

## Reconciliation opinion editorial by UN envoy to Afghanistan: Time to talk

**23 February 2010 - The largest military offensive since 2002 is now underway in the Helmand province in Afghanistan. At the same time, a consensus is emerging that the conflict in this country can ultimately not be solved by military means.**

I have consistently advocated the need to prepare the ground for a political process, which could lead to a political settlement. Military operations must therefore be conducted in a way that does not close the space for efforts to initiate such a process.

At the recent London Conference, more than 70 countries and organizations agreed to create a trust fund that would help integrate Taliban and other insurgents who accept to stop fighting. The details of how this fund will work, who will be targeted, and how incentives will be provided, remain to be worked out.

It is my view that this reintegration trust fund is not in itself a "game changer" as some tend to believe. It could, however, be an important tool if combined with a reconciliation process aimed at those who take part in the insurgency for ideological rather than economic reasons, and if at some point that process involves the political structures of the insurgency. I have long maintained that if you want relevant and sustainable results, you will have to involve relevant people with authority in an appropriate way.

There are no doubt fighters who are on the side of the insurgency because of a lack of licit economic opportunities. However, I believe we tend to exaggerate their numbers. We should not underestimate the number of those who fight for reasons of ideology, resentment and a sense of humiliation – in addition to criminal elements. Often, such motivation stems from a conviction that the government is corrupt and unable to provide law and order combined with a sense of foreign invasion – not only in military terms, but in terms of disrespect for Afghanistan's culture, values and religion.

Offering financial incentives only could be perceived as an attempt to buy loyalties or convictions, and generate further resentment. A reintegration fund without a political process could easily harden the insurgency rather than weakening it. While it may not be difficult to buy a young man out of unemployment – even if this could also be unsustainable, it is difficult to buy him out of his convictions, sense of humiliation or alienation from power.

The Afghan government and the international community have repeatedly stated their basic conditions for a political process. At the center of these conditions stands acceptance of and respect for the Afghan Constitution. The insurgency cannot be allowed – by political means – to bring the country back to the dark years of the 1990's. Those who choose to reconcile must respect the achievements made since 2002 and accept the aspirations of the majority of Afghans for a peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan, where each and every Afghan can enjoy the rights given to them.

A political process must be shaped and led by Afghan authorities and cannot be imposed by international civilians or military with scant knowledge of this complex society. However, the international community must support – in financial and political terms – and facilitate where the Afghan authorities desire. This process – when it is launched – will not come about suddenly. Nor will it yield a dramatic breakthrough overnight. It will require careful orchestration among key actors. Loud and public invitations to the insurgency to join a reconciliation process will most likely be met with rejections. More cautious diplomatic initiatives may produce results. As in many other peace processes, confidence-building measures could be undertaken to test the prospects for a wider process. The delisting of individuals from the UN sanctions list could be one such measure. Five individuals have already been delisted as a result of a request by the Afghan Government in January. More should be considered. Another confidence-building measure should be the release of detainees from facilities such as the US detention center at Bagram.

However, such steps would have to be followed by measures undertaken by the insurgency. A commitment from the Taliban not to attack health facilities or schools and to facilitate humanitarian assistance could be initial contributions. In his declaration following the London Conference, the leader of the Taliban, Mullah Omar, stated that he was committed to provide education to all Afghans. The Taliban should demonstrate that this is serious by stopping attacks on schools. In the past, the Taliban has also facilitated access to areas under its control for humanitarian assistance, such as vaccination programmes – at least on a temporary basis. Further steps to improve access for humanitarian action should be taken. Such confidence-building measures would serve to test if a process towards a political settlement is possible.

President Karzai has announced his intention to organize a Peace Jirga later this spring. The aim would be two-fold; first to forge an inclusive nationwide consensus around a political process. A reconciliation policy cannot be allowed to create new lines of fragmentation inside Afghan society, along ethnic lines. Second, the Jirga process will mobilize religious and community leaders for reconciliation. This effort must also involve Afghanistan's civil society – including women's groups – to ensure that the rights of all are respected and that the reconciliation of some does not happen at the expense of others. The Peace Jirga must be more than an event. It must be the beginning of a process, an internal and inclusive dialogue, which can allow Afghan leaders to approach the process of reconciliation knowing that the Afghan society as such stands behind it.

Furthermore, the involvement of neighboring countries, and especially Pakistan, will be critical. A strong and genuine involvement by Pakistan will be key to any peace and reconciliation process. The military campaign will continue over the next weeks and months. However, it must not lead us further in the direction of a militarization of our overall strategy in Afghanistan. There is – particularly at this moment – an urgent need to inject more political oxygen in the non-military areas of our partnership.

By the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Kai Eide





## **Children to be at center of any peace framework for Afghanistan**

**24 February 2010 - The protection of children must be at the center of the reconciliation agenda of the Government of Afghanistan, as endorsed by the international community, said the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Radhika Coomaraswamy upon concluding her seven-day visit to Afghanistan.**

"It is crucial that the upcoming Peace Jirga addresses child protection issues, especially recruitment and use of children, and begins the process of formulating UN Security Council-endorsed action plans for the release of children from armed groups and their reintegration into their communities. President Karzai gave me his commitment that these issues will be given high priority in the framework of the peace discussions," said Ms Coomaraswamy.

"Children have to be protected. We stand ready to work with ISAF and the government armed forces to develop standard operating procedures that protect children during military operations, that spell out a protocol on how to deal with children associated with armed groups, and that outline practices to bring clarity to the delineation between civil and military activities, so that humanitarian assistance and humanitarian workers are not placed in danger," added the Special Representative.

The Special Representative recognised and welcomed the major change in tactics and attitude with regard to the protection of civilians by international and national forces since her last visit. Despite this, as recent events have shown, we are daily confronted with child casualties.

In 2009, 346 children were killed – 131 from air strikes, 22 from night searches and 128 by anti-government elements, including the Taliban, who used some children as suicide bombers – while 38 were killed by undetermined perpetrators.

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NATO commander General Stanley McChrystal assured the Special Representative that he will work with the United Nations to ensure the better protection of children.

"I was very happy to note the political will of the Afghan authorities demonstrated during my discussions to protect children affected by armed conflict. They have taken practical steps to do so, such as the implementation of an inter-ministerial steering committee for Children and Armed Conflict to work with UN agencies in monitoring and responding to grave violations against children and the appointment of focal points in the ministries of Defence and Interior to monitor and investigate incidents of under-age recruitment in the Afghan national security forces," said Ms Coomaraswamy.

With regard to the detention of children allegedly associated with armed groups, the Special Representative met separately with the ministers of Interior and Justice, who committed to give unlimited access to all detention facilities, including the National Directorate for Security (NDS) facilities, to United Nations child protection actors. The Minister of Justice also agreed to consider legislation to criminalize the recruitment and use of children.

Attacks on schools reached their highest levels in 2009, with over 600 incidents recorded. The Special Representative met with the Minister of Education and child protection partners to discuss measures to protect educational institutions. It was understood that the key to the security of schools and the safety of students is community ownership and involvement in the protection of schools.

SRSG Coomaraswamy also raised the issue of sexual violence against girls and boys, including the much condemned practice of "Bacha Bazi." The Ministry of Interior has now set up a unit for crimes against women and children. This unit will focus on training staff to investigate and prosecute cases of sexual violence and other violations against women and children.

"The international community stands ready to fully support this unit in line with the recommendations put forward by the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict so that impunity can end. The children of Afghanistan have suffered enough," she concluded.

During her visit, the Special Representative met with President Hamid Karzai, Ministers of Defence, Interior, Justice, Education, Public Health and Social Affairs. She also met with ISAF Commander General Stanley McChrystal as well as NGOs, children and their families.



## Statement by Robert Watkins, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan

**22 February 2010 - I am deeply saddened at the reports of the terrible loss of civilian life on Sunday in southern Afghanistan.**

According to government figures, at least 27 civilians, including women and children, were killed and numerous others wounded during aerial operations of the international military forces in which vehicles travelling in Uruzgan province were fired upon.

UNAMA has consistently requested all parties to the conflict to do their utmost to avoid civilian casualties. I would like to reiterate that request once again.

I appreciate International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) statements that the armed forces currently engaging insurgents in southern Afghanistan have taken great precautionary measures to safeguard civilians. I also appreciate the quick acknowledgement of responsibility and the apology by ISAF regarding yesterday's loss of life in Uruzgan.

However, measures highlighted in the tactical directives and guidelines issued by ISAF on the use of lethal force must be fully implemented at all times and under all circumstances. In addition to the tragic loss of life, trust in the intentions of the international military forces in Afghanistan will suffer greatly if military forces do not take more care to protect Afghan lives.

I extend my sincere condolences to all the victims and their families.

## UN humanitarian coordinator to donors: US\$ 870.5 million required for Afghan emergency programmes

**17 February 2010 - The United Nations humanitarian coordinator in Afghanistan today called on donors to shell out a total US\$ 870.5 million to fund the emergency work for programmes and projects for the most vulnerable sectors of the country.**

"This is not necessarily a request for new funding from donors but a request to reallocate a portion of existing funds to the HAP," stressed Humanitarian Coordinator Robert Watkins in a press conference at UNAMA where he presented the 2010 Humanitarian Action Plan (HAP) for Afghanistan with representatives from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the Government of Afghanistan.

"The 2010 HAP includes US\$ 356 million or some 41 per cent for projects for NGO projects," revealed Mr Watkins who, as UN resident coordinator, leads the Humanitarian Country Team that services the broader humanitarian community in Afghanistan.

"These implementing partners must receive stronger support in 2010 than they did in 2009 not only to increase the funding they receive to do the essential work that only they can do, but also to increase their own security provisions," said Mr Watkins, adding that the HAP "is a means of bringing attention to NGO projects and to encourage donors to fund them."

Mr Watkins – who is also the deputy special representative of the UN Secretary General in Afghanistan for relief, recovery and reconstruction – noted that Afghanistan "needs long-term development and many donors support recovery and reconstruction efforts. However, the impact is often undermined by emergency situations, such as natural disasters and conflict."

"Conflict affects the ability to deliver humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable of communities—to conduct needs assessments and then to reach the populations," lamented Mr Watkins. In 2009 alone, some 2,412 civilians died from conflict-related incidents, up by 14 percent from 2008.

Thus, HAP 2010 sets out to "mitigate the effects of hazards and conflict for the protection of the most vulnerable populations," assured Mr Watkins who stressed that HAP 2010 hopes to address Afghanistan's institutional gaps as "national institutions do not have the capacity or necessary resources to support the humanitarian needs of population."

Afghanistan, which suffers from chronic poverty, is next to the last of 182 countries in the United Nations Human Development Index.

This year's HAP shall also serve as a "means of improved coordination/data collection," said Mr Watkins, pointing out that "one major obstacle to good coordination in Afghanistan is finding reliable information on which to base assessments, plan strategies and monitor/evaluate implementation."

Thus, "improving data collection is a priority within this year's HAP."

"Streamlining data collection and making the results available to the broad humanitarian community will ensure consensus of statistics and again further strengthen the aid community's ability to raise the necessary funds in times of crisis. Such effective cooperation will also strengthen donor confidence in the aid community to deliver in an efficient and effective manner and ensure more lives are saved," Mr Watkins said.

In addition, "another goal of the 2010 HAP is to improve coordination of humanitarian efforts by ensuring that all humanitarian actors in Afghanistan are focused on the same objectives and working together."

"Coordination, consensus and agreement on key messages will reinforce efforts to reach those most in need of our assistance," stressed the UN resident coordinator who then urged for "cooperation of the military in respecting the boundaries between aid and security in order to allow humanitarian organisations to carry out their mandate."

The 85-page Humanitarian Action Plan for 2010 was produced by the Humanitarian Country Team, the Clusters and the broader humanitarian community, according to Mr Watkins who stressed that the document "is not the result of a top-down approach by the UN, but rather a bottom-up development ensuring that the NGO sector, the UN and all the humanitarian actors are working together to maximise the resources available."

By Aurora V. Alambra, UNAMA





## Mine-filled desert springs to life, thanks to humanitarian agencies

**17 February 2010 - Just about 25 kilometres from Afghanistan's eastern regional hub of Jalalabad, Sheikh Misri was known as a dreary and rough desert of barren land littered with landmines and unexploded ordnances until December 2005.**

Now, just in a matter of four years, one can see a stark difference with a somewhat thriving life there, thanks to relentless and synchronized humanitarian efforts of United Nations humanitarian agencies, the Government of Afghanistan, other international aid agencies and individual donors.

Fast forward to 2010, now, you can get down from a bus that regularly runs on a newly constructed dirt road from the nearest highway, in the middle of settlements.

If you look like a stranger, children will gather to have a glimpse of you and the local women shy away. More often than not, you will hear the noise of construction works nearby. If you turn around, you can see a long array of tents that serves as the clinic, established by the International Medical Corps (IMC), for nearly 20,000 people.

Welcome to Sheikh Misri New Township (SMNT)!

SMNT is one of the five pilot locations being developed as a land allocation site for landless returnees who spent years outside their country as refugees, and for internally displaced persons (IDPs), in accordance with Presidential Decree Number 104.

Since December 2005, United Nations-supported Mine Action Coordination Centre for Afghanistan (MACCA) has cleared 1,257,937 square metres of landmine-hazard area, destroyed 69 anti-vehicles and anti-personnel mines and 1,816 unexploded ordnance (UXOs).

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Then came humanitarian agencies like IMC, United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), UN World Food Programme (WFP), UN Agency for Human Settlements (UN-HABITAT), World Health Organisation (WHO), International Rescue Committee (IRC), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Nazaneen Jaber Khel Education and Health Centre (NEHC) and Bayat Foundation, among others, joining hands to support the Government in developing a township for the returnees.

Now, this otherwise lifeless desert has been a home to about 2,500 families living in nearly 1,100 shelters constructed by UNHCR, IRC and UN-HABITAT, among others. As the UN launches today the 2010 Humanitarian Action Plan budgeted at US\$ 870.5 million, Sheikh Misri can be remembered as a living example of how a desert can become a thriving life if different humanitarian efforts are put together.

USAID has completed the improvement of the 15-kilometre road linking the township to the nearest highway. Within the township area, the Afghan Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation has completed the paving and grading of 13.5 kilometres of road, and the construction of 100 culverts.

On a recent visit to the township area, a United Nations team found that the former refugees or IDPs were happy about what has been done so far and demanded more. "We are happy about all that has been done here," said Abdul Rahim, the head of the local Shura or elders, recalling that there was "nothing when we came here."

Mr Rahim said 1,000 more shelters, more vocational training schemes, more roads, drainages and a water reservoir are needed, just to name a few. When Mr Rahim was making the list of demands for the main township area, another member of the Shura, Malek Nader who has his shelter a little far from there, intervened and said his area was more neglected.

"Everything has been done in this side, but nothing has been done in our area," said Mr Nader, furious. In his bid to calm down Mr Nader, the director of the Department of Refugees and Repatriation (DoRR), Abdul Rahman Shams, said everything can't be achieved overnight.

"Step-by-step everything will be there. Remember, nothing was here before," said Mr Shams. "There is already a plan in place for the other side. But it takes time to get it implemented," he added. Just a few minutes' drive from the main township area to the foothill, one can see extraordinary development works underway, not to mention the spectacular view of the settlements down below.

An impressive number of schoolchildren – all clad in dark blue – were playing under the scorching sun, about 20 metres away from their 13-room school building constructed by UNICEF. Soon, all of them were inside their respective classrooms – some on carpeted floor. Inside the classroom, one can find an example of how the various UN agencies are working together: UNICEF has provided necessary stationery for the children and WFP provides biscuits everyday. And, just a few metres away, UN-HABITAT is constructing a new school building.

Maulavi Gul Rashid, the school headmaster of Sheikh Misri Primary School, said there will be about 1,000 students after construction of the new building, a significant rise from 208 boys now.

There are two other schools in the township, one of them for girls constructed by NEHC, and the other for boys by UN-HABITAT. All school-going girls get biscuits as well as cooking oil under WFP's school-feeding programme. Just a few metres from the school, UN-HABITAT has just completed construction of a 20-bed hospital, with support from the European Union. Once it opens, it will serve the medical needs of all the Sheikh Misri dwellers.

Back in the township area, a number of livelihood programmes are underway. UNHCR has supported cow raising, animal feed production and tractor projects, among others. In 2009, the refugee agency also supported 100 households with a kitchen- garden project, 30 others with poultry farming, and additional 36 families with supplementary cow-feeding and refresher training.

IRC and the German aid agency GTZ are also involved in providing vocational training, with WFP providing food to all the trainees. In addition, WFP has supported starting home-based nurseries for a number of families. "Everything is good except water supply," said Bahadur, 70, who lives along with his three sons in a UNHCR-built shelter.

By Tilak Pokharel, UNAMA

## Afghan families to benefit from poultry project in northeast Afghanistan

**22 February 2010 - The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is running a poultry project for 2,000 families in Kunduz and Takhar provinces.**

The project will cover 2,000 more beneficiary families in Kunduz and Baghlan provinces.

A 12-day-training session was recently held for 22 women poultry trainers. The trained participants will then teach the beneficiaries in Imam Sahib district of Kunduz on how to manage their poultry farms.

"The object of this project is to increase the family's income, to raise and promote the standard of poultry in Afghanistan, and to reduce poverty. We develop the poultry production level and train the women on how to earn more money with small capital," said Ebdullah Azizi, the head of FAO in Kunduz.

"As studies show, Afghanistan, annually, pays US\$ 170 million for imported chicken and eggs. So let's save this money by promoting the standard of poultry production inside the country," added Mr Azizi.

"For the first time, the beneficiaries receive 15 pieces of pullets, a wire mesh, a feeder and drinker from FAO. Then they created their poultry co-ops and, by selling their production in the market, they promote their poultries" said Dr Abdul Qadir Noori, FAO Kunduz national poultry officer.

Zainab, a trainer, says she has taught almost 8,000 women in the north-east region since 2004.

"When the women begin their work, their economical situation is bad. But by promoting their farms, family life gets better," she said.

She adds that training has taught the participant to protect their hens against diseases, and how to sell and market their production.

"Agriculture is the foundation stone of a society. By promoting the family life, we can develop a strong society. So the poultry project is a better way for having strong families and a strong society," said Sayed Azam Urfan, the acting director of Kunduz Agriculture and Livestock Department.

According to Mr Urfan, the cooperatives function as the connecting bridge between the beneficiary families and society. "We support them on marketing and finding poultry feed," he added.

"The families who already have poultry farms, they have reached economical self-sufficiency," said Sayed Amir, the head of KohiNoor Foundation, a partner NGO.

By Shamsuddin Hamed, UNAMA



## Former commanders give up their weapons for development

**23 February 2010 - Former mujahideen commanders continue to lay down their arms in the hope to get more development in their area.**

Seven former commanders handed over their weapons to the provincial authorities in Bamyan province in return to get more development projects in their district.

The district of Kahmard, in the north of Bamyan, was declared as a peaceful district or a district free of illegal arms through the DIAG (Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups) campaign.

"We have given up our weapons and we hope to get more development," said Mawlavi Ismael, a former mujahid in Kahmard.

DIAG is a Government of Afghanistan-led programme, which is supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other international donors.

Some 94 light and heavy weapons were collected from these former commanders in Kahmard district.

"We had to fight for our land and for our honour, but now the time has come to put down our arms and help the Government build our town," Ismael added.

The weapons were handed to the provincial Governor in a ceremony in the district centre, where hundreds of community elders gathered to witness the process.

"Today we are announcing Kahmard as a peace district. We are planning to announce Bamyan a province free of illegal armed groups very soon," said Dr Habiba Sarabi, Governor of Bamyan province.

Bamyan province has six districts and a provincial capital. According to DIAG officials, Kahmard is Bamyan's fifth district that has been declared free of arms and work is ongoing to soon declare the rest of the districts free of illegal weapons.

"Many projects are underway in Kahmard in (areas of) health, education, agriculture and other sectors," pledged Dr Sarabi.

DIAG officials say that extra funding is allotted for peace districts for development projects.

Yones Afshar, head of the UNDP's DIAG project in Bamyan, said that once a district is declared peaceful, then, according to the district's development priority, the District Development Assembly selects a project which is implemented by the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development.

"We did the same for other four peace districts in Bamyan," said Mr Afshar.

For Mawlavi Ismael and other former commanders - who have never seen a paved road and public electricity in their province - road and electricity is the biggest need of the hour.

Ismael is happy with the promise made by provincial authorities to increase development work. But one thing always bothers him and his former Mujahideen friends: "We don't understand, our province is the most peaceful in the country, but why is it also one of the least assisted?"

By Jaffar Rahim, UNAMA

## Displaced families from Marjah receive food assistance from UN

**21 February 2010 - United Nations agencies are working with the local government of Helmand to provide emergency humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons (IDPs) as the influx of people from Marjah district continues into Lashkargah and into other parts of the province.**

Some 1,644 IDP families have so far been registered in Lashkargah by the government and UN agencies and others are expected to become internally displaced in Marjah and Nadali districts in the days to come.

According to World Food Programme (WFP) officials in Helmand, some 982 families have received food assistance in Lashkargah, the capital of Helmand province, as of 17 February 2010.

Moreover, the Nimroz office of the United Nations Assistance Mission (UNAMA) reported that around 284 new IDP families from Marjah have arrived in the Khashrod district of Nimroz province.



Hazrat Siddique Amin, UNAMA's Nimroz office head, and a representative from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), called for an emergency coordination meeting to share information, assess needs and plan action to respond to the arrival of approximately 300 families comprising 2,100 individuals from Marjah and Sistani areas.

"The decision was made to provide emergency assistance to the new IDPs in Khashrod in 24 hours in order to support them in this critical juncture," said Mr Amin.

The IDPs are registered and verified jointly by the WFP, members of the Provincial Disaster Management Committee (PDMC), and implementing partner Afghanistan National Construction Company (ANCC).

Sher Ali Khan, WFP field monitor in Nimroz, said the newly arrived IDPs in Khashrod have been verified and around 35.52 metric tonnes of food material – enough for 300 families – have been delivered from the stock in Zaranj to Khashrod district.

"The UN agencies – UNAMA, UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF and BRAC (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee) INGO (international non-government organization) – dispatched food and non-food items for 300 IDP families to Khashrod district. The food will be distributed to IDP families that have already been surveyed and listed by a committee comprising of UN (service contractor) and government staff," added Mr Khan.

The food and non-food items provided by the UN agencies include: blankets (600); plastic sheets (300); family kits (300 complete kits); jerry cans (300); sweaters (2,100); wheat (100 kilos per family); pulses (10 kilos per family); cooking oil (7.4 kilos per family); and salt (two kilos per family).

The Department of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (DRRD) provides drinking water through tankers while UNICEF provides the jerry cans for use by the IDPs.

"We are living in difficult conditions. We appeal to government and aid agencies to provide us assistance on emergency basis," said Haji Nasrullah, one of the IDPs from Marjah district who moved to Khashrod along with his family.

As the conflict continues in the area, more and more people are expected to abandon their homes and move to safer areas asking for more assistance from UN agencies.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has begun its polio vaccination campaign in areas where it is able to access the population in that region.

Speaking at a press conference, on Wednesday, in Kabul, about the situation in Helmand, the Deputy Special Representative for the Secretary General, Robert Watkins, said UN organizations and NGOs are providing food and necessary healthcare needs of the population in the region.

"UNHCR is assisting the government in the registration of the displaced families and WFP is providing food and is so far reporting that they have adequate stocks to meet the needs of the displaced population.

"Finally, I would just like to say that I want to once again call upon all parties who are involved in this conflict in Helmand to ensure the impartiality and access of humanitarian organizations to affected civilians. I would like to ask them to ensure free movement of civilian population that wish to leave the zone of conflict," added Mr Watkins.

By Mujeeb Rahman, UNAMA





## UNAMA trains police officers, prosecutors on human rights

**19 February 2010 - As a part of strengthening Afghanistan's state institutions, United Nations human rights officers have trained about 30 members of the Afghan National Police and prosecutors on human rights in the justice sector, in the east of the country.**

Four trainers from the Human Rights Unit of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) gave presentations for three days this week to Afghan officers dealing with justice from four eastern provinces of the country which are struggling to have their own fully functional state institutions to deliver justice to the people.

Organised by the US Government-funded Afghanistan Justice Sector Support Programme in Rodat district of Nangarhar province, the training covered some of the most pertinent issues like rights of the accused, domestic violence, women's rights, child abuse, access to justice, problems arising from interpretation of Islam and the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), among others.

For Saydan Mohammad, an Afghan police officer from Achin district, the most interesting thing that was covered in the training was violence against women.

"Talking about violence against women is something new to me," said Mr Mohammad, adding that although there might be such cases in his district, "hardly any come to the police."

UNAMA Human Rights Officer Rasha Al-Kaisy told the participants that one of the objectives of the training was to minimise the mistakes in the justice system, thereby reducing cases of human rights violations.

"Violence is a broader term. It is not only about hurting a person physically; it's both physically and psychologically," Ms Al-Kaisy told police officers and prosecutors, adding that Afghanistan should have an environment where "the people can trust you and the rule of law."

The participants had all sorts of questions like whether a father should marry a second wife if his first wife refuses to breastfeed her newly born baby, and why human rights activists are against death penalty.

One of the participants, Mujeeburahman (one name), said the human rights community should speak aloud against civilian casualties in combat.

Similar training was given to police and prosecutors last year, too.

"The two things that were constantly raised by the participants during the three-day training were women's issues in the context of religion, and how rampant corruption can be checked only by individual efforts," said Ms Al-Kaisy.

By Tilak Pokharel, UNAMA

## Training of trainers for spring round of polio vaccination

**18 February 2010 - A two-day Training of Trainers (ToT) workshop was recently held in Kunduz for 40 doctors and health workers to prepare them for the first round of the polio vaccination campaign this coming spring in the provinces of Kunduz, Takhar and Baghlan.**

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO) technically and financially supported the Department of Public Health (DPH) in the implementation of the vaccination campaign in the north-eastern provinces.

"The objective of the event is to review past outcomes and problems and plan for the coming campaign," said Dr. Abdul Ahad Hakemi, the mass immunization head in the Northeast Region.

The participants will train the provincial team of coordinators and supervisors in their own provinces; then the trained coordinators will, in turn, train volunteers before starting the first round of polio vaccination.

Under the Mass Immunization Programme, routine vaccination will be held in the health centers, aside from the implementation of the regular National Immunization Days (NIDs), added Dr. Hakemi.

"Since 2004, we didn't have any polio cases in the northeast region provinces (because as) part of the NIDs, we implement vaccination to prevent the children from (contracting) polio," said Dr. Hakemi.

"We learned a lot from the training. We reviewed the previous campaign, evaluated the problems and hurdles, and we are going to prepare the plan for the coming round of the polio campaigns," said Rohullah, one of the participants from Baghlan province.

"This training is a good feedback for the coming rounds – we are learning the useful lessons, we learned (about) the (past polio-vaccination) experiences from each other," said Faizullah, one of the participants from Takhar province.

"WHO provides the budget of the training, monitors the campaign, and does the evaluation of the campaign; while the UNICEF supports the Ministry of Public Health to operate the NIDs campaign," said Dr. Nazar Ahmadi of WHO Kunduz.

With UNICEF and WHO support, the Departments of Public Health in the northeast provinces were able to vaccinate 1,119,764 children through the NIDs.

By Shamsuddin Hamedi, UNAMA