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**United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan**

Strategic Communication and Spokespersons Unit, Kabul, Afghanistan

## Press Statement

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### **STATEMENT BY UN SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE STAFFAN DE MISTURA ON MYSTERIOUS ILLNESSES AFFECTING GIRLS IN AFGHAN SCHOOLS**

Kabul, 12 May 2010 - I am concerned by recent reports from Kunduz, Daikundi and Kabul of girls falling ill in school, allegedly due to the presence of some kind of chemical contaminant.

The UN World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF, in support of the Afghan Ministry of Public Health, Ministry of Education and provincial authorities, have been investigating these reports, helping to treat the ill children and seeking ways to prevent any possible breach of security in Afghanistan's schools.

Blood samples have been taken sent to laboratories out of the country, as no facilities exist here which can thoroughly test the samples.

At this point the investigations have not revealed any conclusion as to the nature or source of these incidents of illness.

Thankfully I understand the children have recovered relatively quickly from their symptoms.

WHO is supporting the Ministry of Health in its investigations and with technical guidance and information. WHO is also consulting with technical experts on methods for carrying out environmental investigations and on testing blood samples.

UNICEF has provided necessary medication to the Ministry of Public Health for treatment and is actively pursuing with the Ministry of Education ways to ensure school security.

As the senior UN official in Afghanistan, I have asked all relevant UN entities to remain vigilant in the protection of schools and of all children's rights to education.

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