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UNAMA News release

Conflict stops in wide areas of Afghanistan as Peace Day marked countrywide

Kabul, Peace Day 21 September 2008 - Guns fell silent across many areas of Afghanistan on Sunday as the tens of thousands of soldiers of the national and international militaries, and the Taliban all stood down from offensive military operations in support of the biggest International Peace Day effort that Afghanistan has known.

From Kabul to Kandahar, and Mazar to Nimroz, communities across the country were marking the day with sports events, marches, and gatherings – representing a huge groundswell of support for peace and following a peace appeal on Friday by President Hamid Karzai. Streets and vehicles were adorned with some three hundred thousand blue flags distributed by national businesses and carrying the symbol of a dove.

Text messages for peace appeared on mobile phones, sent out by the major telecoms companies. Meanwhile, teams of health workers fanned out across seven provinces in the south, east, and west of the country in the most ambitious peace day polio vaccination effort to date – potentially reaching 1.8 million children.

Special Representative of the UN Secretary General, Kai Eide, described the response as “remarkable” and in a statement urged Afghans and their international partners alike to join together in making enduring peace a common goal. “Today’s events show the huge demand that exists for peace in Afghanistan,” he said. “A window for peace has been opened, through which the people of Afghanistan are making themselves heard.”

The polio vaccination effort is being run by the national health authorities, Unicef, and WHO. A similar Peace Day in 2007 reached some 1.3 million children, many in insecure areas. The results of this year's campaign are not expected to be known for several days.

FACTS, BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR JOURNALISTS:

International Peace Day was established by Resolutions 36/67 of 1981 and 55/282 of 2001 of the United Nations General Assembly. Since 2001 it has been marked on 21 September each year. The intention behind these resolutions is a 24 hour cessation of hostilities.

UNAMA and UN agencies in Afghanistan work alongside multiple Afghan and international partners in efforts to support Peace Day, both as a means of increasing space for humanitarian activities and as a means of promoting peace itself.

Among events being reported around Afghanistan as of midday today were:

- **Kunduz:** the dedicating of a Peace Avenue in Kunduz – on a street on which there've been three suicide bombs; poetry recitals; a theatrical performance; chess and volleyball competitions; and an Afghan New Beginnings Programme school symposium;
- **Takhar, Badakshan, and Baghlan:** school symposiums; drawing competitions; and the opening of 16 school classroom in Cha'ab district, a beneficiary of the Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups programme;
- **Bamyan:** an announcement by UNESCO and UNMACA that the city will be completely mine-free by early 2009; marches by orphans with Olympic medal winner Rohullah Nekpai; the opening of a 'Peace Park' and declaration of a new 'Peace District'; a two day seminar by journalists on media and peace;
- **Dai Kundi:** soccer competitions; theatrical performances; painting competitions;
- **Kapisa and Balkh:** the inauguration of veterinary clinics in districts complying with the Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups programme;
- **Kandahar:** a gathering of elders and public officials for peace; poetry recitals; performances; kite-flying; and releases of doves;
- **Nimroz:** free peace day medical services were being provided; peace lessons were being taught in schools; and a street declared a 'peace avenue';
- **Zabul:** A peace event at the Boys' High School in Qalat;
- **Kabul:** A conference of the Afghan National Journalist's Union in support of Peace Day; a school symposium at the Habibia High School; a football tournament; a demonstration in support of peace day outside the main UNAMA compound; photo and cartoon exhibitions for peace; a chess competition in the city centre's Shar-e-naw park; a peace parade; a 1000-metre long hand-painted banner was erected by politicians and 1000 children outside the royal tomb; kite-flying.

- **Mazar, Herat, Jalalabad, and eastern provinces:** Peace marches and gatherings were scheduled in Mazar and Herat. In Jalalabad media discussions on peace have been running since September 10, and Peace Day celebrations were planned across eastern provinces. Updated details were still awaited as of 1pm.
