

UNAMA NEWS

United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
Website: www.unama.unmissions.org

Compiled by the Strategic
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Kabul, Afghanistan

3 - 10 December 2009



UN envoy to government: Use political will to fight corruption

9 December 2009 - Corruption is very high on the United Nations' agenda for Afghanistan, according to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General Kai Eide.

Mr Eide was speaking at a news conference in Kabul organized on the occasion of International Anti-Corruption Day that included key government officials involved in fighting corruption.

The top UN envoy also used this opportunity to press the new government of President Karzai to show greater political will in combating graft. President Karzai is expected to name his new cabinet by Saturday.

He also noted that fighting corruption will not necessarily succeed through new strategies, but through the implementation of existing laws.

"Structures do exist, a legal system does exist, that is able to a large extent to address corruption. So in my mind it's not the creation of a new structure that should be at the heart of our discussions but the political determination to make use of the structures in place, that is the important element," he added.

Also today, Jean-Luc Lemahieu, the head of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in Afghanistan said that "Afghanistan has taken a number of significant steps but an enormous amount of work remains to be done."

President Karzai will convene a National Anti-Corruption conference from 15-17 December that will bring together Afghan civil society, the government, the judiciary and the international community.

By Aditya Mehta, UNAMA



UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon addresses the media during his visit to Kabul in early November following the attack on a guesthouse which killed five UN staff.

Photo: Fardin Waezi (UNAMA).

Ban looks to UN budget committee to support plan to boost security

7 December 2009 - The United Nations faces unprecedented security challenges in many regions of the world, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon told the General Assembly's budget committee today, as he sought support for almost \$300 million in new funding to make the Organization and its staff safer.

"We have been adapting to new security threats for many years now, but the latest threats compel us to go further still," he said, highlighting a recent attack on a guest house in Afghanistan that killed five UN staff members

Mr. Ban told an informal meeting of the Fifth Committee that his proposal for almost \$300 million over the next two years aimed to strengthen and unify the UN security management system.

"I would also like to underscore the importance of meeting emergency needs, particularly in the light of recent attacks," said Mr. Ban, adding that he remains deeply concerned about the security situation in Afghanistan.

The Committee is currently examining the Secretary-General's proposed budget of \$5.06 billion to cover the work of the UN Secretariat for 2010 and 2011, which represents real growth of \$22.4 million, or half a percentage point, over the previous biennium

Given the global economic downturn, Mr. Ban stressed that his proposed budget only includes the highest priority projects and call for only "modest" increases.

"We all recognize the need to constantly modernize our infrastructure, stay abreast of technological developments, and strengthen performance," he said. "It can be the difference between progress and poverty, and even a matter of life and death."

Among the other issues Mr. Ban addressed were the appointment of a special adviser on Africa, the funding of a development account, and the recruitment of the next chief of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS).

"As Chief Administrative Officer, I am committed to management reform and to greater transparency, accountability and efficiency," said Mr. Ban.

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UN's Eide meets US Defense Secretary

9 December 2009 - The United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Kai Eide, today met with the US Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates in Kabul, where he presented his civilian agenda proposals for Afghanistan, first articulated at the ISAF Foreign Ministers meeting in Brussels on 4-5 December.

The UN's top envoy outlined the need for a more compact structure for coordinating civilian assistance in order to move forward in Afghanistan.

He called for the United Nations, the International Security Assistance Force, the European Union and key donors to ensure they all work together in a more coordinated and streamlined way.

"There is no other choice. We all have to change our mindset and be more geared towards a coordinated approach," said Mr Eide.

The Special Representative also underlined the need to avoid a situation where pressure for immediate results lead to an acceleration of quick-impact projects and drew attention further away from long-term sustainable solutions

"This applies in particular to the building of civilian institutions and Afghanistan's economic growth," said Mr Eide.

"The launching of President Obama's strategy and the ISAF Foreign Ministers has provided a new momentum in the partnership between Afghanistan and the international community. However, that new momentum is still fragile and must now be consolidated with the appointment and work of the new Afghan government and the preparations for the London conference on 28 January 2010," added Mr Eide.



Human rights for all citizens in Afghanistan

7 December 2009 - The Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan Robert Watkins, today spoke at the country's Ministry of Foreign Affairs in advance of Human Rights Day on 10 December. Below are excerpts from his speech.

Human Rights Day honours 61 years of world-wide effort to push back discrimination – the theme of this year's celebration – and to advance our common agenda that men and women everywhere enjoy their human rights which are fundamental to their safety, dignity, happiness and well-being.

On this day we should take time to consider how far we have come in terms of human rights protection and promotion and the nature of the challenges ahead. A number of important gains have been made particularly in terms of enhancing the right to health and education and identifying the need to undo the discrimination that marginalizes and impoverishes a very large swathe of the Afghan population.

A key driver of injustice in Afghanistan, and related instability, is the abuse of power. Linked to this is the issue of pervasive corruption. Re-establishing the rule of law and ending impunity for criminal conduct remains crucial to creating durable peace and justice in this country. Known violators of human rights should be punished, not rewarded. Ignoring this issue has inevitable consequences and serves to cast a dark shadow over the country and its prospects for a democratic future.

There is an urgent need for a new deal for the people of Afghanistan. This necessarily entails an inclusive political agenda shaped by the values inherent in human rights and genuine efforts to give them meaningful effect. A national dialogue, that allows for all voices to be heard, particularly the voices of those who historically have been compelled to remain silent, is very much needed today. The need to secure freedom of expression, therefore, is paramount; without it, large sections of society will continue to feel marginalized and powerless.

The issue of accountability and justice has to be a priority in any dialogue geared to the realization of peace and reconciliation. The year 2009, very sadly, has seen an intensification of the armed conflict. The worsening security situation has grave humanitarian consequences, hindering efforts to undertake timely and effective life-saving humanitarian action. This year, I am sad to say, has seen the highest civilian death toll since 2001 – with anti-government elements responsible for the largest number of casualties.

However, I am pleased to note that there have been some positive steps by international military forces to reduce civilian casualties; such measures include improved transparency of command structures and tactical directives that prioritize measures to safeguard the lives of civilians.

As SRSR Kai Eide has publicly stated, all of the conflicting parties must make every effort to minimise civilian casualties. Pursuant to its mandate, UNAMA will continue to monitor, report and advocate for the protection of civilians.

Climate change is population, gender issue – UNFPA

7 December 2009 - The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) today launched in Kabul the State of World Population Report 2009.

The 2009 Report – which shifts the debate on climate change from carbon emissions to how human beings both affect and are affected by global warming – was unveiled by Arie Hoekman, UNFPA country representative.

The Population Report was earlier launched at the global level on 19 November “and today we are doing the same here in Afghanistan while the negotiations leading up to the widely anticipated International Conference on Climate Change have just started in Copenhagen,” said Mr Hoekman.

To hammer out a new international agreement that could slow down and eventually halt the accelerated warming of the earth’s climate in the long run, the world’s climate experts and Government officials are convening in Copenhagen this month for the 15th Conference of Parties to the United Nations Conference on Climate Change.

In a press conference at the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Mr Hoekman called on Afghans to join the worldwide fight against global warming, pointing out that even as the country is in the midst of conflict, all other conflicts “pale in comparison” to the eventual consequences of climate change

“Perhaps some will say, why the importance (of) talking about climate change in a country that is torn by conflict? Yet, it is exactly this climate change that will most likely make all conflicts pale in comparison in terms of its impact on global society, regions, individual countries and local communities. That is, if we don’t act now,” added Mr Hoekman.

Pointing out that “slower population growth in both developed and developing countries may help ease the task of bringing global emissions into balance,” Hoekman enthused that the 2009 Report “breaks new ground by shifting the debate on climate change from abstract and technical discussions about nations’ carbon emissions to the realities of how human beings – from individuals to the world’s population as a whole – both influence and are affected by the warming of the earth’s atmosphere.”



“It seems logical to assume that greenhouse gasses would not have accumulated that fast if the number of earth’s inhabitants had not increased so rapidly. Imagine, we were only 1,250 million people in 1850 and 100 years later it doubled and reached 2.5 billion by 1950. After that the growth of the world population went into overdrive. Now, only 59 years later, the world population numbers 6.8 billion,” Mr Hoekman warned.

The UNFPA country head revealed that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change had assessed as early as 2007 the “gender aspect of vulnerability and adaptive capacity” in response to climate change and comparable natural disasters.

“Women produce roughly half the world’s food, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and anywhere from 60 per cent to 80 per cent of food in most developing countries. Given women’s significant engagement in food production and preparation and the potential for land use to contribute to climate-change solutions in developing countries, the close connection between gender, farming and climate change deserves far more analysis than it currently receives,” he stressed.

By Aurora V. Alambra, UNAMA

Higher education set to soar in Afghanistan

4 December 2009 - A new plan to double the number of places at Afghanistan’s universities has been launched in Kabul.

The plan aims to build a high quality, internationally recognized and well-managed public and private higher education system that responds to Afghanistan’s growth and development needs, improves public well-being, respects traditions, and incorporates modern scientific knowledge.

The Minister of Higher Education, in the presence of high-ranking officials, ambassadors, international donors, and UNAMA’s Special advisor on Development Mark Ward, inaugurated the National Higher Education Strategic Plan yesterday at Kabul University. “The new strategy for higher education will nearly double the number of places for Afghan students in university in five years,” said Mark Ward during the inauguration

“The plan is to increase the number of places in Afghanistan’s universities from the current 62,000 to 115,000 in 2014,” he added. There have been significant improvements in the education sector since the fall of the Taliban regime, in 2001, with school attendance increasing from less than one million children in 2001 to more than seven million attending school today. This success has created pressure on the country’s universities to expand. “We must also focus on quality too. Afghanistan’s universities must teach what young people need to know today, to take their place in a modern workforce, not ideas and skills from the past,” Mr Ward added.

The plan also includes the training of more than 1,000 university teachers, the rehabilitation of teaching infrastructures, such as the building of additional classrooms, laboratories, computer labs, offices and other facilities at all existing universities. The main goal is to match the education system with the realities of Afghanistan, by producing quality graduates relevant to the market needs of the country, and also to encourage research which focuses on key problems facing Afghanistan including its agriculture, business, mining, education and private sectors. The budget of this strategy is US\$ 560 million and still requires support from international donors.

By Alexandre Brecher-Dolivet, UNAMA

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Human Rights Day 2009

10 December 2009 - **Secretary-General's Message for Human Rights Day 2009.**

No country is free of discrimination. We see it everywhere, in many forms: old and new, covert and blatant, public and private. It may appear as institutionalized racism, as ethnic strife, as episodes of intolerance and rejection, or as an official national version of history that denies the identity of others.

Discrimination targets individuals and groups that are vulnerable to attack: the disabled, women and girls, the poor, migrants, minorities, and all those who are perceived as different.

These vulnerable people are frequently excluded from participating in the economic, political, cultural and social lives of their communities. The bigotry that stigmatizes and excludes them can be exploited by extremists. In some countries, we are witnessing the rise of a new politics of xenophobia.

But these victims of discrimination are not alone. The United Nations is standing with them, committed to defending the rights of all, and particularly the most vulnerable. That is our identity and our mission. The international human rights community continues to counter bias and hatred. Public awareness has led to global treaties offering legal protection from discrimination and unequal treatment. But abstract commitments are not enough. We must continue to confront inequality and intolerance wherever they are found. On Human Rights Day, I invite people everywhere, at all levels, to join the United Nations and human rights defenders around the world in the fight against discrimination.



Human Rights Day 2009

10 December 2009 - **Statement by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay.**

The concept of non-discrimination lies at the heart of human rights. For this reason, it has been designated the official theme of this Human Rights Day, which occurs every year on the anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. And for this and many other reasons it should be an unofficial theme every day, every year, for everyone.

Twenty-six of the Universal Declaration's 30 Articles begin with the words "Everyone..." or "No one..." Everyone should enjoy all human rights. No one should be excluded. All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. Non-discrimination must prevail. Today, we have a whole range of rights-based international treaties imbued throughout with the concept of non-discrimination. These include, for example, Conventions on the rights of the child, rights of people with disabilities, rights of refugees and of migrant workers; Conventions dedicated to the elimination of racial discrimination and discrimination against women; as well as treaties dealing with labour, health and religion. These legally binding standards are complemented by important UN declarations detailing minority rights and the rights of indigenous peoples. These international laws and standards are supported by thousands of national and regional laws and institutions. Quite a few countries now have truly universal education, and a smaller number have universal public health systems. Taken together all of this marks an extraordinary celebration of humankind's ability and aspiration to create a world of equal opportunity and equal treatment under the law.

And many millions of people have benefited as a result. People of all sorts have something to offer. When we embrace diversity, we bring extra richness and depth to our societies.

Yet discrimination is still rampant. Women work two-thirds of the world's working hours and produce half of the world's food, yet earn only 10 percent of the world's income and own less than one percent of the world's property. Despite significant improvements over the past century, women and girls are still discriminated against to some degree in all societies and to a great degree in many. Every day countless numbers of women are sexually or physically abused, and the vast majority of their abusers go unpunished and future abuse is undeterred.

Minorities in all regions of the world continue to face serious threats, discrimination and racism, and are frequently excluded from fully taking part in the economic, political, social and cultural life available to the majorities in the countries or societies where they live. Similar problems face the estimated 370 million indigenous people who make up five percent of the world's population, but 15 percent of its poorest people.

They are often marginalized, deprived of many fundamental rights – including land and property – and lack access to basic services. Racial and ethnic discrimination are also to be found all across the planet, and remain one of the most dangerous forms of discrimination. Left unchecked, or actively fanned, they can all too easily lead to hatred, violence, and – in the worst cases – push on up the scale to full-blown conflict, crimes against humanity and genocide.

Discrimination based on religion or belief can be equally destructive. In certain countries, members of certain groups are restricted in how they can exercise their religion or belief and deprived of their fundamental rights.

In extreme cases such conditions may lead to sectarian violence, killing and conflict. Stereotyping can lead to stigmatization and isolationism. Refugees and migrants are widely discriminated against, including in rich countries where men, women and children who have committed no crime are often held in detention for prolonged periods. They are frequently discriminated against by landlords, employers and state-run authorities, and stereotyped and vilified by some political parties, media organizations and members of the public.

Many other groups face discrimination to a greater or lesser degree. Some of them are easily definable such as persons with disabilities, stateless people, gays and lesbians, members of particular castes and the elderly. Others may span several different groups and find themselves discriminated against on several different levels as a result. Those who are not discriminated against often find it hard to comprehend the suffering and humiliation that discrimination imposes on their fellow individual human beings. Nor do they always understand the deeply corrosive effect it has on society at large.

Discrimination feeds mistrust, resentment, violence, crime and insecurity and makes no economic sense, since it reduces productivity. It has no beneficial aspects for society whatsoever. Yet we continue to practice it – virtually all of us – often as a casual reflex, without even realizing what we are doing

I would therefore like to encourage people everywhere – politicians, officials, businesses leaders, civil society, national human rights institutions, the media, religious leaders, teachers, students, and each and every individual – to honour Human Rights Day 2009 by embracing diversity and resolving to take concrete and lasting actions to help put an end to discrimination.