

UNAMA NEWS

United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

Website: www.unama.unmissions.org

Compiled by the Strategic
Communication and Spokespersons Unit
Kabul, Afghanistan

31 December 2009 - 7 January 2010



Ban lays out twin Afghan needs: stronger Government role, greater economic drive

6 January 2010 - The Security Council discussed the situation in Afghanistan today, with Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stressing the twin needs to strengthen the Government's role while coordinating "broader and more effective" international civilian efforts under the United Nations umbrella to spur economic and social development.

"Better coordination based on strong political willingness of donor countries and strong local effort is key to resolving the current situation," he said, citing insufficient political will rather than lack of structures or shortage of resources as the main obstacle.

"We need strategies that meet the requirements of building sustainable institutions to deliver services to the Afghan people and to develop the Afghan economy."

Mr. Ban welcomed the new approach by United States President Barack Obama "that seeks an optimal balance between military and civilian efforts" in the battled against the Taliban and other insurgents, and that would strengthen cooperation with the UN, and noted the international community's reaffirmed resolve to complete the task of erasing the terrorist threat.

He also hailed the priorities set out by President Hamid Karzai in his inaugural speech on his re-election focusing on security, good governance, ending corruption, achieving national unity and expanding cooperation with the country's neighbours to address drug-trafficking and other cross-border threats to stability.

"But if these strategies are to be implemented in an efficient and timely manner, the new Afghan Government must fulfil its far-reaching pledges. At the same time, the relationship between Afghanistan and its international partners must be re-evaluated," he said.

A high-level international conference on Afghanistan in London on 28 January "offers an important opportunity for fresh impetus, both to the international effort as well as that of the newly established Government in Kabul to provide greater stability and support to the security and developmental needs of Afghanistan," he added.

Turning to the current security threat – "the single biggest impediment to progress" – Mr. Ban noted that Taliban efforts to prevent people from participating in the electoral process also destroyed social structures and traditional security mechanisms, and he cited attacks against UN personnel and humanitarian workers, warning that more terror attacks could be expected.

"Afghanistan is at a critical juncture," he declared. "All key players – Afghan and international – have drawn important lessons from controversial experiences and missed opportunities. I appeal to both the Government of Afghanistan and the international community to make the best possible use of the next few months."

Mr. Ban's Special Representative for Afghanistan, Kai Eide, also underscored the need to focus on development and building up civilian institutions as well as avoiding perceptions of disrespect and arrogance in dealing with Afghans and gradually transferring authority to allow them to take charge of their own future.

"If we do not take these civilians components of the transition strategy as seriously as the military component, then we will fail," he told the Council in his final briefing before the end of his mandate.

He cited the hundreds of millions of dollars needed to train future administrators, build up an infrastructure to allow the Government to deliver services, exploit mineral and energy resources that could be a major source of employment and income, develop a transportation network, set up a comprehensive educational system, develop the critically under-funded agricultural sector and launch a peace and reconciliation process.

"The military surge must not be allowed to undermine equally important civilian objectives and the development of such a politically driven strategy," he said, stressing that the greater coordination of civilian efforts under the UN umbrella will be based on "all of us working more closely under Afghan leadership."

Turning to the international approach to Afghanistan, he warned of a tendency to "shape strategies, make decisions and operate in a way that Afghans perceive as disrespectful and sometimes arrogant," leading to "dangerous tensions" between the Government and the international community and fuelling suspicions of unacceptable foreign interference and a sense of humiliation due to perceived disrespect for local religion, culture and values.

"Success in our long-term partnership will depend on consulting more, listening more and demonstrating greater understanding for a society which needs our assistance but also demands our respect," he said. "We have to learn the pulse of the Afghan society, which is very different from ours."

In his latest three-monthly report on Afghanistan earlier this week, Mr. Ban warned that there was currently no indication of an early improvement in security following last year's deterioration, declaring that a better coordinated international effort was crucial to reversing overall negative trends.

Following today's Council debate, in which more than 20 Member States participated, Mr. Ban told reporters he was "encouraged by the understanding and strong support shown."





World must act now to reverse worsening situation in Afghanistan, Ban warns

4 January 2010 - There is currently no indication of an early improvement in the security situation in Afghanistan, which deteriorated last year – dramatically so in Kabul, the capital – and a better coordinated international effort is crucial to reversing overall negative trends, according to the latest United Nations report released today.

"We are now at a critical juncture," Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon tells the Security Council in the report, which focuses on the flawed presidential election and the adverse effects of increased Taliban suicide and other attacks both for the Government's ability to deliver basic services and that of the international community to provide aid.

"The situation cannot continue as is if we are to succeed in Afghanistan. Unity of effort and greater attention to key priorities are now a sine qua non. There is a need for a change of mindset in the international community as well as in the Government of Afghanistan. Without that change, the prospects of success will diminish further."

The Afghan Government and its international partners will be meeting in London on 28 January for a high-level meeting to discuss the country's agenda in the wake of the recent elections.

Mr. Ban calls on the Government and world community to make the best possible use of the coming months to focus on agreed priorities, with a reinforced international coordination structure under a UN umbrella that will meet the principal needs of delivering services to the Afghan people and developing an economy that can gradually carry more responsibility for the people's well-being.

He cites insufficient resources as one cause of the current lack of such coordination but singles out a lack of political readiness in donor countries to adapt their thinking to meet these needs. "If the international community were to continue along a course of substituting local capacity, rather than of capacity-building, the result would be entrenchment and ultimately failure," he warns.

"If the negative trends are not corrected, there is a risk that the deteriorating overall situation will become irreversible. We cannot afford this."

Mr. Ban rejects the argument that the election, marred by fraud in the first round and by the withdrawal of President Hamid Karzai's main opponent Abdullah Abdullah in the second, was so flawed that it had condemned the state-building process to failure.

"This is incorrect. Rather, it is the weaknesses in the state-building process so far, including the ongoing culture of impunity, the still inadequate security forces, corruption and the insufficient pace of institution-building that undermined the electoral process," he writes.

"Despite the flaws, however, this is not a reason to abandon what has been achieved and what must now be built upon," he says, warning that the flaws and weaknesses must be corrected before the UN can engage in a similar supporting role for future elections. Parliamentary, district and mayoral polls are due this year, beginning in May.

Turning to the security situation, the report cites an average of 1,244 incidents per month in the third quarter of 2009, a 65 per cent increase over 2008, with armed clashes, improvised explosive devices and stand-off attacks constituting the majority.

The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) recorded 784 conflict-related civilian casualties between August and October, up 12 per cent from the same period in 2008, with anti-Government elements responsible for 78 per cent of the total, of whom 54 per cent were victims of suicide and improvised explosive device attacks.

Mr. Ban notes the insurgents' intimidation and threats against civilians to discourage them from participating in the elections, targeting community leaders and clerics in particular, as well as slightly increased attacks against the aid community, a nearly daily occurrence. On average nine people were assassinated per week in the third quarter, one of whom on average was a community leader.

"The continuing high rate of direct intimidation of national staff working for the aid community, including the United Nations, continued to pose obstacles to programme delivery," he writes. Following the 28 October attack by the Taliban on a guest house in Kabul where UN staff resided, killing five and wounding five more, some 340 UN international personnel have temporarily been relocated outside of Afghanistan.

But he reiterates that the Organization will not be deterred, with over 6,000 national and international personnel remaining on the ground. "The United Nations plays an important role in Afghanistan and has the support of the Afghan people to continuing it," he stresses.

Mr. Ban's Special Representative for Afghanistan Kai Eide will brief the Council on Wednesday on what is needed to allow UNAMA to more effectively coordinate aid and whether its mandate needs to be changed.

Mr. Eide will make clear that the extra military resources committed to Afghanistan by United States President Barack Obama and other members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) are much appreciated but they must be accompanied by a coherent political strategy, UNAMA spokesman Aleem Siddique told a news briefing in Kabul today.

"For the military efforts to succeed, they must be led by a political strategy to build sustainable civilian institutions and begin a peace process under Afghan leadership and international partnership," he said.

UNAMA, a political Mission directed by the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), was set up by the Security Council in 2002 to provide political and strategic advice for the peace process following the US-led ouster of the Taliban. It currently has some 1,500 staff, 80 per cent of them Afghan nationals.



UN envoy to tell Security Council: Demilitarize approach in Afghanistan

4 January 2010 - The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan held its first press conference for the year 2010 in Kabul today.

At the conference, UNAMA Spokesperson Aleem Siddique announced that the Special Representative of the Secretary-General Kai Eide will be addressing the United Nations Security Council in New York on Wednesday, where he is expected to tell member states that the international community needs to demilitarize its overall approach in Afghanistan.

"The Special Representative will make clear ... that the extra military resources committed to Afghanistan are much appreciated and required, however they must be accompanied by a coherent political strategy.

For the military efforts to succeed, they must be led by a political strategy to build sustainable civilian institutions and begin a peace process under Afghan leadership and international partnership," said Mr Siddique.

The Security Council is also expected to examine key issues such as UNAMA's mandate, the implications of the budget, as well as how the Mission can better coordinate aid.

Prior to the UN Envoy's address to the Security Council in New York, the Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is also expected to release his latest quarterly report on Afghanistan to the Security Council.

Two major conferences on Afghanistan are slated to take place in the first half of 2010 in January in London and, thereafter, in Kabul.

According to Mr Siddique, the conference in London, which will be co-chaired by the UK Government and the United Nations under Afghan leadership, is expected to be attended by foreign ministers from over 40 countries, including troop contributing countries under the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force, the US-led coalition, neighbouring countries - Iran and Pakistan - the European Union, and other international organizations.

"The Conference is not just about sending more troops or soliciting more donor funds. The conference will secure the political commitments required to ensure we enable the Afghan state to stand up on its own in the coming months," Mr Siddique clarified.

Answering a question on whether the lack of a complete cabinet would impede progress at the London Conference, the Spokesperson said that although it does not help not to have a full cabinet before such a decisive meeting, the UN was encouraged that the key ministers of finance, agriculture and defence and acting or deputy ministers would be present.

Meantime, the Independent Election Commission (IEC) announced last week that it would conduct the Parliamentary elections in May 2010. Asked whether UNAMA would pay for these elections if the US declines, Mr Siddique said no request for money has been made from the Afghan government so far and that "we will have to judge our level of engagement depending on progress made in reforming these (electoral) institutions ahead of any poll."

One of the key reform indicators that the international community would be looking at is the reform of the Independent Election Commission, which was unable to prevent fraud that occurred during the Presidential and Provincial Council Elections of August 2009.

Mr Siddique emphasized on the importance of cleaner, fairer future elections, adding "we need to see the removal and replacement of those officials who were complicit in the fraud."

By Aditya Mehta, UNAMA



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UN envoy: Political strategy key to success in Afghanistan

3 January 2010 - The international community needs to 'demilitarize' its overall approach in Afghanistan if it is to reverse current trends.

That's the message the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Kai Eide, will give to the United Nations Security Council on Wednesday at the world body's headquarters in New York.

"We have to get into a mode where our strategy is politically driven and not militarily driven, where the political and civilian components become an appendix to a military strategy," Mr Eide said in Kabul today.

Mr Eide, who will be addressing the Security Council for the last time in his capacity as Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, is due to brief member states on what he expects in the next six to nine months for Afghanistan, including the agenda for the forthcoming international conferences on Afghanistan in London and Kabul.

The UN Envoy stressed that one of the main objectives of the military troops that will arrive this year is to build the capacity of Afghan forces.

"I am deeply skeptical (of) a situation where we have an increase of military forces and that increase of military forces engages in political, civilian and humanitarian issues. I say this because...when you have an increased number of troops coming in, there will always be a trend for those forces to demonstrate quick results and take upon themselves political tasks. That leads to quick impact. (But) quick impact very often becomes quick collapse," he added.

Speaking to reporters in Kabul, Mr Eide once again emphasized the need for the Afghan government to initiate a peace process based on the constitution "as soon as possible."

"If the insurgents join the peace process (then) that will significantly increase the prospect of gradual troop withdrawals," Mr Eide said.

He added that the United Nations would be ready to meet with the insurgency anywhere in order to promote such a process in accordance with the mandate.

Answering questions regarding the Independent Election Commission's announcement to hold Parliamentary polls as early as 22 May, Mr Eide said that although he respects the decision to follow the constitution, the time available to conduct such an election was very short.

The international community, including the United Nations has repeatedly stressed on the cogent need for the government to implement reforms before holding another election, especially after last August's Presidential and Provincial Council elections were denigrated by voter fraud and insecurity.

"For me... it is important that a real reform process takes place before the next elections," said the Special Representative, adding that no request for money for the elections has been made from the government.

Meantime, on Saturday, Afghan MPs rejected a majority of the names proposed by President Hamid Karzai for his new cabinet, including the only female minister. Among the seven names approved by the parliament are the former Ministers of Interior, Defence, Finance, and Agriculture. The international community has been pressing Mr Karzai to include competent, reform-oriented individuals in his cabinet.

With the Afghanistan Conference in London just weeks away, Mr Eide said this deadlock was a "political setback, in the sense that it prolongs the situation without a functioning government."

However, according to the Special Representative, the vote also proved that the parliament has made full use of its authority under the constitution and would hopefully lead to a more accountable cabinet which is able to command the confidence of the Afghan people.

By Aditya Mehta, UNAMA

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Pakistan assures UNHCR of its continued hospitality towards registered Afghans

31 December 2009 - Pakistan's Ministry for States and Frontier Regions (SAFRON) has assured the UN refugee agency that it will continue to extend its traditional hospitality to some 1.7 million registered Afghans, pending a decision on the modalities of the renewal of their Proof of Registration (PoR) cards.

"The Government of Pakistan informed UNHCR that the Ministry of SAFRON has submitted the Draft Management and Repatriation Strategy for Afghan Refugees in Pakistan (2010-2012) to the Prime Minister of Pakistan on 15 December and decision on it would be finalised soon. In the meantime there will be no action taken against registered Afghans after 31 December 2009," said a letter addressed to the UNHCR Representative in Islamabad on Wednesday, 30 December 2009.

The Government of Pakistan assured UNHCR that till the final decision by the Cabinet, the registered Afghan refugees - holding PoR cards - will be accorded due protection. Pakistan also committed that the principles of voluntarism and gradualism, in relation to Afghan returns - as enshrined in the Tripartite Agreement - will be adhered to and it shall continue to respect international norms.

The management of stay for Afghans in Pakistan and their voluntary return are governed by a Tripartite Agreement signed between Pakistan, Afghanistan and UNHCR. Under the Agreement, the three parties have agreed in principle to extend the stay of registered Afghans in Pakistan beyond 31 December 2009.

In a separate note the Minister of SAFRON has also requested Pakistan's Ministry of Interior to issue instructions to the Provincial Home Departments and other concerned authorities to ensure that the PoR card holders should not be harassed until the final decision on the draft strategy is taken.

"We welcome this assurance from the government of Pakistan," said Khassim Diagne, Officer-in-charge for UNHCR in Pakistan. "This will help remove the concerns and anxiety among the registered Afghan population in Pakistan. This is also a gesture of continued generosity from the Government and People of Pakistan."

Some 2.19 million Afghans were registered in Pakistan, in 2007, by the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) with financial and technical assistance from UNHCR. Currently there are some 1.7 million registered Afghans living in camps and urban centres in Pakistan. More than 3.5 million Afghans have returned home under a UNHCR facilitated voluntary return programme since 2002.



UN food chief calls for bolstered support to feed world's hungry billion

31 December 2009 - With the number of chronically hungry people topping one billion for the first time in history, a coordinated effort to feed the world is crucial for the coming year, the head of the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) said today.

In a statement, Josette Sheeran, WFP's Executive Director, thanked global, national and community action for already saving millions of people. This year, the WFP strove to deliver food assistance of some 108 million people in 74 countries.

"As we look ahead to 2010, I am overwhelmed with gratitude for the support, generosity and hard work that nations across the world have dedicated to the fight against hunger," Ms. Sheeran said.

She noted that the end of the decade has witnessed much suffering, unprecedented natural disasters and deadly conflicts.

The WFP itself lost staff members this year. Just last week, a staff member was among eight people killed in a suicide bomb attack in the city of Kandahar in southern Afghanistan.

"Yet our spirit of compassion remains unbroken and our determination to reach out to the most vulnerable is undeterred," Ms. Sheeran said. "These losses have brought us all ever closer, allowing the challenges and wounds to bind us, rather than divide us."

She voiced hope that the coming decade "will be filled with hope, opportunity and security for every single child on earth. Working together, we can make this a reality."

Afghanistan: top UN envoy voices concern over mounting civilian toll

31 December 2009 - As the United Nations investigates a joint raid by Afghan and international forces in which 10 people – mostly students – were killed, the world body's top envoy to Afghanistan today appealed to all groups, both government and insurgent, to step up efforts to distinguish between civilians and combatants.

Details surrounding the 27 December incident, in which the 10 civilians were killed in northeast Afghanistan, are still unclear, but according to the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), there is strong evidence pointing to insurgents having been in the area at the time.

"I appeal again to all of the armed actors to make every effort to minimise harm to civilians and want to underline the importance of taking all precautionary measures to distinguish between civilians and combatants," Kai Eide, the Secretary-General's Special Representative, said in a statement.

"Greater efforts must be made to reverse current trends so that civilians are spared the worst effects of armed conflict in the coming year."

Mr. Eide, who also heads UNAMA, said that the world body remains concerned about night-time raids since they are often deadly and local authorities are frustrated when operations are not coordinated with them.

For safety and cultural reasons, evening raids are distressful to families directly affected by them, as well as to communities throughout Afghanistan, he added.

"UNAMA is equally concerned about the risks posed to civilians by insurgents living or operating in residential areas," the envoy said. "They account for the majority and an increasing proportion of civilian deaths."

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UN boosts aid to vulnerable Afghans as winter conditions take hold

5 January 2010 - United Nations agencies have stepped up their humanitarian relief efforts to help tens of thousands of vulnerable Afghans survive the bitter winter weather in the east of the country, the world body's mission there, known as UNAMA, said today.

Last month the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) began distributing blankets, plastic sheets, jerry cans, warm clothing and gas cylinders to some 4,100 returning refugee and displaced families in eastern provinces where temperatures can plummet to minus 20 degrees Celsius in January, the coldest month.

In addition, more than 12,000 vulnerable families, or 72,000 individuals, will receive a cash voucher worth \$30 to buy heating materials or other items of their choice from approved retailers.

"This year, our winterization package is much better than last year's, because the number of items for each family has been increased," said UNHCR's Assistant Field Officer in the eastern city of Jalalabad, Esaq Shirzai.

"For instance, the winterization package includes warm clothes, shawls and gas cylinders. Also, the number of blankets given to a family has been increased from three to six," added Mr. Shirzai.

The World Food Programme (WFP) and World Health Organization (WHO) have also provided extra assistance to the vulnerable people in Afghanistan's eastern provinces of Nangarhar, Laghman and Kunar, which are on or close to the rugged border with Pakistan.

WFP has stocked stores in areas where roads could be blocked by heavy snow with over 5,000 tons of wheat, including 2,018 tons in Nangarhar, 374 tons in Laghman, and 1,028 tons in Kunar.

Meanwhile, WHO has distributed 34 cartons of pneumonia kits, 36 cartons of emergency health kits, 870 bags of Ringer Serum, 23 cartons of diarrhoea kits, 14 cartons of essential medicines and 55 cartons of medicines for tuberculosis to the hospitals of the three provinces, as well as Nuristan province.

