



With Afghan elections over, time to refocus on peace and development – UN envoy

29 September 2010 - With a series of important political events having taken place this year, it is now time for Afghanistan and its partners to focus on the road ahead in ensuring peace and development for the country, a top United Nations official said today.

Briefing the Security Council, Staffan de Mistura noted that it has been a crucial year for Afghanistan, with the holding of the London Conference in January, the consultative peace jirga in June, the Kabul Conference in July and the national legislative elections earlier this month.

“Now that the legislative elections have taken place and once the final results are announced on 30 October, we hope and expect that all partners will revert their focus to the Kabul Process and in parallel refocus their attention to a political solution,” he stated.

The Kabul Process, set out at the conference held in the Afghan capital in July, includes commitments for action aiming towards a transition to greater Afghan responsibility and ownership, in both security and civilian areas.

Mr. de Mistura, the Secretary-General’s Special Representative and head of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan outlined some key conditions for ensuring progress in that transition. These include the need for all partners to engage politically behind the Kabul Process, and to avoid new agendas or competing initiatives and focus on priority issues.

In addition, the international community should align resources behind the Government’s stated priorities, as well as strive to be more results-oriented.

He noted that continued progress in these key areas will require reinforced efforts towards a consolidated peace and reintegration programme.

“There is unanimous consensus by the international community that there is no military solution in Afghanistan; the solution can and should be only political, and an ‘Afghan solution’; a solution that can only be supplemented by a broader regional solution,” said the Special Representative.

He added that the Government has already signalled initial steps towards a coordinated political strategy, of which the recent announcement of President Hamid Karzai’s appointments to the High Peace Council is only a beginning of a framework.

UNAMA stands ready, said Mr. de Mistura, to support the Government’s efforts, both in facilitating discussions on an eventual political settlement and in supporting any regional initiatives.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, in his latest report on Afghanistan that was issued last week, warned that much of the progress achieved in recent months is fragile and continues to be overshadowed by the deterioration in the security situation.

He added that, maintaining focus and momentum on the transition to Afghan leadership, amid rising security challenges and competing domestic, regional and international political pressures, will require sustained Government attention and the support of international partners.

For complete text of the Secretary-General’s Report on Afghanistan and SC debate summary, go to UNAMA website.



Afghans play sport for peace in the country's east

29 September 2010 - Cricket and volleyball tournaments were launched in Nangarhar and Laghman provinces in Afghanistan's east to mark the International Day of Peace, which falls on 21 September.

According to Nuragha Zwak, Director of the Youth Department of Nangarhar province, a total of eight teams participated in the cricket tournament in Jalalabad.

"More than 500 youth from different parts of Nangarhar province are involved in several peace activities, organized by the Youth Department, with the full support of the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF)," he added.

Firoz Khan, 23, a legal advisor to the Youth Department, is one of the organizers of this tournament.

"So far, four matches have taken place. Out of eight teams, four teams have qualified for the semi-finals, which will take place in early October," said Khan.

Nasim Jan, 22, whose team, Peace Caravan, qualified for the semi-finals, says he has been playing cricket for the last five years.

"I was so happy to take part in this vital event, which will deliver a good message about the significance of peace, that is a crucial need for all Afghans right now," said Nasim Jan.

The tournament was supported by UNICEF.

In continuation with the spirit of Peace Day, the UN Refugee Agency – UNHCR – in Jalalabad will also organize other activities, particularly cricket matches for returnees and internal displaced people (IDP), in some townships and settlements in Nangarhar and Laghman provinces.

Earlier, on the eve of Peace Day, girls and boys from Nangarhar and members of the Youth Federation took part in several events, including radio and TV round table discussions on the significance of peace, as well as drawing and poetry competitions.

"We also published a special edition of our newspaper "Youth", that contains articles and essays about peace and reconciliation," added Zwak.

Nooria, a member of the Youth Federation, who also does voluntarily work teaching computer education to girls in a project supported by UNICEF, took part in several peace events.

"Since 30 years our people are suffering from war. Many people lost their life. Many others sustained injuries and became disabled. I want both sides to stop fighting. We don't want people to kill each other and destroy our country," Nooria added.

By Shafiqullah Waak, UNAMA

UN SG calls on youth to give ideas on tackling global challenges on Peace Day

21 September 2010 - United Nations Secretary-General's message on Peace Day: Today we observe the annual International Day of Peace — a day dedicated to ceasefire and non-violence.

Peace is precious. It must be nurtured, maintained, defended. That is why, each year on the International Day of Peace, I ring the Peace Bell at United Nations Headquarters. And it is why — every day — I work for peace. I mediate between antagonists. I sound the alarm about threats — those we can see clearly, and others that lurk just over the horizon. I promote tolerance, justice and human rights, and I campaign for harmony among countries and peoples.

This year, Peace Day is dedicated to young people. We recently entered the International Year of Youth. Its theme of dialogue and mutual understanding captures the very essence of peace. Young people today are at home with global diversity, comfortable in an interconnected world. Yet they are also vulnerable to the forces of extremism. So I say to all Governments and our partners: let us do more for young people. Let us give them a world of peace and tolerance.

And I say to all young people, join us. Help us to work for peace. You are impatient. You see what we, your elders, allow to persist, year after year: poverty and hunger; injustice and impunity; environmental degradation.

With just five years remaining to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, I ask all, young and old, to help us to find global solutions to these global problems. Share your plans and ideas, act with creativity and passion. Help us fight for peace and prosperity for all.



Gardez's citizens pledge to work toward peace

29 September 2010 - A large gathering of people, including the governor of Paktya, senior Government officials, UN agencies, civil society, and school children and teachers, pledged to work towards bringing peace to Afghanistan, at a function to mark Peace Day 2010 in Gardez.

"Today we are observing Peace Day, even as many people continue to die. Due to the absence of peace, our youth are being killed, our women have become widows...and the Afghan people are becoming deprived from leading a prosperous life," said Zarghona Himmat, a member of the Provincial Council.

Himmat also called on tribal elders and the youth to do their best in bringing peace to the country.

Religious scholars such as Maulavi Mirajuddin, a member of the Ulema's Council, who also spoke at the event, said Islam teaches the lessons of peace and harmony.

"The Holy Prophet says those who promote reconciliation between two people will go to paradise," he informed the gathering about the significance of peace from an Islamic point of view.

"Of course, we are all aware there is no peace yet in Afghanistan. So 21 September can not be a day of celebration, but a day of reflection and re-motivation so that we may continue to play our part in the important effort to find peace for Afghanistan, after so many years of violence and difficulty," Christophe Svillon, from UNAMA, added.

Peace Day memorabilia, including kites, were distributed to participants and doves were set free in the air to end the function.

Meanwhile, with the close cooperation of the Gardez municipality, UNAMA fixed Peace Day banners and posters in different parts of the city.

By Dilawar Khan Dilawar, UNAMA

Afghanistan issues call at UN for end to State financing of terrorist groups

27 September 2010 - With his country enduring horrific terrorist violence on an almost daily basis, Afghanistan's Foreign Minister underlined the need for both States and non-State actors to cut off their financing for Al-Qaida at the United Nations today.

Nearly nine years after the declaration of the so-called Global War on Terror, "the international community's promise to the people of Afghanistan of a life free from the fear of the threat and exploitation of international terrorism remains unfulfilled," Zalmay Rassoul told the General Assembly's annual high-level debate as it entered its fourth day.

The reality, he said, is that "terrorism and the ideologies of extremism and radicalism are spawned beyond the borders of Afghanistan."

Despite the efforts of the country's military allies, terrorists continue to penetrate Afghanistan's borders, Dr. Rassoul said.

"As long as certain State and non-State actors provide Al-Qaida and its affiliated individuals and entities with sanctuary, arms and financing, they will remain formidable and murderous adversaries."

Terrorism in the region poses an increasing threat to global peace and security, the Foreign Minister said.

"If our international partners and allies wish to win the global war on terrorism, they must look beyond villages in Afghanistan and engage in a strategy that will effectively and decisively dismantle organizations and networks that continue – with immunity – to support terrorist and radical militants," he explained.

The scourge can only be overcome through a concerted global effort, the official said, noting that Afghanistan is cooperating with Pakistan and others in counter-terrorism activities.

"The people of Afghanistan have known too much violence and too much despair," he said. "The Afghan people crave peace, stability and security."

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Alpine trek fitting climax to Peace Day campaign in Afghanistan

24 September 2010 - School children and local community leaders were among the participants in a day-long walk in Afghanistan's Central Highlands held today by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to mark the International Day of Peace in 2010.

The alpine ranges of central Afghanistan have been the backdrop for "Trekkling for Peace", an environmental awareness campaign held over 100 days in the build-up to Peace Day.

The campaign, organized by UNEP in conjunction with the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), was designed to raise awareness of the significance of the Central Highlands' unique environment.

The message of peace and reconciliation was prominent at today's trek and during a variety of arts, cultural and outdoor activities, including a Ceremony for Peace, staged in the countdown to Peace Day by UNAMA, UNEP and the Provincial Peace Committee of Bamyān.

This is a crucial year in which we can together try to help the Afghans to find their own peace," the UN special envoy to Afghanistan, Staffan de Mistura, said.

"So 21 September cannot be a celebration day but a day of thinking and re-motivating ourselves in order to help the Afghans to find peace after so many years of violence and of difficulties," Mr de Mistura said.

Held annually on 21 September, the theme for Peace Day in 2010 was "Youth, peace and development".

Today the Trekkling for Peace campaign finale began with speeches from the Governor of Bamyān Province, Habiba Sorabi, Robert Watkins, Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General and Resident Coordinator of the UN Country Team, and representatives of the national Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL), the National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA), the Department of Youth and UNEP as well as local community leaders.

Kite-flying on the mountains by local children ended the opening ceremony before the group set off on their 5-kilometre alpine trek.

UNEP's work in Bamyān Province brings these themes together in a practical way by fostering awareness and action by young people to maintain a healthy local environment through dialogue and mutual understanding at the community level, UNEP's Afghanistan-based Protected Areas expert, Andrew Scanlon, said.

"We're working to help communities come together to manage their natural resources, and after decades of conflict in the country this helps to build trust in the wider community," Mr Scanlon said.

"Working in partnership to manage natural resources can be a great tool for building peace within and between communities and has been a key message of our Peace Day campaign. The feedback from the trek participants was overwhelmingly positive," he added.

The Central Highlands area includes Band-e-Amir, one of Afghanistan's most remarkable natural landscapes and the country's first national park, as well as the Ajar Valley Wildlife Reserve.

Environmental education, including raising awareness of the connection between natural resources and livelihoods, is a pillar of UNEP's country programme in Afghanistan where peace remains fragile.