



UNAMA underlines obligations to protect civilians

27 July 2010 - UNAMA is deeply concerned about reports of civilian casualties in Rege in Helmand Province on 23 July. It is essential that the current ISAF-Afghan Government investigation be completed in a thorough, transparent and timely manner, and that the findings be made public as soon as possible.

UNAMA's human rights office is also gathering information on this matter.

"While the Government and ISAF determine the facts of what occurred in Rege, where reports detail a large number of civilian deaths and injuries, I once again highlight the need for all sides to meet their obligations to protect civilians," said Staffan de Mistura, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and head of UNAMA.

UNAMA emphasizes that all parties to an armed conflict have responsibilities under international law to protect civilians and minimize the impact of their actions on the civilian population and civilian objects – such as schools and hospitals.

All parties are obliged to:

- not attack civilians and civilian objects
- not launch attacks where death and damage to civilians and civilian objects would be excessive in relation to the anticipated military advantage
- take constant care to spare the civilian population and take all feasible precautions to avoid and minimize civilian deaths and injuries
- never use civilians as human shields to protect fighters from attack

"Any loss of civilian life is tragic, and we offer our sincere condolences to family members and the community, and wish a speedy recovery to those injured," said de Mistura.

Afghan polio vaccine campaign targets 7.7 million with support from UN agencies

26 July 2010 - More than 20,000 volunteers and health workers are going house-to-house to administer two drops of the oral polio vaccine to children under the age of five in 14 provinces of Afghanistan.

The three-day campaign, Sub-national Immunization Days or SNIDS, kicked off yesterday. It is part of a national effort led by the Ministry of Public Health with support from the UN World Health Organization (WHO), the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other partners to vaccinate 7.7 million children across the country by December.

"We hope that religious scholars, community representatives, parents and ordinary people will help us achieve our target to eliminate polio from the region," Dr Rahmathullah "Kamwak", the head of WHO in the southern province of Kandahar, told journalists at an inauguration ceremony also attended by the head of the provincial public health department Dr Abdul Qayom "Pokhla."

A dozen confirmed polio cases have been reported in the country, mostly concentrated in the south where fighting has limited access to more than 100,000 children, according to a statement released today by the WHO.

In the east, 13 volunteers participating in the campaign were abducted by anti-Government forces in Kunar province. Aid organizations continued the vaccination campaign after a security assessment.

Meanwhile, in Qasaba on the outskirts of the city of Jalalabad, three volunteers recruited by the Ministry of Public Health were spotted by UNAMA knocking on doors.

"This is the second (polio) campaign I am involved in and it's going smoothly," said Fariba, one of the volunteers, her voice coming from beneath a blue burqa.

She said her team administered 207 life-saving drops yesterday and 130 today.

Three of the recipients were children of Faizullah, a 35-year-old father who works in a nearby flour mill.

Faizullah said he gets his youngest children vaccinated against polio whenever there is a campaign, "I don't want to see my kids handicapped."

Eradicating polio in Afghanistan is challenging because of the insecurity and the continued population movements from polio endemic areas to polio free areas and vice-versa, said Dr Khushhal Khan Zaman, the head of WHO in Jalalabad.

As a step towards greater regional cooperation, a synchronized campaign against polio has been launched in bordering Pakistan's tribal areas which account for the greatest population movement.

By Mujeeb Rahman in Kandahar and Tilak Pokharel in Jalalabad, UNAMA



Senior UN officials meet with tribal and religious leaders in the east

26 July 2010 - Alain Le Roy, Under-Secretary-General for the Department of Peacekeeping (DPKO), accompanied by Martin Kobler, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General (Political) for Afghanistan, met on Thursday with traditional leaders in eastern Afghanistan.

The meeting is part of an ongoing effort to engage with tribal and religious leaders to be briefed on perspectives of reconciliation and reintegration in the country.

In Gardez, Le Roy met with tribal elders for about an hour at the United Nations compound.

The two senior UN officials also met with the Provincial Governors of Paktya and Khost provinces and with UN Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) staff.

Security Council voices support for Afghan-led transition to stability

24 July 2010 - The Security Council today welcomed the commitments made this week by the Afghan Government towards greater security, improved governance and tackling corruption, and called on the international community to support the country's efforts.

"The members of the Council looked forward to the timely implementation of these commitments," Ambassador Joy Ogwu of Nigeria, which holds the rotating Council presidency for this month, said in a statement read out to the press.

The statement followed a closed-door meeting during which Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon briefed the Council on his visit to Afghanistan earlier this week and his participation in the Kabul Conference held on 20 July.

Top officials from over 60 countries, as well as international and regional organizations and financial institutions, attended the meeting, the first international gathering on Afghanistan to be held inside the country.

It concluded with the adoption of a communiqué setting out the commitments for action that form part of what is known as the "Kabul process," which will see a transition to greater Afghan responsibility and ownership, in both security and civilian areas.

"The members of the Council supported this Afghan-led process, which aims to accelerate Afghan leadership and ownership, strengthen international partnership and regional cooperation, improve Afghanistan's governance, enhance the capabilities of its security forces, deliver economic growth and provide better protection for the rights of all its citizens," said Ms. Ogwu.

Mr. Ban told the Council he was encouraged by the outcome of the conference, while adding that "words must be followed up with deeds – by the Afghan authorities and by the international community," UN spokesperson Martin Nesirky told reporters.

In today's statement, Council members also acknowledged the intention of the Afghan Government to engage with the 15-member body and the international community in a transparent process of de-listing individuals from the Consolidated List of individuals and entities subject to UN sanctions in connection with Al-Qaida and the Taliban.

Individuals on the list, which include 137 Afghan nationals, are subject to the assets freeze, travel ban and arms embargo imposed under Council resolution 1267 of 1999, and related resolutions, by which all UN Member States are required to impose sanctions on Osama bin Laden, the Taliban and those associated with them.

By UN News Centre



Nangarhar's flood-affected victims get relief from UN and partners

25 July 2010 - Food and non-food assistance provided by various United Nations agencies today began reaching the flood-affected people of the eastern Afghanistan province of Nangarhar.

The aid given by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the International Organization on Migration (IOM), and the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) is being distributed by multiple Government authorities including the Afghan National Disaster Management Authority, which has been managing and coordinating all aspects related to emergency response to disaster.

"Distribution is very tough because everyone wants to get it as soon as possible. Even those not affected are here to receive, which is creating some confusion," said Abdul Rauf, Emergency Response Manager in Jalalabad of the International Rescue Committee (IRC), an international non-governmental organization (IGO).

The IRC had started distributing relief aid to the flood victims of Jalalabad on Thursday. Afghan Red Crescent Society also distributed its aid in Chamtala township of Khogyani district on Friday.

At the request of the Government authorities, UNICEF and UNHCR have met shelter and household requirements of 164 families in three affected districts in the province, while IOM has mobilized medical mobile teams since Wednesday.

Seventy-two families in Jalalabad identified as flood victims received packets containing tents, bed nets, blankets, jerry cans, tea pots and kitchen utensils distributed by the IRC.

WFP has also committed to providing food items for the next three months for those affected by the flood.

"In order to effectively respond on time to these disasters, OCHA's [Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs] focus is on information gathering, resource mobilization, post-disaster monitoring, identification of gaps and ensuring that needs are addressed," said Kenneth Baato Rogers, Head of OCHA's Eastern Regional Office.

On Wednesday, Nangarhar's Deputy Governor Mohammad Alam Ishaqzai convened a meeting of humanitarian agencies to coordinate rescue and relief efforts in Jalalabad, Surkhrod, Khogyani and Chaprahar districts of Nangarhar province as well as some neighbouring areas of Laghman.

The flood struck four districts of the eastern region on Wednesday reportedly killing one person and injuring two others.

Jalalabad, the capital of Nangarhar province, is 150 km from Kabul. The eastern region, which comprises four provinces - Nangarhar, Laghman, Kunar and Nuristan - has a population of 3.5 million people.

SRSR Coomaraswamy welcomes establishment of a committee for children in conflict

22 July 2010 - "The inauguration this week of a steering committee established to address and respond to grave violations against children in armed conflict affirms the Afghan Government's commitment to protect Afghan boys and girls from the on-going conflict.

With President Hamid Karzai's approval of the body, I am delighted to see that he has kept one of the key promises that he made during my last visit to Afghanistan in February 2010," said United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Radhika Coomaraswamy.

"The inauguration of the Steering Committee on Children and Armed Conflict marks a first step towards a broader national engagement in protecting children from the adverse effects of the Afghan conflict—which must include the development of an Action Plan to end the recruitment and use of child soldiers in the Afghan National Security Forces.

I am hopeful that the Afghan Government will take the necessary measures to ensure that its national police are removed from the Secretary-General's list of shame," she continued.

Security Council resolutions 1612 and 1889 established a Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism which provides the necessary information and background on violations committed against children in conflict.

Armed groups who recruit and use children or those who rape or use sexual violence against children or kill and maim them are listed in the Secretary-General's Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict.