

Statement by Staffan de Mistura, Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General: On certification of final results by Afghanistan's Independent Election Commission

24 November 2010 - The United Nations strongly welcomes today's certification of the final results for 34 out of the 35 constituencies in the 18 September Wolesi Jirga elections by Afghanistan's Independent Election Commission (IEC).

We support the IEC's decision to take more time to finalise the certification of the results of the elections in Ghazni province.

This final certification is the culmination of many months of dedicated work by the members and staff of the IEC as well as those of the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC). While we have noted that there were many irregularities and much fraud committed during this election, the committed work of the IEC and the ECC to identify and deal with these problems marks a significant step in the development of Afghanistan's national electoral capacity.

The formation of a new parliament will be a major step in Afghanistan's path to improving its democratic governance and the capacity of Afghan institutions to deliver services to the Afghan people. These improvements are an essential element in Afghanistan's efforts to build stability and sustainable peace.



Search for peace in Afghanistan must be led by the country's people – Ban

20 November 2010 - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said today that the search for peace through a political process in Afghanistan must be led by the people of that country themselves, and pledged United Nations' continued support for the efforts to restore security.

"We all recognize that there can be no purely military solution. This process must be Afghan-led, and it must respect the constitution and the rights of all Afghans," Mr Ban told the Summit of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) on Afghanistan in Lisbon.

The Secretary-General stressed that civil, political and human rights of the people of Afghanistan cannot be traded for stability or "saved for later." "They are crucial for stability and an inherent part of an inclusive approach to peace," he added.

He said the search for a political solution has entered its initial stage, he said, noting that process will be long and uncertain, with progress and setbacks.

"In accordance with our mandate, my Special Representative has offered – and the High Peace Council has accepted – UN support for such efforts.

"I would like to express my appreciation to the people and Government of Afghanistan and their international partners for supporting the role of the United Nations and the work of my Special Representative," Mr Ban said.

He stressed the need to focus on reforms with diligence and unity to overcome the public tensions and disagreements. He noted that there has been a welcome increase in civilian-military coordination in recent months.

"The leaders of ISAF [International Security Assistance Force] assembled here, are about to endorse a declaration that sets out priorities for the next year and stresses a real transition to Afghan leadership and responsibility. I welcome the Lisbon Declaration and the NATO-Afghanistan Partnership Agreement," the Secretary-General said.

"With effectively used resources, political will and mutual cooperation, we can succeed in helping Afghanistan to build back better. The Afghan Government and the international community, including the UN Assistance Mission, have defined a clear path for transition. Our shared goal is to achieve significant results by 2014," he added.

Outlining the basic principles that will guide the transition towards 2014, Mr Ban pointed that although the process was a joint one between the Government of Afghanistan and ISAF, it encompassed the Afghan people, the country's neighbours and the wider region, and had a implications for global security.

"Our approach is based on attaining security conditions – province-by-province – for development work to be effective. We aim to build capacity and support Afghan institutions, especially security institutions. This will require long-term commitment and partnership," the Secretary-General said.

"We have a strategy, as well as mechanisms to implement it. But events can undermine even the best-laid plans," he said, reminding leaders at the summit – also attended by Afghan President Hamid Karzai – of the recent attack by insurgents on the UN compound in Herat province, one of the most stable provinces in Afghanistan.

In comments to the press at the summit, the Secretary-General paid tribute to soldiers and civilians, both Afghan and international, who have given their lives in the effort to restore security in Afghanistan. "The costs have been high, but the objective – Afghanistan at peace – remains necessary and just," he said.

He said the summit had culminated in the adoption of the Lisbon Declaration and the NATO-Afghanistan Partnership Agreement. "These are important steps forward that build on earlier conferences in London and Kabul, and on progress on the ground in Afghanistan," he said. Afghan institutions have also demonstrated that they can take on increasing leadership and responsibility, he added.



UNICEF calls for a comprehensive Child Act in Afghanistan

23 November 2010 - Afghanistan needs a comprehensive Child Act fully in line with the provisions and principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In Afghanistan today one in five children die before reaching their fifth birthday - mostly from easily preventable diseases like diarrhoea and pneumonia – five million children are still out of school, over three million of whom are girls, and only six percent of children are registered at birth, leaving the great majority without a legal identity, protected and cared for by law.

"We are acutely aware of the difficulties facing the Government of Afghanistan in seeking to fulfill the rights of children in the country, especially in light of the ongoing conflict", said UNICEF Representative Peter Crowley. "It is the responsibility of the Government of Afghanistan to ensure the existence of a complete legal framework to fully protect all children. UNICEF will continue to assist in that process".

UNICEF welcomes the several important pieces of legislation and policies that have been developed and adopted since 2002; however inconsistencies remain between national legislation and the provisions of the Convention, as do challenges in ensuring effective implementation. Furthermore, while the Constitution of Afghanistan adopted in 2004 provides for progressive guarantees of international human rights standards, there is little direct reference to the specific rights of children.

It is for these reasons that UNICEF recommends to the Government that it prepare a comprehensive Child Act to encompass the full array of children's rights, backed by the necessary resources for implementation, as well as means to monitor and provide appropriate forms of redress. The Act would supersede all preceding legislation not in line with the Convention, and accord to the Convention a legal status that could be directly invoked within the domestic legal system. Once in place the successful implementation of a Child Act will require the fullest possible ownership and commitment from the senior-most levels of the Government of Afghanistan.

It is clear that legislative and policy frameworks alone will not automatically lead to the effective protection of child rights in Afghanistan. Awareness-raising on children's rights among the general population will be vital, as will specific training for all relevant professionals with a duty of care towards children, including all law enforcement officials, national security forces, and education and health personnel. Furthermore, the specific integration of child and human rights education into the school curriculum is needed so that all children in Afghanistan understand the rights to which they themselves are entitled.

Finally, despite the efforts already made to ensure the rights of all children, both girls and boys, from all areas of Afghanistan, there continue to be clear disparities among the child population of the country.

Poverty, disabilities, the impact of conflict, gender inequalities and the rural-urban divide all clearly affect access, or the failure of access, to basic education, health and other services. Targeted measures will therefore be required to address all such disparities. Equity considerations must be foremost in all planning and budgeting decisions that impact the welfare of children wherever they are and wherever they may live in the country.

World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims: WHO, Afghan govt call attention to road safety

21 November 2010 - To mark World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims, the World Health Organization and the Afghan Ministry of Public Health remember the many citizens who unnecessarily lost their lives in Afghanistan's streets year after year and renew their commitment to preventing further road traffic injuries and deaths.

Road traffic crashes kill nearly 1.3 million people each year on the world's roads – more than 3000 deaths every day – and injure or disable as many as 50 million more. They are the leading cause of death among young people aged 10-24 years. More than half of these accidents are sustained by people that are not travelling in a car, but are either pedestrians, cyclists or motorcyclists.

"Afghanistan now realizes the critical increase in and public health challenge posed by road traffic deaths," declared Her Excellency Dr Suraya Dalil, Acting Minister of Public Health. "We pledge our political will to focus on preventive measures as these are stunning figures that need not, and should not, be so high."

Earlier this year, the UN General Assembly declared the first-ever "Decade of Action for Road Safety," providing an opportunity for global action. The World Health Organization is supporting the Ministry of Public Health to launch their national plan for the Global Decade of Action for Road Safety on 11 May next year to ensure that the Decade leads to real improvements by making roads and vehicles safer, improving the behaviour of drivers and pedestrians, and enhancing emergency services.

"To set measurable priorities and targets and evaluate their impact, we first need to know the magnitude of road traffic injuries in Afghanistan," claimed Peter Graaff, WHO Representative to Afghanistan. "But one thing is clear: simple road safety measures such as wearing seatbelts, obeying speed limits and avoiding the use of mobile phones and other distractions can spare your own life, of other passengers in your vehicle and on the road."

Data shows that Afghanistan currently does not have a motorcycle helmet law, nor a seat-belt law. In addition, there is no formal, publicly available pre-hospital care system to deal with road traffic victims.

