings and collages from young up-and-coming artists.

Peace Day is marked on 21 September as an annual day of global ceasefire and non-violence. This year's Peace Day coincides with Afghan parliamentary elections scheduled for 18 September, and so UNAMA and UN agencies are working with communities to conduct activities before and after this period.

UNICEF will conduct a youth cricket camp in Jalalabad, in the country's east, and UNEP will hold youth activities to promote environmental awareness among young people in Bamyan province.



UNAMA condemns killing of electoral candidate and campaign workers

29 August 2010 - The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) condemns the killing of a fourth parliamentary election candidate, in Herat on Saturday, and of five men supporting the electoral campaign of a female candidate, also in Herat province. At this stage it is not clear who is responsible for the separate killings.

UNAMA offers its condolences to the families of those who lost their lives. Those responsible for the killings must be brought to justice.

These killings constitute violent intimidation of all electoral candidates and their supporters. This is unacceptable. UNAMA calls upon the Afghan security forces to be on heightened vigilance over the coming weeks leading to the parliamentary elections.



Central region governors focus on Afghan ownership, gender empowerment at UNAMA facilitated meeting

29 August 2010 - Empowerment of women and ensuring their equal participation in decision-making were among the key topics at a United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) facilitated meeting last week between the provincial governors of Bamyan and Dai Kundi.

Qurban Ali, the newly appointed governor of Dai Kundi, the province which includes Afghanistan's first female mayor, met with Bamyan's Habiba Sarobi, the only female governor in Afghanistan.

In addition to women's issues, the governors discussed ways to strengthen working relationship between the two provinces. Dai Kundi is one of the poorest provinces in the country and also one of the newest, created in 2004.

Meanwhile, UNAMA coordinated a special UN regional team meeting to focus on programme delivery and expansion of services into Dai Kundi "fully incorporated into the national development programme, like the Kabul Process," said Heran Song, Head of the UNAMA Central Highlands Region, referring to the process of transition to Afghan leadership and responsibility.

The Dai Kundi governor thanked UNAMA for its support and said that he hoped that sustainability of such exchange programmes will help to improve good governance and strengthen Dai Kundi's provincial administration and awareness.

By UNAMA



Number of voluntary returns to Afghanistan this year tops 100,000

27 August 2010- The number of people returning voluntarily to Afghanistan from Pakistan and Iran so far this year has exceeded 100,000, almost twice as many as last year. Some 95,000 of these are from Pakistan.

The Afghanistan voluntary repatriation programme remains UNHCR's largest worldwide, with some 4.5 million people having returned to Afghanistan since 2002. As the figures of the past few years show, the number of returns can vary significantly from year-to-year.

As part of its monitoring responsibilities, UNHCR conducts interviews with returning Afghans to assess the reasons for returns. This year, the most oft-cited factors have been economic reasons, difficulties in Pakistan, and local improvements in security in some parts of Afghanistan.

Overall, almost 70 per cent of the returnees come from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in the north-west, with the rest from Balochistan, Punjab and Sindh provinces. A third head to eastern Afghanistan, a further third to the central region and the rest mainly to the north-east.

Separately, in Pakistan, UNHCR is in discussion with the authorities to rehabilitate damaged refugee villages in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. So far, in flood hit areas, UNHCR has been able to assist around 700,000 people, representing a third of those the agency plans to help.

To speed assistance, UNHCR has set up additional distribution points in the worst-affected areas of Shangla, Swat, Peshawar, Charsadda and Kohistan. We are also in the process of establishing additional hubs and identifying partners to expand our outreach to flood victims in need of help.

Further south, in Sindh, 2,000 families have so far received UNHCR non-food item family kits. UNHCR tents have helped people in Sukkar, Shikarpur and Jacobabad.

According to government officials the number of displaced people in Balochistan has increased to 1.1 million people, including 700,000 from flood-affected parts of Sindh.



UN backs mine removal efforts in historic Afghan city

26 August 2010 - The United Nations entity tasked with coordinating landmine removal efforts said today it is supporting the efforts of a local organization that is removing mines from the Afghan city of Ghazni, ahead of a planned designation of the city as an Islamic centre of civilization.

The project, which is being carried out by OMAR, an Afghan humanitarian mine action non-governmental organization (NGO), is funded by Canada through the Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Action, which is managed by the UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS).

The de-mining of Ghazni is in support of preparations to have the city recognized as an Islamic Centre of Civilization by the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (ISESCO) in 2013.

The OMAR project will clear nine minefields through the deployment of eight manual mine clearance teams, one mechanical mine removal unit, one mine detection dog set and one explosive ordnance disposal team.

In total, there are 48 identified minefields remaining in the centre of Ghazni, which contaminate over six square kilometres of land, causing deaths and injuries as well as preventing the land from being used for housing or farming.

This project will remove the impact of mines from seven communities, including different sites of special archaeological or historical importance, such as shrines and monuments.

"I am pleased that the work is now under way to clear the archaeologically and culturally rich city of Ghazni," said Maxwell Kerley, the director of UNMAS. "We appeal to our donor partners and friends in the Islamic world to contribute further to this important work so that the families of Ghazni can, for the first time in 30 years, live free from the threat of landmines and other explosive remnants of war," he added.

Additional funding could support further efforts by 12 teams to clear remaining minefields in the centre in two years, in time for the city's designation as an Islamic Centre of Civilization.

The project will follow the Mine Action Programme of Afghanistan's model of "community-based de-mining," by which the majority of the de-miners are being recruited and trained from Ghazni with expert oversight from OMAR's experienced staff.

So far, 50 new jobs have been created in Ghazni through the project. The training of these de-miners will be completed on Wednesday, following which they will join the teams which have begun the work. A further two teams will then be recruited and trained so that eventually all eight de-mining teams will comprise locally recruited people.

By UN News Centre

