



United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

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Press Conference (near verbatim transcript)

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UNAMA: Good Morning ladies and gentlemen, welcome to our Monday morning press briefing, my name is Aleem Siddique, from UNAMA Spokesperson's Office.

Explosion in Kabul

News just coming into to us this morning is that three children may have been killed and in a separate incident many police officers have injured both by ordinance that exploded here in Kabul city today. This appears to have been an unfortunate accident. We would like offer our sincere condolences to the victims and their families at this early stage and we will of course continue to monitor the situation over the coming hours and update you as more information comes in.

No damage to Bamyan Buddha site

I also wanted to clear up some media reports that we saw yesterday on alleged damage to the site of the Buddha remnants in Bamyan.

This was a controlled explosion carried out by ISAF at the request of the Government's ANBP disarmament programme. The Governor had been informed as had the local authorities and all necessary precautions had been taken to prevent any possible damage to the Buddha remains.

UN officials who have visited the site have confirmed that this exercise to make the area safe for local residents was completed successfully without any damage to the archeological remains.

Victory day attack in Kabul

There has been much debate and speculation about last Sunday's attack in the media and also in parliament. We all recognise the need to review the events of this attack but we must also recognise and acknowledge some key salient facts:

Once the attack began the perpetrators were stopped in their tracks and defeated by Afghan security forces within minutes.

This attack was an attempt to dishonour the sacrifice that the Afghan people have made for their own independence and to sow discord amongst the Afghan people.

Afghans must remain united and stand in solidarity in the face of such provocation

When such an incident occurs we must of course look at what could have been done to prevent such an event, but we must also acknowledge that the security forces when called upon and under extreme circumstances did their utmost to minimize loss of life and stepped up to successfully protect the President.

Whether such attacks happen in Kabul, London or Madrid there will always be lessons to be learnt. While it will always be difficult to prevent such attacks by those determined to undermine peace and stability, we have seen an increasing number of terrorist attacks thwarted by the Afghan security forces.

The important thing that we must focus on is that the Afghan security forces must be recognised for their efforts on Sunday, they must of course be held accountable but we must also acknowledge their determination to learn the lessons of last Sunday

and their openness in explaining the circumstances of this attack to the Afghan people

Accountability must squarely rest with the perpetrators of this attack and the Afghan people and their Government must continue to stand united in the face of such terrorist actions.

Eighty families return to home to Bala Murghab

The first group this year of internally-displaced people left Herat province for their homes in the Bala Murghab district of Badghis province last week. More than 80 families, over 500 individuals returned to their homes after fleeing from violence and conflict nine months ago.

The return operation was jointly organised by the Department of Refugees and Repatriation, UNHCR, WFP and IOM. The returning families, in addition to receiving free transportation to their homes also received non-food items, including blankets, jerry cans, plastic tarpaulins and soap. Upon their arrival in Bala Murghab they will also receive wheat flour, lentils, cooking oil and salt from the World Food Programme.

There is an estimated 150,000 internally displaced people across Afghanistan - 111,000 are located in the southern provinces.

Food-for-work in Laghman and Logar provinces

Nearly 9,000 people from Laghman province will benefit from the World Food Programme's "food-for-work" scheme. Approximately, 1,636 tones of wheat will be distributed to those who work on WFP road-gravelling project in five districts of the province.

3,200 people from four districts of Logar province will have short-term job opportunities as part of WFP's food-for-work projects. WFP will fund 11 food-for-work projects in Baraki Barak, Khoshi, Kharwar and Puli Alam districts over the coming months.

Promoting women's access to public transportation

A new policy to help women secure equal access to transportation will see 35 percent of seats on all public transport reserved for women, children, elderly and physically impaired people in Kabul and Herat cities.

Messages and signs have been developed and are now ready to be painted or sprayed on the buses. A workshop on promoting women's access to transport is planned for the drivers and conductors of forty buses. The implementation of this policy will be monitored by the Afghan Women's Network.

For more information on this initiative and other activities that UNIFEM are currently engaged in, please collect a factsheet from the side table.

Training centre in Nangarhar handed over to local government

One hundred ex-combatants and 45 women will benefit from a new vocational centre in Nangarhar province.

The project to upgrade the Nangarhar vocational training centre has now been completed and the centre will be officially handed over to the local government by UNDP's urban development group tomorrow in Jalalabad city.

The centres will be used for vocational training for ex-combatants and vulnerable people as a part of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled "*Basic Vocational Training Project for ex-Combatants*". The centre will promote sustainable livelihoods and equip ex-combatants, the disabled, widows and the most vulnerable people who are out of work.

For further information on this project, please collect a press release from the side table.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

Sabah TV [translated from Pashto]: Pakistan says that they will negotiate with the Pakistani Taliban. Don't you think that this will allow them to become more powerful? Secondly, the director of National Security Directorate (NSD) has said that the attack on President Karzai on 27 April, were masterminded in Bajour agency of Pakistan. What is your view on this?

UNAMA: The United Nations has always advocated for a joint response to deal with the insurgency in this country. We need to see a joint response from both Afghanistan and Pakistan. We need to see that the brother countries of Afghanistan and Pakistan join hands to defeat those who are undermining peace and stability in both countries. Quite clearly we have seen evidence of that over the last months. We have seen encouraging signs from the new Pakistani Government in recent weeks. We want to encourage those coordination efforts between Afghanistan and Pakistan to deal with the threat to the people of both countries. Any efforts that can be made to bring peace in both countries must be led by the Government's of both countries. Let me assure you of the United Nations full cooperation in assisting the people of this region to deal with the shared challenge of defeating the insurgency and bringing peace to the people of both countries.

RFE/RL: Some of the Afghan political experts claim that a number of Afghan officials were involved in the attack on President Karzai on victory day. Do you agree with this? Secondly, are you against talks between Pakistan and the Taliban?

UNAMA: Let me clear up this issue whether we are for or against the Pakistan's talking with the insurgents on that side of the border. UNAMA has no mandate to talk about Pakistani affairs. Our interest is the safety, the security and the progress of the people of Afghanistan and that is where our focus remains. As the United Nations we are an organization of member countries and Pakistan is a vital part of the United Nations and of course we encourage our member states to work cooperatively together to defeat common challenges that they face and that the world community

faces. We want to see Afghanistan and Pakistan work closely together and we have seen some encouraging signs in that direction in recent weeks.

On your first question, it is an issue of concern and we have seen swift concerted action from the Afghan security forces on this very issue which we welcome. There are two things you have to look at in such an instance. How the conduct of the Afghan security forces was during the event and what lessons they have learnt after such an event and what actions they have taken to ensure that such an event cannot take place again. These are two important factors that one needs to judge. If we look at both of those key areas, firstly what action did they take during the event when this attack was underway? They [Afghan security forces] stopped and defeated this attack within minutes. Secondly you need to look at what action the Afghan security forces take to deal with the aftermath of this attack and within a week you have seen the Afghan security forces take decisive action against the perpetrators of this attack and those that are suspected to have been involved in assisting this attack.

IRNA [translated from Dari]: Regarding the last Sunday's attack you stressed that we must also recognise and acknowledge some key salient facts, can you tell us what are those facts?

UNAMA: Please talk to me afterwards and I can repeat exactly what I have already said to you earlier in the conference.

Radio Killid [translated from Dari]: The parliament speaker Mr. Yonus Qanooni talked about a new scheme by the international community regarding the Counter Narcotics efforts, under which 50 percent of the international community's assistance will be provided to farmers, and why was it previously provided directly to the government? and you talked about a new policy by UNIFEM that will secure equal access of women to public transportation, why do you not put pressure to avoid violence against women, for example violence in the northern provinces of Afghanistan continue to take many victims?

UNAMA: On your first question on counter narcotics and government plans to extend more funding towards farmers, of course the United Nations is working very closely with the government authorities to do exactly that, the United Nations has been one of the strongest advocates for alternative livelihood for farmers in this country. The United Nations is in complete agreement with the government of Afghanistan in the need to provide alternative livelihood to those farmers who currently growing poppy, to encourage them towards growing legal crops in place of poppy. On second part of your question, which was to do with violence against women, the United Nations has been one of the strongest advocates against the violence against women, if I can just highlight to you that UNFPA and UNIFEM are playing a major role in setting up counseling centers and referral centers for women who are suffering due to violence within their communities and within their families. We have five such centers now set up in the major cities of this country that are offering support to women in need. If you are genuinely interested in this issue, I invite you to come and join us and visit one of these centers in Herat, Jalalabad, or Mazar, and we can show you the work we are doing to tackle this issue. But let us not forget that the first and primary responsibility for protecting women against such violence rests within our own communities and families. As brothers, fathers and husbands we are the key to ensuring the safety of our Afghan sisters, daughters and mothers.

REF/RL: I would like know about your view point on the impacts of peace agreement between Pakistani government and Taliban for the people of Afghanistan.

UNAMA: Thank you madam, I think it would be the reiteration of the previous answer that I gave. The United Nations has always made clear, this is a regional insurgency, we need to have a regional solution, and we need to see the brother countries of Afghanistan and Pakistan join hands to defeat those that are trying to undermine peace and stability in both countries. The United Nations has always made clear that we need to see more than simply military action, we need to see development action, and we need to see political outreach and that includes political outreach from both sides of the border. We have no mandate to comment about what the sovereign government of Pakistan is doing on its own territory, but we have made clear publicly already, we need to see the brother countries of Afghanistan and Pakistan working together to defeat this insurgency and this requires not only military efforts but also political outreach efforts and also development efforts. Whether these efforts will succeed or fail; only time will tell. Let me assure you that the United Nations will play every role that it possibly can to support both governments in succeeding.

Thank you very much.
