

## Afghanistan: top UN envoy deplores militant attacks in Kabul

18 January 2010 - The top United Nations envoy to Afghanistan today strongly condemned this morning's coordinated deadly attacks, for which the Taliban have claimed responsibility, in the capital, Kabul, decrying the militants' "staggering disregard" for civilians.

According to media reports, the militants targeted Government buildings, including the presidential palace, as well as shopping malls and other areas. The attacks took place as President Hamid Karzai was about to swear in new members of his cabinet.

"There can be no justification for endangering the lives of so many people and I condemn these attacks in the strongest terms possible," said Kai Eide, the Secretary-General's Special Representative.

"Such attacks will not deter us from continuing our support for the people of Afghanistan and its Government institutions."

A report released just last week showed that 2009 was the deadliest year yet for civilians in Afghanistan, with 2,412 casualties recorded – an increase of 14 per cent over the previous year – prompting the UN to call for greater efforts to ensure their protection.

"2009 has proven to be the worst year since the fall of the Taliban regime for civilians caught up in the armed conflict," said Norah Niland, Chief Human Rights Officer at the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), adding that the conflict has intensified and spread into areas that were previously considered safe.

The Mission's report points to anti-Government elements as being responsible for the largest proportion of civilian deaths, killing three times as many civilians as pro-Government forces.

Of the 2,412 deaths reported last year, 1,630 (67 per cent) were attributed to anti-Government elements while 596 (25 per cent) were attributed to pro-Government forces. The remaining 186 deaths (8 per cent) could not be attributed to any of the conflicting parties as they died as a result of cross fire or by unexploded ordnance, the Mission stated in a news release.



## UNITED NATIONS *Office on Drugs and Crime*



### Corruption, not insecurity, biggest concern for Afghans – UN report

19 January 2010 - While violence and poverty are widely thought to be the major challenges confronting Afghanistan, nearly 60 per cent of the population said corruption is their biggest concern, according to a new United Nations report, which states that Afghans paid \$2.5 billion in bribes over the past 12 months.

"The Afghans say that it is impossible to obtain a public service without paying a bribe," says Antonio Maria Costa, the Executive Director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), which published the report, "Corruption in Afghanistan: Bribery as Reported by Victims."

The report is based on interviews with 7,600 people in 12 provincial capitals and over 1,600 villages on their experiences between autumn 2008 and autumn 2009.

During the survey period, one Afghan out of two had to pay at least one kickback to a public official, UNODC says in a news release. More than half of the time, the request for the bribe was explicitly demanded by the service provider, and in most cases, the bribes were paid in cash.

The average bribe is \$160 in a country where the gross domestic product (GDP) per capita is just \$425 per year. Afghans paid out \$2.5 billion in bribes over the past 12 months, equivalent to almost one quarter of the country's GDP. This is similar to the revenue accrued by the opium trade in 2009, which UNODC estimates at \$2.8 billion.

"Drugs and bribes are the two largest income generators in Afghanistan: together they correspond to about half the country's GDP," Mr. Costa notes.

In addition, the report finds that public officials are seen as the biggest culprits, with around 25 per cent of Afghans saying that they had to pay at least one bribe to police and local officials during the survey period, while between 10 and 20 per cent had to pay bribes either to judges, prosecutors, or members of the government.

The international community also received criticism, with 54 per cent of Afghans believing that international and non-governmental organizations "are corrupt and are in the country just to get rich."

This perception, notes UNODC, "risks undermining aid effectiveness and discrediting those trying to help a country desperately in need of assistance."

Mr. Costa urged the new Afghan Government to make fighting corruption its highest priority, describing the scourge as a cancer that is spreading. Specifically, he said President Karzai must urgently administer tough medicine based on the UN Convention against Corruption, including turning the High Office of Oversight and Anti-Corruption into "an independent, fearless and well-funded anti-corruption authority."

Among other measures, he recommended that public officials should be "vigorously" vetted, public servants should disclose their incomes and assets, and governors and local administrators "with proven records of collusion with shady characters" should be removed.



## Joint board endorses peace programme and increases in security force personnel

**20 January 2010 - The Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board (JCMB) co-chaired by the head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) today endorsed the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Programme of the Government of Afghanistan.**

The JCMB endorsement of the Peace and Reintegration Programme comes a week before the London Conference on Afghanistan.

The JCMB is the forum where Afghanistan's leaders and the international community identify top development priorities and finance them. It is chaired by Minister of Finance Zakhilwal and UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General Kai Eide.

The Peace Programme aims to promote peace through a political approach and to encourage Taliban fighters and leaders, previously siding with armed opposition and extremist groups, to renounce violence and join a constructive process of reintegration. The programme is in line with President Karzai's vision for his second term as outlined in his inauguration speech.

The Board also agreed to increase the number of soldiers in the Afghan National Army up to 171,600 and the number of police officers in the Afghan National Police up to 134,000 by October 2011.

Also endorsed by the 28-member body were the Afghan government's Integrated Plan for Economic Development, and the programme for "More Effective Afghan Aid."

During its 13th meeting at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs today, the four-year-old JCMB also took note of the following Afghan government policy and strategy papers: Concept Note on Governance (Rule of Law and Human Rights); Concept Paper on Regional Cooperation; Concept Paper on Security; Concept note on Anti-Corruption; and the progress towards the finalisation of the Afghan National Police Strategy.

The 28-strong JCMB has seven representatives from the Government of Afghanistan; plus 21 representatives from the international community, including international military forces consisting of contingents from a total of 42 nations.

The Afghan Government representatives are the senior economic advisor to the President as JCMB co-chair; the National Security Advisor, and the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Finance, Economy, Education and Justice, as members.

The JCMB was constituted by the Afghanistan Compact – the by-product agreement of the London Conference of 2006 – for a period of five years from April 2006 to March 2011.

By Aurora V. Alambra, UNAMA

## UNHCR to build 10,000 houses for returnees in 2010

**18 January 2010 - The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) said today it expects to build 10,000 houses for returning Afghan refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in 2010.**

According to UNHCR, the construction of 10,000 new houses will bring the total number built since 2002 to an anticipated 200,000 units, assisting more than 1.2 million returnees mostly from Pakistan and Iran.

The new shelter units are being built by recognizing shelter as one of the priority needs of returnees, according to a statement issued by the agency in Kabul today.

The refugee agency has facilitated the return of more than five million Afghans, an estimated 20 per cent of the total population, since 2002, making this operation "one of the most significant in the agency's 60-year history."

It has also assisted over 500,000 IDPs to return to their places of origin and voluntary return has been the preferred durable solution for them.

Still, there are approximately 2.6 million Afghan refugees living beyond the country's borders – mostly in Pakistan and Iran.

Although sustainable return and reintegration is becoming increasingly challenging in view of the deterioration of the security situation, limited socio-economic opportunities and widespread poverty, "large portions of the returnees have been able to go back to their places of origin and are living a normal life", said Mohammad Nader Farhad, public information officer with UNHCR Afghanistan.

Together with Afghanistan's Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation, UNHCR will continue to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees from Pakistan and Iran and their reintegration within their communities.

UNHCR's operation in Afghanistan is in line with the goals of the "Refugee, Returnee and IDP" set out in the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS).

"During 2010 UNHCR's reintegration activities such as shelter, water, and income generating projects inside Afghanistan will focus on addressing the needs of the most vulnerable returning Afghans," said today's statement.

Water and sanitation activities will remain one of UNHCR's priorities for assisting returnees.

The agency has helped build or reconstruct more than 10,000 water points since 2002.

While continuing to monitor the situation of returnees and provide free legal advice, UNHCR will also run a special programme that provides assistance to extremely vulnerable individuals in 2010.

"UNHCR will also continue to advocate for the longer term reintegration needs of returnees to be fully mainstreamed into national development programmes so as to underpin the sustainability of voluntary repatriation," said UNHCR.

By Tilak Pokharel, UNAMA





## Afghanistan to get US\$ 11 million from UN to boost emergency response

*19 January 2010 - Afghanistan is receiving US\$ 11 million from a US\$ 100 million allocated by the United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) to boost the humanitarian response in "14 ongoing but underfunded emergencies".*

The amount Afghanistan will receive is the third highest after Ethiopia (US\$ 17 million) and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (US\$ 16 million).

"The Humanitarian Country Team, which consists of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the UN under the leadership of the UN Humanitarian Coordinator, will decide how to spend the money," said Wael Haj-Ibrahim, the Afghanistan head of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) which manages the CERF.

Launched in March 2006, CERF is managed by OCHA and aims to speed up relief operations for humanitarian emergencies and make funds available quickly after a disaster, when people are most at risk.

Other countries receiving assistance from the US\$ 100 million fund are Kenya, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Yemen, Chad, Niger, Colombia, Eritrea, the Philippines, Haiti and Guinea.

CERF is funded by voluntary contributions from Member States, NGOs, local governments and individual donors.

Since 2006, nearly a third of the US\$ 1.5 billion allocated from CERF – over US\$ 440 million – has gone to chronically neglected crises in almost 50 countries.

By Tilak Pokharel, UNAMA

## UNAMA RADIO PROGRAMMES ON 105.2 FM

UNAMA's weekly radio show in Dari and Pashto – "Afghanistan Today" – produced with RTA at 9:00am every Saturday morning - is also available for downloading from the UNAMA website. For those of you who use iTunes, you may be interested to know that UNAMA has started its own special page on iTunes for its radio programming. The iTunes page also includes the latest reports from UNAMA Radio in Dari, Pashto and English.

Listeners with iTunes installed on their computers can search for "UNAMA Radio" and then subscribe for free to all the latest audio reports and programmes on Afghanistan.

## UN agencies in Kandahar ready to help people during the winter

*20 January 2010 - UN agencies in the south of Afghanistan are stepping up efforts to help the needy during the winter.*

In Kandahar the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees says that in southern Afghanistan 4,000 returnee and displaced families will receive help from the UN Refugee Agency this winter.

The figures include 1,500 families from Helmand, 1,250 from Kandahar, 570 from Zabul and 500 from Uruzgan.

As temperatures drop around the country, United Nations agencies, their partners, and the Afghan Government, are working together to provide relief supplies to help some 200,000 vulnerable people cope with the harsh winter country-wide, including provinces in the southern region.

In addition to non-food assistance and heating materials, in certain areas in some provinces, more than 12,000 vulnerable families (72,000 individuals) will receive a cash voucher worth US\$ 30 to buy heating materials or other items of their choice from identified retailers.

The winterization kit consists of patoos, sweaters, shoes and socks.

In addition, UNHCR is aiming to distribute kerosene to each vulnerable family instead of a US\$ 30 cash voucher.

The assistance by UNCHR will start in the third week of January.

The material is already procured and pre-positioned in the provinces in anticipation of the blockage of roads during the winter.

Mr Abdul Jalil, from UNHCR Kandahar, said that the process for identifying those most in need is ongoing the Zhary internally displaced persons (IDP) camp in Kandahar, Zabul, Uruzgan and Helmand provinces.

"The aim of the identification process is to select the most vulnerable families in need amongst the IDPs for assistance. UNHCR will distribute the winter kit/package – which includes, warm clothes, shoes and socks and heating material – to the identified vulnerable families", said Mr Jalil.

In addition to UNHCR's assistance, the World Food Programme (WFP) and World Health Organization (WHO) will provide assistance to vulnerable families during the winter.

The WHO Kandahar office has distributed anti-TB drugs to Helmand, Kandahar, Zabul and Uruzgan provinces.

WHO will also send-off five pneumonia kits to Uruzgan, three to Zabul and five kits to the Helmand office of the Ministry of Public Health.

In addition the WFP Kandahar office will assist 36,000 beneficiaries under the localized emergency winterization programme during the winter.

The assistance is planned to run from December 2009 to February 2010 for the southern provinces.

According to WFP Kandahar office the organization has allocated a total of 710 metric tons of mixed food for the beneficiaries.

The food package, for each family, includes wheat, pulses, oil and salt.

By Mujeeb Rahman, UNAMA