

Chris Alexander, Deputy Special Representative to the Secretary-General and Nilab Mobarez, UNAMA Spokesperson's Office

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NILAB MOBAREZ, UNAMA (translated from Dari): Good morning to everyone and welcome to our press conference. My name is Nilab Mobarez from UNAMA Spokesperson's Office. Today we are joined by Mr Chris Alexander, the deputy Special Representative of the United Nations Special Representative to Afghanistan who will make some opening remarks and will then be happy to take your questions. I would first like to make a couple of announcements from the UN, before we hand over the floor to Mr Chris Alexander.

CAMPAIGN TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

As you may know, a world-wide campaign to end violence against women has begun and will run until Human Rights Day on 10 December. In Afghanistan this week, there are events across the country in support of this campaign. UNIFEM and the Ministry of Women's Affairs are in Herat tomorrow and Wednesday to push awareness there. UNAMA is holding press and other events in Mazar and Jalalabad. We will be sending details to you in the coming days of related events here in Kabul. You may recall that the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour, raised the matter of women's rights during her recent trip here. UNAMA shares the view that women continue to suffer disproportionately on many human rights issues. It is up to all of us, not just women, to bring about real improvements to the situation of women in Afghanistan and we appeal to the media for your continued support in this effort.

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF DISABLED PERSONS

Today, 3 December, is International Day of Disabled Persons. This year, the United Nations and others are focusing on the goal of decent work for persons with disabilities. It is a time for us all to remember that every person around the world deserves opportunities for productive employment in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity.

The United Nations Development Programme is working to promote an understanding of disability issues across the country and mobilise support for the dignity, rights and well-being of people with disabilities.

UNDP is holding an event today to recognise disabled people in Afghanistan. The event will include music, circus performances, running, volleyball, and a football match.

It is being held at the Afghan-Korea Vocational Training Centre in Afshar and will be open until mid-afternoon today. You are all invited to attend. If you would like more information on this event, please speak to us after this press conference.

NILAB MOBAREZ, UNAMA: I will now hand over to Chris Alexander.

CHRIS ALEXANDER, DEPUTY SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE: *Asalam alakum, wa rahmatullah wa barakato.* Thank you very much Nilab and thank you very much for being with us today. My goal this morning is simply to convey to you a part of our vision of the future. These are some of the key priorities UNAMA will be pursuing in the months ahead, in support of the Afghan government and in partnership with the entire international community. They fall under three broad headings. The first is political outreach; the second, rule of law; and the third is what we are now calling an integrated strategy.

Political outreach is an issue we have discussed with you in this room many times in the past year. It has been a reoccurring theme for President Karzai, for the Special Representative of the Secretary-General Tom Koenigs, and for many others leading Afghanistan's efforts to end the current conflict and to strengthen peace.

By political outreach, we mean engaging with those Afghan individuals and groups who, for one reason or another, have come to feel excluded from the political process and the development effort now underway in this country. It is almost inevitable that some should feel this way and it is to be expected that this sense of distance from a very complex process, now underway, should have emerged in some quarters. Our point is that all Afghans deserve to feel a

part of these institutions, of this society, and that by bringing all groups, in all parts of the country to feel connected will take strong effort, long-term effort, serious effort, by all who are concerned with these issues.

We also intend to continue reaching out to some groups hitherto involved in the insurgency, who are now seeking ways to end the violence. These people want to bring peace to their families and their communities and we know there are many such groups. Our objective is to help them re-connect with their government and their society, participate in strengthening institutions and join with us, in a concerted effort to consolidate peace.

This is a difficult issue, I know, for you as journalists – because there are no dramatic results on this front, there is nothing visibly to show for the effort of political outreach. But we simply appeal to you, to stay with us, in watching this agenda unfold. It is substantive. On 21 September, the posters beside you, remind us of what a spontaneous reaction there was to one day of peace in Afghanistan. Our conviction is that the appetite for peace in the coming year will grow and the dialogue about peace will be broader and deeper than ever.

Our second area of focus in the months to come is the rule of law. As you all know, Afghan and international attention on this front was galvanised by an international conference held in Rome in July this year co-chaired by President Karzai, by United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, and by the Secretary-General of Nato. Since that time there have been energetic efforts here in Kabul to fashion a national strategy for the justice sector and to design a national justice programme. Each of these pieces of work is approaching its final form. And we are committed, along with the Afghan government and donors, that this work translates into concrete improvements in the capacity and performance of Afghanistan's justice institutions in 2008. This of course, has to include improved access to justice for Afghans across this country.

The rule of law is not only about courts and prosecutors, trials and prisons. Improved law enforcement across Afghanistan will continue to depend on the success of police reform. The restructuring of the Ministry of Interior which is continuing; improved training for police both in Kabul and the regions; measures to reduce corruption and improve financial accountability; and the ability of the Ministry to show leadership, through reformed structures, equally effective in all parts of the country. We have seen a lot of progress over the last year in all of these areas. We think much more can be achieved in the year to come. Police have been among the principal victims of the insurgency this year. We remember the hundreds of police who have given their lives in the cause of peace. But we support both the Afghan government and the international community in their absolute resolve to continue to make police reform a priority. And both justice reform and police reform will in their turn be strengthened and accelerated by the disarmament process, now known as DIAG [Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups]. In spite of a very serious insurgency, there has been more disarmament in 2007 than there was in 2006. And all of these efforts, in the field of rule of law will continue to be supported by the improvements of civil administration at provincial and district levels – an issue, which for the first time is getting serious attention due to the new independent directorate of local governance under Jilani Popal.

The third priority for us is an Integrated Strategy. What do we mean by an Integrated Strategy? We mean that all of the efforts underway in the many different sectors in this country, in many different parts of this country, need to fit together as one single, coherent plan. At the centre of this plan, we will continue to have the Afghanistan Compact and the emerging Afghanistan National Development Strategy. But all of us understand that neither of those plans will be successfully implemented without a successful approach to counter-insurgency, without a successful implementation of a counter-narcotics agenda, and without successful efforts to reinforce and deepen regional cooperation.

The strategy for countering the current insurgency has improved in 2007. Afghans must remember that they have the support of a UN mandated force and of the entire international community in countering the current insurgency. We understand that support for insurgent groups among Afghans remains very low. In 2008 our counter-insurgency can be even more effective if we continue progress in reducing civilian casualties, if we continue targeting insurgent leaders, if we continue strengthening Afghan security forces – and the Afghan National Army is now growing faster than ever – and if we continue reinforcing Afghan political leadership of this effort.

So the integrated strategy is something that you are going to be hearing more often in the months to come. Part of it will be addressed in February at a meeting in Tokyo of the JCMB [Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board] which will focus on the counter-narcotics agenda. A major part of it will be reflected in the launch, in March of next year, of the Afghan National Development Strategy. Still more of it, will be reflected in the renewal of UNAMA's mandate in March of next year. And there will be a lot of discussion in the build-up to the Nato summit in April of next year, in which an Integrated Strategy for supporting Afghanistan will be the principal theme of discussion.

And on the regional cooperation agenda, I would remind you of the prospect of a second regional Afghanistan–Pakistan Peace *Jirga* to be held across the border, probably in Islamabad, in 2008. And I would also note that there is to be another conference on regional economic cooperation, also hosted in Islamabad in 2008. So none of the issues that I have raised is an abstraction, all are extremely substantial. UNAMA and the United Nations have many

priorities about which we speak from this tribune every week. But the ones I have outlined today will be among our principal priorities in 2008. Through political outreach, by strengthening the rule of law, and by integrating the very complex and large scale efforts underway to support Afghanistan, we think that 2008 can be a year of achievement for this country, a year of achievement for its international partners, and a year of achievement for the United Nations.

Thanks once again for joining us today and I'd be delighted to take your questions.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

RADIO KILLID (*translated from Dari*): Referring to your first issue, political outreach, I would like to know if you have already established contact with certain groups to participate in this peace process in Afghanistan. And secondly Mullah Omah and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and some other senior leaders of the Taliban are on the blacklist. Do you think that these people can also participate in these efforts [towards peace]?

DSRSG: Some of the conditions for this dialogue for political outreach have been set by the international community and we have spoken here before about Security Council Resolution 1267. There are other Resolutions that have brought that consolidated list up-to-date. We, of course, are governed by its provisions. But, the most important conditions for this dialogue are set by Afghans themselves - by their government, by their parliament, by civil society. And we know that there has been a lot of discussion of this issue, over the course of this year in all of those places. Those discussions will continue and as you know very well, some of those discussions will, by necessity, have to take place out of the public view.

But one thing is already clear. There is a certain consensus around one issue. Those Afghans who show good will, who are willing to live under the current Afghan Constitution, to participate in Afghanistan's legitimate institutions, and to end their participation in violence - are welcome in this process. That principle at least has been embraced, as you have heard by the President, by other leading members of state institutions and by the international community itself. And there are many groups and individuals as I said that are interested in this process. I wish I could bring them all here to be on this stage with us, but for obvious reasons I cannot. And my appeal to you is to maintain your interest in this issue, to take a responsible approach to it, and to reinforce that message of welcome to those who are prepared to respect the law and participate in the institutions that this country has chosen.

VOA (*translated from Dari*): You mentioned about the list [Resolution 1267]. Abdul Hakim Munib who used to be one of the senior officials of the Taliban and also the ex-governor of Uruzgan. Will the United Nations accept any exceptions for those who join the peace process or will they be excluded from the list?

DSRSG: That will depend on the member states of the United Nations and the Security Council who are the keepers of that list. The list is relatively short and I can confirm that Abdul Hakim Munib has not been removed from the list, even though he is no longer the governor of Uruzgan. But our sense is, that the steps he took to reconcile with the government, not recently but many years ago, do represent a model for others - potentially for some of those on the list and for many of those not on the list.

GOOD MORNING AFGHANISTAN (*translated from Dari*): My question is about your third point - the Integrated Strategy. What happened and why is the international community now, after six years, only thinking of having an Integrated Strategy? Why could they not think of such a strategy in the beginning or three years ago? If that had happened, Afghanistan would not be having the problems that we are facing now.

DSRSG: It is a good question. Let us be honest and think back to six years ago. The Bonn Agreement was certainly an attempt – and a very credible attempt for its time – to have an integrated strategy. The Afghanistan Compact, which was written in late 2005 and agreed in early 2006, was a credible attempt to have an integrated strategy for its time – a time of less insurgency, a time of lower opium poppy cultivation.

At the end of 2001, the Afghan government was almost not functioning. There was no national police, no national army and there were no national programmes. Schools had not yet re-opened. There was no National Solidarity Programme and there was very limited donor and international support for the development and reconstruction of Afghanistan.

This year, six years later, for all of the reasons that you know far better than I, the scale of the effort to rebuild this country, to bring peace to this country, is much greater. The recurrent and development budget of the government is US\$1.5 billion. More than half of that amount is being paid for out of the revenues collected by the government. The international community is spending between \$3 billion and \$4 billion this year on development in all its forms, from roads to health care clinics. There are over sixty countries with major development investments in this country. There are provincial development plans now for all

34 provinces. Eighteen sector strategies will form the core of the Afghanistan National Development Strategy. There are twice as many international military forces in this country as there were only one and half or two years ago.

So the short answer and the simple answer is that circumstances have changed. International commitment to Afghanistan has grown. The scale of the challenge, inside Afghanistan has also grown. The attempt now is not to integrate strategies for the first time, but to re-integrate strategies that are more complex than before.

Take the example of regional cooperation. In 2001 Afghanistan had about one half a billion dollars in trade with its immediate neighbours and the other members of ECO [Economic Cooperation Organisation]. Only five years later, trade with those countries is \$4 billion - eight times as much. The strategy for regulating trade relations, investment projects with neighbouring countries, needs to be an integrated one. If electricity is going to flow from Central Asia through Afghanistan to South Asia all of those countries need to share the same vision of how this project would proceed. And the same complexity applies to all the sectors that I mentioned. So the challenge of integration imposes itself on us. It is part of adaptation and the attempt to have continuing success. In the case of economic strategy, [GDP] growth this year is expected to be 13.5 percent. The question is - how do we harness all of these efforts to ensure that economic growth continues at these high levels?

AFGHANISTAN TIMES (translated from Dari): When does the strategy you mentioned start operating? About political outreach, isn't it related to what a UN or another official had said in the past that Hekmatyar and the Taliban should have been included in talks in 2001? If they reconcile will they be given a share of power? How sure you are that this strategy will be implemented, while civilian casualties caused by the military, still occur?

DSRSG: We remain concerned about the issue of civilian casualties. Many of you were here when Louise Arbour sat at this table and repeated the United Nations interest in this issue and determination to follow this issue and advocate all steps, by all of those who are part of this conflict to protect civilians, to ensure civilians are not the victims of violence at any stage. The good news is that thanks to everyone's efforts, fewer civilians have been victims of insurgency-related violence in the second half of this year, than were victims in the first half of the year. There has been improved performance. Our sense is that the Taliban were ashamed by some of their mistakes and some of the atrocities that they committed against children, against innocent men and women in many parts of the country. Both ISAF and Afghan security forces, as professionals have made every effort to improve their operations to improve their targeting procedures and this has had a positive result. But these improvements have to continue. This is part of a successful integrated strategy. The population has to feel that they are being protected by security operations. And on the question of who may or may not be part of the peace process, those are decisions that only the government of Afghanistan can take.

SALAM WATANDAR (translated from Dari): If Hezb-e-Islami and the Taliban would agree to join the peace process on the condition of foreign forces leaving Afghanistan, what would be the UN's view on this?

DSRSG: Obviously ISAF and all the international military forces operating in Afghanistan are here under the mandate of the United Nations' Security Council. Anyone questioning this mandate is questioning both the will of the Afghan people, as expressed by their government, and the will of the international community.

PAJHWOK (translated from Dari): You have spoken about strengthening the rule of law and my question is whether transitional justice will be considered as part of this programme. As you know, recently Louise Arbour, the High Commissioner for human rights expressed her concern on this issue? Secondly, would you please also shed some more light on Resolution 1267?

DSRSG: Thank you. The Action Plan on Peace, Justice and Reconciliation is obviously part of the agenda that the government, with its international partners is pursuing as part of these reforms to the justice system and as a part of establishing the rule of law. The High Commissioner made the point, with which many agree, that the central focus within this action plan should be on the victims of the crimes of the past. Victims deserve to be given their voice, to be able to tell their story, they deserve recognition and in some cases, if the government agrees, they probably will deserve compensation for what happened to them. The High Commissioner was concerned that the focus on victims perhaps had been lost sight of in the past year. Obviously the best way to protect human rights and to prevent the crimes of the past from recurring is by strengthening justice institutions – reforming and strengthening them. Resolution 1267 – the consolidated list is part of that resolution – is linked to just this issue, the rule of law. It is a part of a sanctions regime and the members of the United Nations are obliged to implement the sanctions against the individuals and groups on that list.

FREELANCE: Does that mean that the Action Plan on Peace, Justice and Reconciliation will also adopt the goals of the Afghanistan justice project which was initiated in 2004?

DSRSG: That was a series of reports, published independently by an NGO that is linked to the Independent Human Rights Commission, but is not part of the government. The Action Plan on Peace, Justice and Reconciliation was mentioned and endorsed as part of the Afghanistan Compact. The implementation of the Action Plan will be part of or will be provided for in this national justice strategy that I mentioned earlier. So the agenda has not changed. We just all acknowledge that under the Action Plan some points have been moved forward faster, others need more attention now.

AFP: You have said that the counter-insurgency has improved in 2007. What we see is quite the opposite. There were more than 6,000 insurgency-related casualties and around 150 suicide bombings and a high number of foreign soldiers' casualties. If we compare these numbers with the last year, we find that this year has been the bloodiest year since the fall of the Taliban. What is the basis of your rather optimistic approach to counter-insurgency improvements, bearing in mind that now we have double the number of foreign forces in Afghanistan?

DSRSG: I am not going to dispute your numbers. The violence is slightly stronger this year and the number of suicide attacks slightly larger. But, I will insist that the quality of the effort – the civilian and military effort to counter the insurgency – is improving and has improved this year. The Urdu-e-Mili [national army], for example, is now operating independently and very effectively in operations at battalion level and even brigade level. The performance of the police, despite all the challenges we discussed and in spite of the number of victims among the police, has also improved.

Most importantly, civilian players – ministries of the government, some NGOs and some of the best international players have adapted to the new circumstances and have managed to deliver reconstruction and development, even to areas that are affected by the insurgency. That is what I mean by improved quality of counter-insurgency effort. That effort, led by the government, has prevented the insurgency from growing as fast as it grew last year. The challenge next year is to make those efforts even stronger to the point where the insurgency itself starts to decline in intensity. Thank you all.