

# UNAMA NEWS

United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan  
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## UN mission critical to US strategy in Afghanistan: Rice

**2 December 2009 - The US Ambassador to the UN, Susan Rice, says the UN Mission in Afghanistan, known as UNAMA, will play a vital role in President Obama's plan for increased engagement in the country.**

Ambassador Rice said the strategy laid out by President Obama on Tuesday has 3 vital components: a military surge of 30,000 troops, a civilian component in cooperation with the United Nations, and a partnership with Pakistan. Ms. Rice acknowledged that UNAMA had suffered a setback when its guesthouse was attacked in October by terrorists, who killed five staff members, but she said it has the ability and the will to continue its vital role.

"We think that the personnel of UNAMA need and deserve the additional resources to ensure their security and to enable them to continue to ramp up their presence and expand it into new provinces within Afghanistan. The civilian component of this strategy is crucial and that is why the United States will increase its investment, that's why the countries of NATO and ISAF will do the same and why the United Nations can and must continue to play a vital role.

Ambassador Rice pointed out that UNAMA's mission is multifaceted, including supporting the elections, coordinating humanitarian and development efforts, and a critical political role that must continue.

## Statement attributable to the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General

**2 December 2009 - Statement attributable to the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General in support of the United States' Plan for Afghanistan as announced by President Barack Obama on 1 December 2009.**

The Secretary-General welcomes the new US plan for Afghanistan announced by President Barack Obama yesterday evening. He notes with appreciation the proposed approach to balance military and civilian efforts and the emphasis on strengthening the capacity of Afghan institutions and Afghan security forces in particular.

The Secretary-General strongly feels that institution-building is a long-term but necessary process that will ultimately ensure the sustainability of the international community's joint efforts in Afghanistan. The United Nations remains committed to support all efforts to transition to increased Afghan ownership, responsibility and leadership in achieving lasting peace, stability and development in the country.

## Ahead of harsh winter, UN distributes aid for 200,000 vulnerable Afghans

**1 December 2009 - The United Nations refugee agency today began distributing relief items in Kabul as part of a nationwide programme to help some 200,000 vulnerable Afghans survive the upcoming winter.**

Blankets, warm clothes, charcoal and other winter supplies were provided today to 1,500 returnees and internally displaced people (IDPs) in the capital, where temperatures can plummet to minus 20 degrees Celsius in January, the coldest month. In other regions, such as the central highlands area, winter temperatures are as low as minus 30 degrees.

In addition to returnees and IDPs, the disabled, the elderly and single mothers are also expected to benefit from the assistance package provided by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

"We have pre-positioned winter supplies throughout Afghanistan based on an earlier needs assessment of tens of thousands of families across the country," UNHCR spokesperson Andrej Mahecic **told** reporters in Geneva.

"Supplies were strategically moved to the areas with harsh winters, such as the western region, where heavy snow would otherwise impede access," he stated, adding that the agency has teamed up with the Government and local partners to ensure aid can reach areas that are difficult to access.

The winterization programme will continue over the coming weeks and is expected to be complete by end of December.

Mr. Mahecic said that UNHCR's winter assistance strategy has emphasized preparedness rather than emergency response. "By giving out warm clothes, shoes and other winter relief early in the season, we hope to prevent illness and hardship for the most vulnerable people."



## Upcoming Afghan conference will help promote post-election dialogue – Ban

28 November 2009 - The international conference on Afghanistan that will be staged in London early next year provides “a very timely” opportunity to discuss the country's agenda in the wake of its recent presidential elections, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said today.

Mr. Ban said the London conference – scheduled to take place on 28 January – and a further high-level conference, to be convened in Kabul a few months later – will help outline the framework so that Afghans can play a greater role in shaping their own destiny.

“These conferences would thus constitute defining moments in the reconfiguration of the relationship between Afghanistan and the international community,” Mr. Ban said today in a statement issued in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, where he is attending the Commonwealth heads of government meeting.

The United Nations Secretary-General stressed his support for high-level dialogue and noted that Afghan President Hamid Karzai, in his inaugural speech earlier this month, also outlined the importance of such discussions in the wake of the elections.

Mr. Karzai was re-elected to the presidency after his opponent, Abdullah Abdullah, withdrew from the run-off round that had been slated for 7 November.

In his inaugural speech Mr. Karzai detailed a work programme for the new Government, and pledged to fight corruption and to bring increased good governance, security and services to the country, where the Taliban and other insurgents continue to wreak violence.

The London conference is the result of a joint European proposal by the United Kingdom, France and Germany and Mr. Ban today thanked Gordon Brown, the UK Prime Minister, French President Nicolas Sarkozy and Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel for their initiative.

After meeting with Mr. Brown today, Mr. Ban told journalists that the conference would have two objectives: to establish a strong compact between Mr. Karzai, his Government and his people, and to set up a strong partnership between the Afghan people and the international community.

“We expect President Karzai will reach out to ethnic groups and other political leaders to promote national reconciliation and unity of the government. We also expect that we will try to help the Afghan Government so they can build institutional capacity.

“We also expect that President Karzai will ensure good governance, including eradication of corrupt practices of their country and... [through improving and strengthening] partnerships with neighbouring countries like Pakistan, India, Iran and Turkey.”

## Top UN official calls for transition, not exit, strategy for Afghanistan

1 December 2009 – Just hours before President Barack Obama formally announces the United States' strategy for Afghanistan, the top United Nations envoy there today underscored the need for a long-term commitment from the international community for the country, stressing that now is not the time to talk about an exit strategy.

“I think we should talk about transition strategy, which is something completely different,” the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan, Kai Eide, told reporters in the capital, Kabul.

Mr. Eide, who also heads the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, said vital to a “transition strategy” is the building up of Afghan institutions, which can help to ensure the sustainability of gains made.

“It really means pushing more and more responsibilities on to the Afghan authorities, allowing them to take more responsibilities,” he stated, adding that Mr. Obama might also be thinking about the same strategy.

“If we are to deliver services to the people, it can't be done by international parallel structures. It has to be done by Afghan institutions. That's going to take time, but the longer we wait the more time it will take.”

The Special Representative said that the next five to six months “can give us a momentum that has been lost during the election process,” and the international community has to “re-assert” a long-term commitment to Afghanistan that can aid efforts to achieve peace and development.

“That long-term commitment depends on a high degree of confidence and trust between the Government and the international community,” he noted.

The way forward between Afghanistan and its international partners will be among the issues discussed at a conference to be convened on 28 January in London. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has welcomed the upcoming gathering, and a further high-level conference to be convened in Kabul a few months later, as opportunities to discuss the country's agenda in the wake of its recent presidential elections.

“These conferences would thus constitute defining moments in the reconfiguration of the relationship between Afghanistan and the international community,” he said in a statement issued on Saturday.





## Eid-ul-Adha: The festival of sacrifice

**26 November 2009 - It is the beginning of the afternoon in Kabul, the Afghan capital. A clear blue sky has replaced the rainy weather of the last few days, and a pale winter sun rises over the Hindu Kush Mountains.**

The downtown bazaar has been unusually crowded today, as thousands of people prepare for Eid-ul-Adha (Eid Qurban), one of the holy milestones of the year, to be celebrated tomorrow.

From a symbolic point of view, this celebration is “the festival of sacrifice”. The festival remembers the prophet Ibrahim’s willingness to sacrifice his son when God ordered him to. This is a four day holiday in Muslim countries. During the festival Muslims who can afford to, sacrifice domestic animals, usually sheep, as a symbol of Ibrahim’s sacrifice. Then the “Qurbani meat” is distributed among family, friends and the poor. The morning of the first day follows with special prayer, the Eid prayer, when Muslims pray for God’s blessing. This day also marks the end of the Hajj, the annual pilgrimage to Mecca.

In Afghanistan, people visit family members, relatives and treat their guests with different kinds of food, fruits and organize family picnics. On this day, families, relatives and friends who broke up, reunite, forget and forgive past differences as a virtue of Eid commanded by God. And, for every Afghan, it is a very special period.

“I always look forward to this day because my parents will buy me whatever I want,” said Sabira, a 13 year old little girl.

Waseh, a shoe shopkeeper in the bazaar is enthusiastic: “Eid is a very good period for business. People are buying new clothes, new shoes, food, fruits, new furniture, etc. I sold more than a hundred pairs of shoes yesterday comparing with only 10 to 15 before Eid.”

A few metres on and Wahida Azami, a mother of six children, is shopping for her huge family. “I am not happy with the prices; they are rising up whenever Eid arrives. I have to buy my children some clothes, shoes and dresses but I can’t fulfill their choices, the prices are sky high, she said”

Close to her, Karim, a 60-year-old Kabul resident, is also skeptical. “This Eid is not for the poor but for the rich,” he said. “If I am not able to treat a guest coming to my house on Eid day – is it Eid for us? This Eid is for ministers, businessmen, commanders and their associates but not for ordinary Afghans.”

Another concern is security. As Fatima, a 28 years old NGO worker said: “This time Eid is different from the past ones. Security is the main problem for Afghans to celebrate this day.”

But the tremendous challenges being faced don’t appear to disrupt most Afghans from celebrating Eid. The general feeling is hope, seen in the common scenes of usual life.

Gathered with some other students, Shabana Razi, 25, delivers her message for the holy period: “Eid is a good opportunity for Afghans to unite and come together to make Afghanistan a better place. That is what this day is for. This is a day of forgiveness and mercy. God commands everyone to forget hostilities of the past and show mercy so that God can show mercy on you.”

At the end of the afternoon the sun slowly vanishes behind the Hindu Kush, and an icy wind starts to blow in the streets of Kabul.

Although it is freezing, the bazaar remains crowded, as Afghans continue to vibrantly celebrate this period over the next three days – perhaps the normality is the best sign of hope the people can offer to the world.

By Jamil Danish and Alexandre Brecher-Dolivet, UNAMA

## UNICEF announces name of staffer killed in Kabul guest house attack

**1 December 2009 - The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has confirmed the identity of one of its staff members who was killed along with four other UN workers on 28 October when militants attacked a guest house in Kabul, Afghanistan.**

Teshome Mandefro Ergete of Ethiopia had worked for UNICEF Afghanistan since September, serving as an expert in drilling wells for fresh water.

In a statement issued yesterday UNICEF's Executive Director Ann M. Veneman said it was with "great sadness" that the agency confirmed that Mr. Ergete had been killed in the attack.

"His remains have now been formally identified through genetic testing, and his family has been informed," Ms. Veneman said. "UNICEF extends its deepest condolences to Teshome's family and friends. He died in the service of humanity."

Mr. Ergete was killed alongside UN security officers Lawrence Mefful and Louis Maxwell and two volunteers with the UN Development Programme (UNDP), Jossie Esto and Yah Lydia Wonyene.

The militants attacked the guest house, which was home to more than 30 UN staff members, in the early hours of 28 October, armed with automatic weapons, grenades and suicide bomb vests.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and other senior UN officials paid tribute to the victims of the attack for their courage and their willingness to serve others.



## UN Afghanistan: Condemn all forms of violence against women and girls

**30 November 2009 - The United Nations in Afghanistan today underlined the importance of Afghanistan's participation in the international "16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence."**

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) stressed that the 16-day campaign is "an opportunity for diverse stakeholders to challenge the routine human rights violations and related violence that women endure" in the country.

"This international campaign, which runs from 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, to 10 December, the International Human Rights Day, is an important reminder that women's rights are human rights," said Norah Niland, UNAMA's head of Human Rights.

Speaking at the weekly UNAMA press conference Ms Niland stressed that "it is important to publicly and explicitly condemn all forms of violence against women and girls."

Some 60 to 80 per cent of all marriages are forced and underage, and approximately 57 per cent of girls marry before the age of 16 – the legal age for marriage in Afghanistan – due to customary practices, according to the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC).

Afghanistan also ranks second highest in the world in terms of maternal mortality rate, with one woman dying every 27 minutes due to pregnancy-related conditions – around 25,000 deaths per annum.

The theme of this year's campaign is "Commit – Act – Demand: We CAN End Violence Against Women!"

"It is equally important to build an environment that inhibits rape and holds perpetrators to account," said Ms Niland, adding that the 25 November to 10 December campaign is "an opportunity to support local initiatives and to draw and build on our current work at the global level to end violence against women."

"Additionally, this campaign period is an opportunity to reflect on and evaluate efforts so that ongoing or future strategies benefit from, and build on, prior experience," she said, pointing out that "the UN and its various partners in and outside the government are working year-round to increase awareness of the harm that victims and their families endure when subjected to violence."

Ms Niland added that UNAMA is also taking action "to give effect to the commitments inherent in Afghanistan's international human rights treaty obligations, as well as a host of action plans and initiatives geared to countering, as well as responding to, specific acts of violence – whether these occurred in or outside the home."

"Public reporting, whether by the UN, NGOs, media as well as, of course, the AIHRC who cannot join us today, can play an important role in highlighting trends or specific cases and deterring acts of violence," she urged, stressing that "there is strong evidence to suggest that silence helps perpetuate violence."

UNAMA is urging Afghans to start their own human rights campaigns "at home, with parents, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters."

"Democracy and peace in Afghanistan is dependent on the elimination of violence and the full participation of women, as well as men, in decision-making processes that affects the lives of individuals and the future of the nation," said Ms Niland.

A UNAMA report launched earlier this year – entitled "Silence is Violence: End the Abuse of Women in Afghanistan" – found that violence targeted at women and girls is widespread and deeply rooted in Afghan society and cultural norms, and that even if such violence is not openly condoned, neither is it adequately challenged nor condemned by society at large or by state institutions.