

## Statement of the UN Special Representative, Staffan de Mistura

*Kabul, 20 October 2010* - The United Nations welcomes the publication of preliminary results by the Independent Election Commission (IEC) of 18 September Wolesi Jirga elections for all 34 provinces across the country, plus the Kuchi constituency.

The staff and management of the IEC have worked extremely hard to get to this important stage, under the leadership of Chairman, Professor Fazal Ahmad Manawi and Chief Electoral Officer, Abdullah Ahmadzai.

The IEC has shown significant improvements in the management of the post-polling day process and we commend them for this. The IEC has identified irregularities and has been committed to ensuring the process is transparent. We further recognise the thorough review they have undertaken prior to announcing the preliminary results. The number of votes invalidated and identified by the IEC point to considerable fraud and electoral irregularities on election day.

The electoral process is not over and the results are not yet final. The Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC) now must complete its adjudication of complaints and review the candidates submitted to them by the IEC for alleged involvement in electoral violations.

We are now looking attentively at this next stage of the process which should also ensure that those who are proven to have committed fraudulent acts are held accountable.

The United Nations hopes that this critical part of the electoral operation is also carried out with diligence and in a timely manner. The United Nations will continue to provide technical and operational support to both electoral institutions.



## Asphalting of 103-km stretch of Keshim-Faizabad Road brings economic growth to Badakhshan

*18 October 2010* - The asphalting of 103 kilometres of the Keshim-Faizabad Road in Badakhshan has brought prosperity and happiness to residents as it has improved access to medical care, education and the local markets of this remote north-eastern province.

This road-improvement project of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has also cut down travel time from Badakhshan to Kabul city to only around 12 hours. It used to take travellers at least two days to traverse this dirt road that was part of the ancient Silk Route from the Mediterranean Sea to the Far East.

"A bus trip between Faizabad and Kabul used to take at least two days and, by road asphalting, the travel time has been reduced to twelve hours or less," said Khudaidad, manager of the Yaftal Transportation Private Sector in Faizabad.

"I have been driving more than ten years between Kunduz, Takhar and Faizabad. We have experienced very bad days – the frequent floods and mudslides had reduced the road – and we were waiting for hours, even nights, for the road to be repaired and opened," said Asadullah, a driver in Faizabad.

The construction and repair of roads such as the Keshim-Faizabad Road provide many social and economic benefits to residents. Mohammad Husain, who has been working as a labourer since 2007, earns US\$ 5 in daily wages from the road-repair project and he is happy to support his family with his income.

The project provides job opportunities to hundreds of the local population like Mr Husain and helps improve family and household incomes.

"I came from Taloqan. We had a very comfortable travel and I paid Afs 400, a reasonable fare comparing to the fare before the road asphalting," said Ikramuddin, a passenger who travelled to Faizabad.

The reconstruction of the Keshim-Faizabad Road is contributing to the local economic growth.

"We now pay only Afs 20 per seven kilos to transport our goods from Kabul to Faizabad. The rate has been reduced by 50 per cent, comparing to previous years," said Abdul Ahmad, one of the shopkeepers in Faizabad. "Of course, when we pay less, we also sell our goods at a more reasonable price," he added.

The USAID-funded Keshim-Faizabad Road Project will cost a total of approximately US\$ 130 million when completed. A part of the Afghanistan Infrastructure and Rehabilitation Programme, it is seen as a vital link in the Afghan Government's ambitious plan to construct a two-lane road to the international border with China.

By Shamsuddin Hamedi, UNAMA



## Income from Kandahar airport increases to US\$ 100,000

*14 October 2010* - The income generated from Kandahar airport has increased from US\$ 59,000 to US\$ 100,000 in the last two months, said Kandahar airport officials.

Kandahar's Deputy Governor, Eng. Latif Ashna, at a press conference said, "airports around the world play a significant role in the economic development of a country," adding "we are working to upgrade airport facilities, at Kandahar airport, in order to build it up to international standards."

The ongoing construction and rehabilitation work, at Kandahar airport, will enhance facilities for those passengers who will travel to Mecca to perform Haj pilgrimage.

"We have installed three power generators at a total cost of US\$ 90,000, which will provide 24-hour power to the airport," said the Head of Kandahar airport, Ahmadullah Faizy.

Faizy mentioned that 38 lavatories and multiple ablution sites will be constructed and four televisions will be installed inside the terminal for passengers.

The Aviation and Transport Ministry-funded computerized scanning system facility will be constructed immediately to simplify the search and checking process of passengers and luggage.

It is worth mentioning that Kandahar airport is considered one of the more developed and standardized airports in Afghanistan.

By Mujeeb Rahman, UNAMA

## 13 million Afghans at risk of contracting Leishmaniasis – WHO

*14 October 2010* - The World Health Organization (WHO) today launched its first global report on neglected tropical diseases.

In light of an ongoing Leishmaniasis outbreak in Herat, Afghanistan, WHO along with the Ministry of Public Health and the Afghan Red Crescent Society used this opportunity to raise awareness about and advocate for neglected diseases in Afghanistan, with special emphasis on Leishmaniasis, a disease that threatens the health of 13 million vulnerable Afghans, especially women and girls.

In Kabul, commonly considered as the world capital of [Cutaneous] Leishmaniasis, the number of new reported cases dramatically rose from the estimated yearly figure of 17,000 to 65,000 in 2009, mainly among women and girls.

"This number is likely to be the tip of the iceberg as cases are grossly underreported owing to poor diagnostic tools and the stigma that is attached to this disease," claimed Peter Graaff, WHO Representative to Afghanistan.

[Cutaneous] Leishmaniasis is a parasitic disease transmitted through the bite of certain species of sandfly. The major symptom is skin sores which erupt weeks to months after the person has been bitten.

Leishmaniasis is both preventable and curable. Preventable through bed nets, and curable through medical treatment.

"The high cost of treatment makes it difficult to integrate anti-Leishmaniasis drugs into the Basic Package of Health Services," said Her Excellency Dr Suraya Dalil, Acting Minister of Public Health.

"I urge donors to take this cause seriously, as it causes unnecessary suffering amongst a large number of Afghans."

"Addressing stigma, early diagnosis and early treatment is the way to go about tackling this disease," said Fatima Gailani, Director of the Afghan Red Crescent Society. "Protecting people from Leishmaniasis is affording them the Right to Life with dignity."

## Making hand washing a priority for more than just a day: Clean hands save lives

*15 October 2010 (Kabul, AFGHANISTAN)* - On the third annual Global Hand-washing Day, more than seven million schoolchildren, parents, teachers and government officials around Afghanistan will lather up, and at the end of the day, they should have more than just clean hands.

This year the theme of Global Hand washing Day – more than just a day – aims to establish the simple, life-saving practice of washing hands with soap, many times a day, as a life-long habit that will continue to be practiced long after the sun sets on October 16.

Global Hand-washing Day partners are promoting this behavioural change not only by organizing activities in more than 10,000 schools to raise awareness of the benefits of hand washing, but by ensuring that schools and communities have the support they need to make the practice routine. Children acting as agents of change will take the good practices of hygiene learned at school back into their homes and communities.

Each year, diarrhoeal diseases and acute respiratory infections are responsible for the deaths of more than 67,500 children under the age of five in Afghanistan. Washing hands with soap and water especially at the critical times -- after using the toilet and before handling food, and after cleaning babies -- helps reduce the incidence of diarrhoeal disease by over 40 per cent, yet this simple behaviour is not practiced regularly.

Global Hand-washing Day shines a spotlight on the importance of hand washing with soap and water as probably the single most effective and affordable health intervention of all. Today that message is being brought to playgrounds, classrooms, community centres, public spaces and the air waves.

In a related development, last month the Ministries of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD), Education (MoE), and Public Health (MoPH); the World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) launched the joint "Call to Action for WASH in schools," which aims at increasing investment in water sanitation and hygiene in schools.

"UNICEF believes that improved WASH in schools not only promotes a healthy environment, but also contributes significantly to increase enrolment and retention, especially of girls," said Peter Crowley, UNICEF Representative to Afghanistan.

