

Statement by Staffan de Mistura on the final certification of election results

1 December 2010 - The United Nations strongly welcomes today's announcement by Afghanistan's Independent Election Commission (IEC) of the completion of the final certification of the results of the 18 September Wolesi Jirga elections.

We look forward to the prompt inauguration of the Wolesi Jirga, as an important further step in Afghanistan's strengthening of its democratic governance.

We commend Afghanistan's independent electoral authorities, the IEC and the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC), for their committed work in conducting the Wolesi Jirga elections and completing the process in extremely challenging circumstances. While we have noted that there were significant instances of irregularity and fraud, the IEC and ECC demonstrated their commitment to address these problems in accordance with the electoral law and the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.



UNIFEM (Part of UN Women) supports Government of Afghanistan in campaign against gender violence

30 November 2010 - UNIFEM (part of UN Women) expresses its thanks and appreciation to the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan for facilitating the visit of Ms Ines Alberdi, Executive Director, UNIFEM (part of UN Women) to Afghanistan.

During her three-day visit, Ms Ines Alberdi met with high-level leaders including the Minister of Women's Affairs, Members of the High Peace Council and also participated in the launch of the 16-day global campaign against Gender Violence organized by Ministry of Women Affairs and also addressed by His Excellency Hamid Karzai, President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

Ms Alberdi also held interactions with a number of key stake holders, including Government representatives, donors, civil society and senior leadership of the United Nations agencies and mission in Afghanistan. She shared knowledge and experiences on 'UN Women' and its strategic role both at the UN Headquarters and field levels.

Ms Ines Alberdi led a high-level discussion with representatives of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, development partners and civil society organizations on Gender Equality, empowerment and protection of women, including the new Violence against Women Law and the effective national responses including social protection.

During the 3-day visit Ms Ines Alberdi was impressed with the progress made in the areas of women's rights, equality and empowerment with focus on achievements such as the ratification of Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) and National NAPWA, highlighting the progress made in the area of law creation and development from a gender-inclusive perspective with special emphasis on the new EVAW Law which represents a positive step forward in protecting the rights of women victims of violence (new law criminalizes certain acts of violence, outlines duties and obligations of the various state actors to victims, stresses education and public awareness and lays out penalties for perpetrators).

The increased role being played by civil society, women's movement and youth groups is also welcoming and appreciative.

It is appreciative to see the openness and opportunities in Afghanistan and UN Women's role. For instance, the achievements of the London Conference, Kabul Conference, Peace Jirga, the establishment of the High Peace Council and the newly elected women parliamentarians.

These new milestones are seen as opportunities for the UN in Afghanistan to further its mandate of contributing to peace. The President's speech during the 16-day global campaign against gender violence launch event also reiterated the commitment towards advancing gender equality and protection of women and girls.

UNIFEM's long term and increased support to Government and the people of Afghanistan dates back to 2002. As UNIFEM transitions into UN Women it will play an increased role in capacitating, supporting and assisting the Government of Afghanistan.

On behalf of UNIFEM (part of UN Women), Ms Alberdi reiterated UN WOMEN's continued commitment and support in partnership with the UNCT to work with the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to enable it to deliver on its commitments to its citizens and in particular to women and girls in Afghanistan.

Message of Violence against Women Campaign in Afghanistan

Violence against women remains one of the most pervasive human rights violations of our time. It affects women in every part of the world.

In our country, Afghanistan, women and girls make more than 50% per cent of the population. They need to know what their rights are.

Afghan women suffer physical violence, psychological violence and sexual violence. Violence against women includes forced marriage, exchanging girls to settle disputes, as well as preventing women getting basic services like health, and education.

Together we can stop this violence. Afghan Laws criminalise all these acts of violence against women.

The EVAW Law protects women and girls. Afghanistan's Constitution Articles 22, 44 and 54 states that "the citizens of Afghanistan - whether woman or man - have equal rights and duties before the law."

Break the Silence and Say no to Violence against women and girls. Let's UNITE to end Violence Against Women.

Women and girls who are suffering from violence can get help by calling the Afghan Women Network Counseling Hotline at 0752007171. You are not alone.

The Secretary-General Message for World AIDS Day

1 December 2010 - Next year will mark the 30th anniversary of the AIDS epidemic. This milestone offers a moment to reflect — and to renew our resolve.

Over the past three decades, AIDS has caused untold suffering and death. But another story has unfolded through the years, one of the global community uniting with passion to take action and save lives. These efforts are making a real difference around the world.

Fewer people are becoming infected with HIV. Millions of people have gained access to HIV treatment. More women are now able to prevent their babies from becoming infected with HIV. Travel restrictions for people living with HIV are being lifted by many countries, as stigma gives way — still too slowly — to compassion and recognition of human rights.

With commitment and solidarity, this movement is helping the world turn the corner on the AIDS epidemic. We have finally reached the first part of Millennium Development Goal 6 — by halting and beginning to reverse the spread of HIV. We must continue to chart a new and bold path ahead.

Our common goal is clear: universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support. We must also work to make the AIDS response sustainable.



Three decades into this crisis, let us set our sights on achieving the “three zeros” — zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths. On this World AIDS Day, let us pledge to work together to realize this vision for all of the world's people.

EVAW campaign starts in Laghman province: Religious scholars to raise awareness for elimination of violence against women

30 November 2010 - Religious scholars have vowed to raise public awareness on the elimination of violence against women in mosques and other areas in eastern Laghman province.

The scholars, also called “Ulemas,” expressed their commitment to work towards ending violence against women, which is widespread in the east of Afghanistan, during an interaction with the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) last week.

On the eve of the start of a 16-day public campaign on 25 November, UNAMA's Human Rights team met with 18 Ulemas in Mehterlam, the provincial capital, to brief them about the Afghan laws pertaining to the elimination of violence against women (EVAW). The 16 Days of Activism for the Elimination of Violence against Women ends on 10 December, International Human Rights Day.

The Ulemas were also reminded of their role and responsibilities under the EVAW law as recommended by the Department of Religious Affairs.

The religious scholars said they would start raising awareness against violence against women immediately. Copies of the EVAW law in local Pashto language were also made available to all the Ulemas who promised to relay information concerning the law to persons in their communities during their mosque sermons.

The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) and the Department of Women's Affairs (DoWA) of Nangarhar province celebrated the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women in Jalalabad city, the provincial capital, on 23 November.

Sabrina Hamidi of AIHRC in Jalalabad said more than 500 cases of violence against women have been registered in eastern provinces during the last seven years, out of which 75 cases were registered in last nine months. Many of these cases were resolved by the AIHRC, with the help and mediation of elders.

“If you compare the number of cases registered this year with the cases reported in 2003 and 2004, it shows some increase but it doesn't mean that the number of cases increased. This is a result of our work that people were aware of women's rights, and were encouraged to report the cases to us or other relevant entities. This is our achievement,” said Ms Hamidi.

“Now, many cases are reported not only by victims themselves but by their neighbours and community elders,” she added, citing the case of an 11-year-old girl who was married off to a 30-year-old man under the “Baad” arrangement where women or girls are used to settle disputes or debts.

“She was beaten by her husband and mother-in-law several times. After many efforts, through some close relatives, she was able to contact AIHRC,” she added.

With the efforts made by the AIHRC and the local Government, the parents of her husband were convinced to allow their daughter-in-law to stay with her parents until the case is resolved.

AIHRC and the Government are still working to seek the final settlement of this case and of tens of other cases in the region.

By Shafiqullah Waak, UNAMA

Nangarhar radio starts broadcast of Afghan law seeking to end violence against women

28 November 2010 - A media house in the east of Afghanistan has started broadcasting articles of an Afghan law that seeks to end violence against women, coinciding with the start of a 16-day global campaign against violence against women on 25 November.

The state-controlled Radio Television Afghanistan (RTA) of Nangarhar province started the broadcast of public service announcements during prime time hours to make the people aware of the Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW) Law enacted in August 2009.

The 44-Article law criminalizes various forms of violence against women, such as sexual assault, forcing into prostitution, beatings, baad (the use of women or girls in exchange for a settlement of disputes or debt), forced marriage, child marriage and honour killings, among others.

Amrullah Rawan, director of broadcasting unit of RTA Nangarhar, said the message will reach about 2 million people in the conservative east of Afghanistan, where most families keep women away from the public's eye and crimes like honour killings and baad are frequent. RTA Nangarhar agreed to broadcast the messages following a request by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

In 1999, the UN General Assembly designated 25 November as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. The day also marks the beginning of the 16 Days of Activism for the Elimination of Violence against Women that ends on 10 December, which is International Human Rights Day.

Nwanneakolam Vwede-Obahor, a UNAMA human rights officer, believes the radio campaign will help spread the message to a wider population as radios are the most effective medium of communication to reach out to the country's rural population.

"There is very little information about the existence of the EVAW Law and a large number of the population in the eastern region are in the dark," said Vwede-Obahor. "We hope that knowledge about the law minimizes violence, at the least, if not eliminates it against women in the region."

Meanwhile, UNAMA's human rights officers have also been briefing religious clerics about the law. On 24 and 25 November, 58 clerics were briefed in Nangarhar and Laghman provinces and a similar session will be held in Kunar province on 3 December. UNAMA will also brief women's shuras (councils) in conjunction with an international aid group called International Medical Corps.

During the 16 days of campaigning, eastern Afghanistan will see similar briefings to youth groups, discussions and distribution of banners, with the involvement of various Government departments, UN agencies like UNICEF and UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies.

By Tilak Pokharel and Shafiqullah Waak, UNAMA



Tackling Afghan drugs and crime requires broad, global strategy: UN official

27 November 2010 - A top United Nations official today stressed the need for a broad strategy and greater international cooperation to boost counter-narcotics and crime prevention efforts in Afghanistan.

"To tackle the problem of Afghan opium and insecurity, we need to develop a comprehensive strategy and this strategy should be international," Yury Fedotov, Executive Director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), told a news conference in Kabul.

Mr. Fedotov said Afghanistan's efforts to increase security and reduce opium cultivation are to be "commended and expanded." At the same time, he said the international community must continue to encourage the Government to take steps to increase security to the extent to which Afghanistan can extend the rule of law and can increase the number of poppy-free provinces.

Afghan opium production has decreased by almost 50 per cent this year, according to the 2010 Afghan Opium Survey released in September by UNODC, which said the sharp drop was mainly due to a plant infection that took a heavy toll on the major poppy-growing provinces of Helmand and Kandahar.

The Survey found that all 20 poppy-free provinces remained so in 2010 and four other provinces – Kunar, Laghman, Zabul and Herat – were almost poppy-free. It also warned that rising prices on the global market may induce farmers to cultivate more of the lucrative crop.

Mr. Fedotov cited the need for a broad strategy to provide Afghan farmers with access to markets and a secure environment. "We need to give farmers a chance to support their families without resorting to opium poppy cultivation."

Just as important is reducing consumer demand, which he said must continue to be an important part of any comprehensive strategy.

Addressing Afghanistan's opium problems in conjunction with other related problems of organized crime and corruption and insecurity will help the entire region, Mr. Fedotov added.

"What we are doing has a broader impact on international stability. This is what we call shared responsibility. International cooperation is the only effective solution to the Afghan drug problem and its international impact."

While in Kabul, the Executive Director met with President Hamid Karzai and reaffirmed his Office's commitment to support national efforts on counter-narcotics and crime prevention.

"Building the capacity of national institutions and developing effective measures to address drugs and crime issues are of the utmost importance, and this is the core of the Afghanization process," Mr. Fedotov stressed.

He also visited a drug treatment centre and a women's prison. He voiced his deep concern over a very high number of drug users who still do not have access to comprehensive treatment services, and called on the international community to support national efforts to improve coverage of drug treatment and HIV prevention services.

In addition, he commended the women's prison which he said is a kind of a "model prison" where the standards of human rights are being observed. "I think that sets the example not only for Afghanistan and its provinces, but also this experience can be followed by other countries." Mr. Fedotov also voiced support for the country's anti-corruption efforts during a meeting with the Director General of the High Office of Oversight.



UNODC: Fighting drugs requires regional cooperation

1 December 2010 - The Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Mr Yury Fedotov crossed to the Sher Khan border in Kunduz on Tuesday and met with the Afghan National Police North Zonal Commander and local Kunduz government officials.

Mr Fedotov who is on his first trip to Afghanistan visited the northeastern province of Kunduz to highlight regional cooperation in fighting drugs as a UN priority. "In fighting drugs we are not lost. We did not win but we will win and it needs close cooperation of the regional countries," Mr Fedotov told the Afghan and Tajikistan media who covered his meeting with Afghan authorities at the border.

"The regional cooperation is the best way to overcome drugs. It is the issue I have raised with Afghanistan President in our meeting," said Mr Fedotov in his meeting with General Dawood Dawood, commander of 303 Pamir North Police Zone.

General Dawood appreciated the United Nations' support in fighting drugs in Afghanistan, and suggested more UNODC cooperation with focus on counter-narcotics, border police training and equipment, and finding an alternative to poppy cultivation.

"Saffron as an alternative for poppy cultivation resulted well in southwestern provinces, we want a similar experience in the northern provinces," said General Dawood who also requested the UNODC to establish drugs-testing laboratories for the Counter-Narcotics Police in Balkh and Kunduz provinces.

"Global terrorism and drugs smugglers have collaboration and they support each other, but we promise not to get tired fighting against them and we need the support of the international friends in this field," said General Dawood.

"Tajikistan is our good friend in fighting drugs, but we need the support of other Central Asian countries which are weak. We need your support to encourage them to extend their collaboration in this field," he added.

On the other hand, Director Rustam Nazarov of the Tajikistan Drug Controlling Agency noted that "based on the signed agreement with the government of Afghanistan, we have very close collaboration on fighting drugs and fortunately it resulted in the reduction of drugs trafficking in the borders."

By Shamsuddin Hamed, UNAMA



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Afghanistan revisits its strategy to combat HIV/AIDS

1 December 2010 - On World AIDS Day, government health officials, the United Nations and its partners identify priority measures needed to tackle the increasing public health concern that HIV/AIDS poses in Afghanistan.

Although Afghanistan currently falls under a low HIV epidemic level category, there is evidence of a concentrated HIV epidemic, in particular among Injecting Drug Users (IDUs) who share needles. Other marginalized groups such as prisoners and migrants or displaced people are also vulnerable to the risk of infection with HIV.

According to government data, 636 HIV positive cases were reported cumulatively by the end of 2009. The real numbers are substantially higher according to UNAIDS/WHO projections which will be revised in 2011.

"What is needed is an urgent scale-up of comprehensive harm reduction services in general and in prisons in particular," said Her Excellency Dr Suraya Dalil, Acting Minister of Public Health. "Prevention, treatment and care is the only way to go if we are to reach the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) for HIV."

Currently, there are only 2 functional Anti-Retroviral Treatment (ART) centres in the major cities of Kabul and Herat where, according to recent studies, HIV infection more prevalent. Availability, access, and quality of services need to be strengthened. MOPH and its partners, including civil society and the UN, are taking steps to address these gaps.

Although Opioid Substitution Therapy (OST) has been approved as a harm reduction strategy, its effective implementation and scale-up for the population at greatest need remains a challenge. "Low awareness of, and the stigma and discrimination associated with, people living with HIV are major impediments to implementing effective HIV interventions and accessing the most-at-risk population groups," said Oussama Tawil, UNAIDS Country Coordinator for Afghanistan.

"Every Afghan has the right to voluntary and confidential HIV testing," said Peter Graaff, WHO Representative and Chairperson of the Afghanistan Joint United Nations Team on AIDS (JUNTA). He continued stating that a human rights-based approach is essential to ensure universal access to HIV prevention, treatment and care.