

UNAMA**United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan**

Strategic Communication and Spokespersons Unit, Kabul, Afghanistan

Transcript<http://unama.unmissions.org>**PRESS CONFERENCE BY UN DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL JAN ELIASSON****Kabul – 2 July 2013****(near verbatim transcript; edited for flow and clarity)****Participants:**

- **The UN Deputy Secretary-General, Jan Eliasson**
- **UNAMA's National Spokesperson, Nazifullah Salarzai**

Jan Eliasson: Thank you very much. Good morning. I am Jan Eliasson. I am the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations. I have been here for five-day visit, which is unusually long for me. I found it extremely interesting and very useful to be here in Kabul and also to go to Kandahar, where I spent a day on Sunday.

I have met with a number of personalities and institutions. I met President [Hamid] Karzai and his Security Advisor. I met the Ministers of Defence, Foreign Affairs, Finance and the Interior, and Dr. Ashraf Ghani, who deals with the transition, the Speakers of both Houses, representatives of the Independent Electoral Commission, civil society, including women's organizations, political parties, as well as the international community, ISAF [International Security Assistance Force] and the UN family. So you understand I have not been completely unemployed these past few days.

My general impression is, of course, that Afghanistan has made impressive progress during the last 10-12 years – impressive progress in building institutions, a democratic state, health and education improvements, in human rights, many steps forward, not least for women, and now, it's transitioning into a new phase – both in terms of security and development, and society in general. Therefore, the Secretary-General and I found that this was the time for me to come here and contribute to something that I found, practically with all my interlocutors, namely, a desire to make sure these gains that have been achieved for the last 10 to 12 years are preserved, maintained and that we will be able, for Afghanistan's people, to proceed further towards peace, development and respect of human rights.

My message to my Afghan colleagues and friends has been that the United Nations is prepared to stay in Afghanistan whatever happens in the post-2014 period. We realize that we have a role

here in several respects. We are prepared to accept that role in coordination, of course, with the Afghan Government and Afghan institutions and the Afghan people, and also with the support which we think we will have from the international community – both the Security Council and the development partners and others in the world community.

There are several areas where we [can] play a role. One of them is, of course, development aid coordination – assistance to coordinate the aid from the donor community who, by the way as you know, are meeting here tomorrow; at the Senior Officials' Meeting. That's one area. The second area is, of course, continued humanitarian assistance. The third area is to help in building up institutions and projects related to certain specific areas. Human rights is, of course, a priority issue for the United Nations, including women rights as I mentioned earlier.

We hope very much also in the future to contribute in important sectors like health, education and agriculture. If there is also any role that United Nations can play in the area of reconciliation we are prepared to do so, but only at the request of the Government, of course, and the parties.

In closing, I would like to just mention one particular issue which has come up in the conversations very often, also at the initiative of the Afghan interlocutors, and that is the upcoming elections, the importance of the elections ahead of us.

There is no other way for democratic transition and for stability and development than through an inclusive, transparent and credible election as prescribed by the Afghan Constitution. It is also one of the most important ways to preserve the gains that you have achieved in the last 10 to 12 years. For these reasons, I am very much encouraged by the fact that President Karzai and the Speakers of both Houses, during my visit, have given assurances to finalize and sign the two electoral laws without delay.

I would just now hope that the upcoming meeting in Kabul, starting tomorrow, the Senior Officials' Meeting, will be a meeting where commitments are made and repeated both by the Government and by the development partners, so that we can translate the solidarity between the international community and Afghanistan by continued [inaudible] cooperation and also seeing the elections taking on new speed with these two election laws hopefully being passed, and then going through a period of voter registration and leading up to, hopefully, an election with the wide participation of voters and, by that, taking a very, very important step towards an Afghanistan which will have much better prospect of living in peace, development and with respect of human rights.

Thank you very much.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

Tolo TV [translated from Dari]: First of all, I would like to welcome you to Afghanistan. And my question is that, as you know that, the main problem of Afghanistan is Pakistan, and as you know Pakistan is training and equipping the insurgents and sending [them] to Afghanistan. We have also been witnessing the conflicts across the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The only institution, the only organization that the people of Afghanistan are hopeful for is the United Nations, for it to solve the differences between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Especially recently, the Government of Pakistan submitted a proposal to the Afghan Government requesting a federal government structure in

Afghanistan. So, I would like to know what kind of role the UN would eventually play to improve the relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan?

Jan Eliasson: You are quite right in stressing the importance of the relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan. It has been historically a very complicated relationship. You are also right in indicating that in order to achieve peace and stability in Afghanistan, there has to be a good cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

I would very much hope that, on both sides, there is a realization of the importance of that bilateral relationship. And now with the new Government coming in to Pakistan, that there will be a possibility of taking new steps because the threats that are to be dealt with are threats that truly are common. They should have reasons to cooperate, to deal with those threats against security and stability.

As to the information that you have about certain federal structures, I can tell you that I, and we the United Nations, have not seen any such ideas. I don't think it's proper for me to comment on anything that I haven't really seen as concretely as has been proposed. So, I would refrain from commenting on it, except, to just underline that it is extremely important to maintain the territorial integrity of Afghanistan and the rights for the Afghan people and the Afghan parties to find solutions, again, in an Afghan-led process.

By the way, thank you for welcoming me to Afghanistan. I was given a wonderful dinner last night by the Mayor of Kabul, and I have seen some of the improvements, a new optimism, in the city. Thank you.

New York Times: *[Inaudible – the following is the gist of the question asked: There has been some controversy in Qatar with regards to the opening of the Taliban office. Would you like to comment on the issue?]*

Jan Eliasson: Well, if I may use a metaphor, I would hope that it is a bump in the road rather than a major road repair. I would hope that there is a realization of the importance of pursuing these talks on both sides and that they will proceed as soon as possible. I think it is important to carry on that dialogue and I hope that the emphasis on the side of the Taliban will be on peaceful pursuits rather than violent expressions of the competition between the different forces.

But it is very important for me as a United Nations man standing up for the UN Charter – that I always have in my pocket here; Chapter 6 of the UN Charter talks about the importance of peaceful solutions – it's very important always to talk and have dialogue and see whether progress can be made.

But it's going to be a tough journey and a long journey and we hope very much that that journey in the end will be fruitful and lead to the fact that there will be cooperation around the future of Afghanistan in due time.

New York Times: Are you optimistic about that? Because the Taliban have not really indicated that they are willing to talk to the Afghan Government.

Jan Eliasson: I have started to answer the question whether I am an optimist or a pessimist. In a way, I am basically an optimist – but I must admit that I sometimes worry a lot. But I hope that, in this case, reason will prevail, that we will go down the road of cooperation and peaceful settlements.

Associated Press: We had another attack this morning from the Taliban, the latest and there have been several here in Kabul. How does this sort of thing complicate the possibility of peace talks with the Taliban? And also, you mentioned that the UN will be prepared to take a role in the reconciliation process. What sort of role could the UN take and how do you think that will help?

Jan Eliasson: Well, the attack this morning – and by the way, they thwarted [another] attack yesterday – is, of course, a sign of the volatile security environment. I find it very objectionable and very strange that parties to any conflict introduce the fear factor among the population to such a degree as is the case here. We have seen this in many parts of the world right now – the blind violence that is taking place, the degree of brutalization of the situation, putting civilians at risk. So, I would hope that this method in today's world is used much less for the time being, especially if there is now a road cleared for the elections to take place and to create a truly democratic society.

I would hope that there would be steps taken by the leadership of the Taliban to realize that the tool of violence in any case cannot instil confidence in the population. There has been too much suffering. There are too many widows and too many fatherless and motherless children in Afghanistan. I think we need to instil a sense of calm, try to achieve a sense of calm and not to have fear characterizing normal life when people really are now heading for a new future.

The reconciliation process must, if it is to be successful, be Afghan-led. What I hope is it will take place with close contacts between the two parties – the High Peace Council and the Taliban. As long as those contacts continue, there's no specific need for the United Nations to be involved. We have had contacts in the past. We may have contacts in the future. But we will only act if requested by the parties and, from my part, I would particularly stress the Afghan Government here in Kabul.

My experience in negotiations – I have negotiated in several conflicts – is however that the best results are achieved if there are direct contacts between the parties.

8:00 A.M. (daily newspaper) [translated from Dari]: My question is with regard to the elections. You mentioned that you met with political parties, with government officials and also with the civil society groups. I would like to know how certain you are that the presidential election 2014 will not be accompanied with challenges and problems like in the past and in your view what kind of steps have been taken so far by the Government in order to ensure transparent and fair elections?

Jan Eliasson: You have an electoral framework which contains several guarantees for fair and transparent elections. I have also high hopes that you will also have a complaints commission, which is a common feature of electoral laws. But, of course, the election laws are just the first step. You then have a period of registration, of widespread information about the elections.

I understand from my visit to Kandahar that there is a special need to make sure that women know that they have the right to vote – because, in any democracy, a very important measurement of the vitality of democracy is their high participation in the elections. That seems to me to be of common interest of all political forces inside Afghanistan. The stronger democratic mandate that the new leadership will have, the stronger the possibilities are to go forward on the road to peace, development and respect of human rights.

But let me underline that this is an Afghan process. This is in the hands of the Afghan authorities and the Afghan people. The United Nations is prepared, if requested, to provide technical assistance. We should draw lessons from the 2009 experience and make sure from all sides that this is truly fair and transparent election.

Shamshad TV: My question is regarding the peace and reconciliation process. The Taliban always say they will just talk with Americans, and in these last days, the Afghan Government also said that the name of the Taliban has been misused and they will talk with Americans. Also, they say that the Americans are also not so honest in their promises. The best example is the Qatar office. So my question is that, in such a complicated situation, how the United Nations can play a role and what more could be more by the United Nations?

Jan Eliasson: As I understand it, the talks in Doha are to be started by a direct contact between the United States and the parties. That is to be more formal step. I would suppose that the intention of the United States is to aim for a direct contact between Afghans. As I understand, the second step is the meeting which will hopefully take place between the Taliban and the Afghan High Peace Council. That is the next step and, if they can make progress, I think this is all good news for the United Nations. If we come in to a situation where there are problems in this process we are willing to play a role, but only if requested. For the time being, we are not requested to play any role.

Al Jazeera Television: It's been a year since the Tokyo Conference took place. There has not been any change since then. Do you see the Afghan government committed to remove the corruption? I mean, as an Afghan, I don't see the Afghan Government to be capable of removing corruption.

Jan Eliasson: There has not been any major conference in the format of Tokyo since then. As you know, there were very substantive commitments made and one of the main reasons for this meeting that will open up tomorrow in Kabul – the Senior Officials' Meeting – is to go through these different commitments. And I think I indicated earlier that there are commitments made by both sides. Development partners need to be reminded of the commitments of this magnitude, which will be so important for the future of Afghanistan. But there are also other commitments made of a different nature, economic but also political. There is a clear interest among the development partners on the elections. I would put that first and highest in terms of what is expected from the Afghan side.

There are also commitments made on human rights, and not least women's situation, which are also followed with great interest from the Members States. And, of course, what you mentioned, corruption and fraud in different forms, is of course is extremely important to fight. It is important for Afghanistan as it is important for the international community, and for the continual support of the international community for the efforts of Afghanistan.

So I think we should have a very open and honest and frank discussion about these issues. We have a joint interest in helping the Afghan people go down the road of progress that I mentioned at the beginning. It is primarily important for your people, who have suffered for far too long, and for the generation that grow up now. But it is also important for regional stability. Somebody mentioned earlier that perspective, and its national security.

I personally followed Afghanistan since 1979 when I was a diplomat in the Swedish foreign services... Since then, I have followed and almost suffered with the Afghan people. So I think

we need to look very carefully at the different aspects in order to create the best possible society to go down the road that you deserve to go and that's where we, from the international community, want you to go. But, it is in the end, of course, primarily an Afghan responsibility and we will be at the side of the Afghan people in a democratically-elected Government of Afghanistan and we will be there in whatever scenario you may paint ahead of us.

Thank you very much.

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