



**United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan**

Strategic Communication and Spokespersons Unit  
Kabul - Afghanistan

Tel: 00 39 0831 24 6121 – 00 93 (0) 790 00 6121

Email: [spokesperson-unama@un.org](mailto:spokesperson-unama@un.org)

Website: <http://unama.unmissions.org>

**PRESS CONFERENCE (near verbatim transcript)**

**Aleem Siddique, Spokesperson, UNAMA Strategic Communication and Spokespersons Unit.**

*Kabul – 4 January 2010*

### **SRSR AT THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL THIS WEEK**

First, the Special Representative, Kai Eide, left Afghanistan for New York yesterday. He will be briefing the UN Security Council this coming week on Wednesday 6 January. The Security Council is expected to look at some of the key issues facing UNAMA over the coming year.

In particular, they will examine:

1. What is needed to allow UNAMA to more effectively coordinate aid?
2. Can this be done within UNAMA's mandate or will it need to be changed?
3. What are the implications for the UNAMA budget?

The Special Representative will make clear at the Security Council this week 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.

### **LONDON CONFERENCE**

Looking ahead, the London conference is scheduled to take place on 28 January and will be co-chaired by the UK Government and the United Nations under Afghan leadership.

The conference will be attended by foreign ministers from over 40 countries, including troop contributing countries under ISAF and the coalition, neighbouring countries - Iran and Pakistan - the European Union, and other international organizations such as the World Bank.

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. It will lay out milestones for the "Afghanisation" of our efforts – both civilian and military.

We hope that a summit planned, here, in Kabul, in early spring will build on the momentum created by the London conference.

### **2010 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS**

Most of you will now be aware that the Independent Election Commission (IEC) has announced 22 May as the date for the Parliamentary Elections.

We need to respect Afghanistan's sovereign decision to hold elections according to the constitution of this country.

At the same time, we have made clear that we need to see significant reform of Afghanistan's electoral institutions to ensure cleaner parliamentary elections.

We will have to judge our level of engagement depending on progress made in reforming these key institutions ahead of any poll.

Our mandate requires a specific request from the Government of Afghanistan before any support can be provided for parliamentary polls. We have not yet received any

specific request for either technical or financial support from the Afghan government for the parliamentary polls.

### **AFGHAN CABINET**

On the issue of cabinet nominations, let me just say that we were encouraged that many of the reform-orientated ministers in agriculture, finance, defence and interior were all approved

We cannot hide from the fact that many others were rejected and this will delay the formation of a functioning cabinet.

However, we respect the Parliament's constitutional role in approving the cabinet choices and hope that the President will work closely with Parliament to approve his choice for the remaining cabinet positions swiftly

### **2009 ACHIEVEMENTS**

Last, as this is the first press conference of the New Year, I thought it might be useful to highlight some of the humanitarian and development achievements of UN agencies over the last year

In 2009, the UN's refugee agency, UNHCR, helped more than 48,000 Afghans to return from Pakistan and 5,500 from Iran. In all 4.4 million Afghan refugees have returned to their homeland with UNHCR assistance since 2002.

The agency also built 10,000 shelters last year for vulnerable returnee families, benefiting 70,000 people.

UNICEF also continued its support to increase enrolment in schools, in particular helping to keep 2.5 million girls in school and providing books and other learning materials for 2.6 million pupils.

The World Organization with UNICEF immunized 7.5 million children against life threatening, but preventable diseases.

The fight against drugs also intensified in the last year – prompted by UNODC's Triangular Initiative – Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan carried out joint operations along Iran's borders and opium production was reduced by 22 per cent and by nearly a third in Helmand.

We hope 2010 will be the year where we turn the tide on drug trafficking in Afghanistan.

Mine action programmes were also launched country-wide by the UN Mine Action Coordination Centre for Afghanistan (MACCA) during the year

Thousands of lives were saved as almost 50,000 anti-personnel mines and over one million explosive remnants of war were destroyed up until November last year.

In addition, 245 communities were declared mine free and more than a million Afghans were given mine risk education last year.

Over the coming year we hope to build on the achievements of 2009 so that we can step up efforts in support of the Afghan people and the Afghan government so that we can see a peaceful, stable and prosperous 2010 for the Afghan people.

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

**SABA TV [translated from Dari]:** My question has two parts. The first is with regards to the reform of the electoral institutions. What kind of reforms are you expecting in these institutions, and whether these reforms have to do with those alleged to be involved in fraud or with the dismissal of officials?

Secondly, whether you have been providing any advice to President Karzai with regards to forming the cabinet, especially the 17 people who have not been approved by the Parliament? What kind of people do you really expect to be in the new Cabinet?

**UNAMA:** On the first part of your question, the reform that we need to see of the electoral institutions needs to be from top to bottom. We need to see reform that prevents the sort or level of fraud and the attempted fraud that took place in the presidential polls. We need to see a removal or replacement of all those officials who were complicit in fraud, or failed to live up to the expectation of Afghanistan's voters. And we need to see cleaner and fairer elections.

Each election is about making progress. If we don't see better elections, parliamentary elections, than the presidential polls, then this country will not have made any progress. So we need to see progress, and reforms that can prevent fraud taking place. We need to see progress that can command the confidence of the Afghan people. That is how we will judge the efforts to reform Afghanistan's electoral institutions.

On your question on the Cabinet: The international community and the United Nations have no role to play in selecting Cabinet members. As any sovereign country, that decision is the prerogative of the president of this country. And it is President Karzai's decision to make the final selection of his Cabinet. And he is free to seek advice and guidance from whomever he wishes. However, we have no role to play in that process.

Nonetheless, having said that, publicly, you heard UNAMA and the Special Representative make clear the type of people that we need to work with and the type of people that the Afghan people want to see in that cabinet. And that is reform-oriented ministers, people who can manage large bureaucracies, manage large ministries and, most importantly, deliver the sort of grassroots services that are so desperately needed around this country.

Those are the type of ministers we want to work with, those are the type of people the Afghan people want to see in the cabinet, and those are the type of people that we hope President Karzai will select to serve the Afghan people over the coming weeks.

**AFP:** Can you elaborate on what the impact on the London Conference will be without ministers in charge?

**UNAMA:** Listen, frankly, it hardly helps that we don't have a complete cabinet to go to London. Nonetheless, we are encouraged by the fact that many of the key ministries have gained the votes of confidence from the Parliament, and they will be attending London.

Have a look at those ministries – they are really key in terms of the immediate challenges facing this country, particularly Interior, Defence, Agriculture Finance, Education – these have all been approved, and these ministers will be going to London.

We take encouragement from that fact. Many others will be missing, and that obviously does not help the situation, and that is regrettable. However, we are encouraged by comments from the Government yesterday that they are focusing all efforts in preparation for the London conference. And even if they don't have ministers in the other ministries, either acting or deputy ministers will be present to ensure that we have representation in London. So, in short, it is not ideal but all efforts will be focused on getting the best possible outcome that we can from the London Conference, considering the situation.

**RADIO KILLID [translated from Dari]:** My question has three parts. The first part is with regard to the formation of the cabinet. You mentioned that the cabinet should be made up of reform-oriented ministers, while you are against the decision that Parliament made with regards to the rejection of 17 other cabinet ministers.

The second part is you mentioned only a few ministers who got the vote of confidence. But you did not mention about Minister Rahimi and Minister Shahrani. Why did you not mention it? Are they not reform-oriented ministers? The third part is with regard to the budget of the IEC, US\$ 120 million dollar is required for the Parliamentary Elections and the Government is not in the position to provide this money. Will the UN be in a position to prepare for such an amount of money? Why has the US government said that as long as there is no reform at the IEC they will not ready to provide any financial assistance?

**UNAMA:** Let me take your first question on the two ministers. I was just giving you examples of reform-oriented ministers or examples of those ministries that have been approved. But this is not a definitive vote of confidence or no vote of confidence in any ministers because that is not the role of UNAMA. It is for the Parliament to decide which ministers are able to serve the Afghan people. But for the purpose of this question, you can add those two ministers to the list I said earlier on.

On the second part of your question, you said that UNAMA is against the Parliament's rejection. Let me make this point perfectly clear. We support the role of Parliament. The Parliament has played its constitutional role and if there is any silver lining or if there is anything positive to be seen from the rejections that we have seen over the last few days, it is that we have a Parliament that is playing its constitutional role in providing oversight to the President's selections for the cabinet.

What we have said publicly or what the Special Representative has said publicly is that the rejection of those cabinet ministers is a set back. That is clear as day for anybody to see when the international community is ready to work with the Afghan Government and many of the positions in cabinet remain empty. That's obviously not going to help push forward progress. That's a concern of UNAMA and the international community. We want to push forward progress for the Afghan people but we can only do that with a complete cabinet. Our hope is that the President and the Parliament will work closely together over the coming days and weeks to represent a list of cabinet nominees, to fill those posts so we can push forward with progress. Our hope is also that we would see at the end of this process is a far more accountable cabinet that can command the respect, not only of the President and Parliament, but also the Afghan people.

The last part of your question was on financing the elections. As I said in my opening remarks, we have not yet received any requests for financial support from the Afghan authorities for Parliamentary Elections so we cannot consider any request for financing until that request has been made.

**TOLO TV [translated from Dari]:** I want a clarification on the rejection of the majority of the nominees by the Parliament that might halt progress or assistance. If you can tell us if this will really affect the assistance given by the international community? Secondly the Government has not specified any date for representing nominees to the Parliament. In case these nominees delayed will that affect the assistance of the international community?

**UNAMA:** Let me be clear, our engagement with the Afghan Government and different government ministries continues. While ministers have not been approved, we are working with the acting ministers or with the deputy ministers. As I said, we want to be working with those ministers who have been selected and approved by the Parliament. In terms of any delays, obviously, from the international community's point of view, we would like to see the President and Parliament approve those remaining cabinet positions as soon as possible. But that's not something we can have an impact on. That's very much the prerogative of the Parliament and the President and you need to ask them about how long that would take or impact on any delays. We are here and we are waiting to work with whomever they approve for us to work with.

**BBC PERSIAN RADIO [translated from Dari]:** Again, a question with two parts. If the Government and the Independent Election Commission requests money from you to finance the Parliamentary Elections (that is around US\$ 120 million), will you provide this money to them? The second part of my question is who will be the successor to Kai Eide and when will he or she start working?

**UNAMA:** On the first part of your question, I go back to comments that I made earlier. When we receive a request for financial support for any future polls in this country, we will consider that request at that particular time. But I am not going to sit here and promise money before we have even received a request. We will judge any request for financial contributions according to the commitment demonstrated in reforming the key electoral institutions in this country so we can see a cleaner, fairer parliamentary poll.

In terms of the SRSG Kai Eide; his contract will be completed here in Afghanistan in March of this year. His successor will be appointed by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon from New York. Like you, we are very keen to find out who the new SRSG but we will have to wait for Ban Ki-moon to announce it. That announcement will be made from our New York Headquarters.

**HASHT-E-SUBH [translated from Dari]:** I would like a clarification on the changing of the mandate of UNAMA and what will it be?

**UNAMA:** The mandate of UNAMA is set by the United Nations Security Council which this month is headed by Turkey. And it will be the Security Council that will decide any changes to the mandate. It is difficult for me to speculate. But the challenges that Afghanistan and UNAMA face are very clear. In terms of increasing international coordination, the effectiveness of it, in terms of supporting any peace process here in this country under the leadership of the Afghan Government. These

will be issues that the Security Council will be examining over the coming week and they will have a look to see whether our mandate needs to be adapted or changed to meet some of these pressing challenges so that we are better able to support and assist the Afghan authorities and meet some of these challenges. But I think we are going to have to wait until that Security Council meeting happens this coming Wednesday.

**CHANNEL ONE [translated from Dari]:** You talked about reforms in the electoral institutions. I just want to know if you have been able to identify some of those electoral staff who were involved in fraud or were biased to a particular candidate, and if they have been identified? What is UNAMA's reaction?

**UNAMA:** First of all, it is not our job to identify the perpetrators of fraud. There is an election commission in this country and it is their job to prevent, detect and prosecute fraud wherever they find it.

Having said that UNAMA and the UN's position on fraud is perfectly clear – wherever it is detected, robust action must be taken to ensure that fraud does not taint the final outcome of any poll.

**RFE/RL:** You pointed out that United Nations will support the peace process in Afghanistan, and you know that the opposition has specific conditions for peace talks: one is that foreign troops must withdraw from Afghanistan; the second concern is the removal of some of the names from the UN black list. Will Kai Eide mention this in his coming briefing to the Security Council?

**UNAMA:** First of all, no peace process has started in this country so there is nothing to talk about. And certainly the peace process is not going to be started by Kai Eide or by the Security Council. It will be started by the Afghan Government. And you know whenever you start a peace process you begin with two sides that have very different points of views with two very different sets of conditions. That is why it is called a process because you begin the process, you begin talking and you bring the two parties together. But that process has to start somewhere and it will most likely start with two sides that are poles apart and they will need to be brought together within that process, which will be led by the Afghan Government based on the constitution of this country. The United Nations has expressed its willingness and readiness to support any such process and we will begin once we are asked by the Afghan authorities.

**PAJHWOK [translated from Dari]:** You mentioned some of the UN achievements over the last year but you didn't mention the challenges that UN agencies have faced as it's the first time that the UN came under direct attack.

**UNAMA:** By far the biggest challenge facing UN operations in Afghanistan in 2009 was the security situation. During 2009, we had humanitarian workers, humanitarian convoys, programmes and activities come under attack. This makes it harder for the United Nations to reach those people who need our help the most. And without a doubt people will have suffered, who did not need to suffer, because we were kept away from them because of the security situation and because of attacks against our activities around the country. Our hope over the coming year and our message to those who continue to fight is to recognize the inherent neutrality and impartiality of the work we do for the most vulnerable parts of Afghan society. If you attack us, you attack the most vulnerable people in Afghan society and we hope that the Afghan people will join us in getting the message out to those who continue to fight that we

need space to reach those people who need our help the most and to recognize the impartiality of the work we do. We don't deliver food to people according to their ethnicity or politics, but we deliver food according to their needs. We hope people will recognize this in the coming year so we can help even more people in 2010 than we did in 2009.

-----