

UNAMA

United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

Strategic Communication and Spokespersons Unit, Kabul, Afghanistan

Transcript

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PRESS CONFERENCE (near verbatim transcript)

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Good Morning to everyone and welcome to this regular meeting with the press, once again I am very grateful to the centre that we can use this excellent facility and I am thankful to you to come to this as I said earlier, to traditional meeting of UNAMA and myself together with you, the journalist community here in Kabul.

I will start with a couple of my introductory remarks with some reflections on the recent Chicago Summit of NATO. Although it is clearly an activity of the other part of the international community working here in Afghanistan with the government of Afghanistan, it is not a UNAMA activity, still this summit is creating and adding to the environment which we United Nations also operate in and we will also operate in the future. So what are the some of the messages that I have found particularly relevant for our work.

First of all it was an overall support for the transition strategy as planned including an understanding that transitions so far has been proceeding rather well and that this strategy that is leading towards the withdrawal of the international military forces from the country, the latest by the end of 2014 is valid and one hundred supported by both international community and government of Afghanistan.

It means it is the beginning of the end of this heavy international presence here in the country and at the same time it is the beginning of a new phase of cooperation between the international community and Afghanistan, and that was also very strongly documented at the Chicago Summit.

Before the Chicago Summit I urged the parties the states that are working under the umbrellas of ISAF to massively contribute, to support the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) for the years to come after the withdrawal of the ISAF and I am very happy to inform that indeed this appeal was well reflected and that indeed that international community pledged a strong support for the ANSF for the years after 2014.

The pledges that were made were not just political commitments but in the majority of the cases it was a clear sum of money that the countries pledged for the years to come and now after the Chicago Summit I am convinced that the target of \$US 4.1 billion that should come every year to support the ANSF will be reached and its achievable. I take this also as an important political

signal because it shows confidence here in Afghanistan that the international community will not abandon Afghanistan after the withdrawal of ISAF.

Now I would like to urge similarly the international community to show the same degree of commitment in the same practical way and to support also the plans of Afghanistan as far as the economic and social development is concerned at the forthcoming Tokyo conference on the eight of July this year. Although that Tokyo conference is not a donor conference or a pledging conference, it is a conference that should provide for and outline the way for future cooperation between Afghanistan and international community and support provided on the basis of mutual accountability, still it is needed that countries that are also clear as far as these basic amount of financial support or assistance or aid that they would be required to provide to Afghanistan to economic and social needs as they did in Chicago for the ANSF.

Coming back to the Chicago Summit, the Summit was primarily about the future support of the ANSF but luckily it was not only about that. Many statements touched upon many other crucial and critical issues for the future development of Afghanistan, first of all the statement of His Excellency President Hamid Karzai. One of the elements in the statement of His Excellency President I found of particular importance because perhaps it is bringing more clarity to one of the topical issues being discussed here in Afghanistan is the elections. There were also many other messages for example request to push for a genuine, broad-based, inclusive political reconciliation process and reinforce the critical role of women in promoting peace and security and generally in many statements the issue of human rights and notably rights of women and children was raised by many very important countries.

One element that was present in the statement of the United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon and unfortunately not in many other statements was the protection of civilians in armed conflict and I believe that, of course he is my boss so I should be careful, I believe that was the right message and very important message about protection of civilians in armed conflicts. Given the fact that it is now the ANSF that are taking over more and more responsibility for ensuring security in many and many increasing numbers of provinces of the country, Secretary-General highlighted this, and again let me quote, "The Afghan security forces must prioritize the protection of civilians including special measure to protect the human rights of all citizens particularly women and girls in armed conflict." I am proud that he was raising this issue as I said unfortunately that many participants did not raise this.

Perhaps as the last part of this introductory statement that is focused on Chicago is again another confirmation of determination of the international community to stay with Afghanistan to partner with Afghanistan to support it in the years to come, best documented by another signature of two strategic partnership one between Afghanistan and Germany and another between Afghanistan and Australia.

To finish my statement of my prospective, Chicago not only sent practical concrete signal of continuous support for Afghanistan in practical financial terms, not only for the ANSF but a strong political signal that the withdrawal of ISAF doesn't mean that the country will be abandoned as it unfortunately happened already in the past.

Thank you for your attention.

Questions and answers:

Rahi Farda TV [translated from Dari]: Recently some western countries, namely the UK, expressed concerns about the ability of the Afghans National Security Forces to take the full responsibility of the security in Afghanistan. Given that you are in Afghanistan, since a while, what is your assessment of the situation in Afghanistan?

Ján Kubiš: With regards to the ability of the Afghans National Security Forces to deliver the necessary degree of stability, I have to rely more on military experts and on the facts on the ground. And both military experts, be it national or international including ISAF, and the facts on the ground at this point of time are telling me that yes the Afghan National Security Forces, provided they will get the continuous, strong, massive financial support from the international community, should be able to deliver.

First two phases of transition delivered and the coming third phase, although much more risky because it will cover not only many more areas but more difficult areas should bring a proof to this. And I hope that it will bring the proof that indeed the Afghan National Security Forces are up to the tasks. But once again, from Chicago but also from bilateral conversations and agreements I see a very strong political goals and practical commitments to provide necessary support and I am stressing, necessary support to the Afghan National Security Forces as envisaged in this planned approximately 230,000 and US\$ 4.1 billion needed for sustaining this approximate number of troops and police.

TOLO TV [translated from Dari]: The question is with regards to the elections. You quoted the statement of the president Karzai and you supported the statement and the holding of elections in 2014. At the same time the president Karzai has previously said he is consulting about the possibility of advancing the elections to one year or advancing of the withdrawal of the international military forces from Afghanistan. And if the elections are held according to the constitution of Afghanistan in 2014 this will coincide with the complete withdrawal of the international forces from Afghanistan. Secondly the commitments that were made by the NATO states and the international community after Chicago, how certain you are that the international community will stay committed to Afghanistan after 2014?

Ján Kubiš: First, I think that it is very legitimate to ask questions, what is the correlation between developing and evolving security situation given that the transition process has not been finalized, it is now entering the third phase. And again although we hope all of us and I have enough confidence in the transition process and I would like to stress it, have enough confidence in the security transition process we cannot exactly predict what would be the situation in which province, in which part of the country. So it is legitimate to ask these kinds of questions because this is not an easy process in a known environment. This is still full of changes, full of challenges.

Because if nothing else, these kind of questions put forward by Mr. President are focusing the minds of all of us the authorities of Afghanistan, the Afghan security forces and police, the international military and the United Nations on how to best prepare ourselves for the election because it is about the security environment that would provide for growth, possibility to have votes collected and people voting all around the country. And it is also about logistics, about the support for the election and you know that in the previous occasions there was a need to engage for both the international community and the international military forces. We now must discuss this with the Afghan authorities, the Afghan forces and then jointly determine what will be the support needed for the elections, because the support is what we are talking about,

supporting the Afghan authorities in organizing the elections. What will be the support provided by the international community including by the United Nations. So it is good that these questions are focusing our minds on certain issues. But again for me what is important is a clear orientation given by Mr President that he will follow the Constitution and that they are planning a presidential election at this point of time for 2014, so we will start our preparations also from this premise.

And as far as your second question is concerned, I can only say that in Chicago those who were speaking we have heard a strong signal of resolve and commitments, most of them although not all of them because some countries, some leaders due to their own political and constitutional reasons perhaps not able to deliver clear figures, but they pledged to deliver clear figures. It was a strong commitment. But most of others they provided clear figures as far as support. It is a strong commitment. It is not just the phrase "We are with you." This is the amount that we pledge. And the leaders understood that this not for one year, this is for many years. Although again as the process of transition and stabilization of the country will continue no question, the expectation is that Afghanistan will contribute more and perhaps the degree of the international community's support for the Afghan National Security Forces will gradually decrease. But all that will be linked to both the security situation and to the ability of Afghanistan to generate enough revenue to be able to increasingly support its armed forces and police.

Freelance: Can you tell us if there is a certain amount of money which should come together for the future socio-economic development in Afghanistan as you called it? Secondly, you said that there was a strong political commitment coming out of Chicago but still you felt necessary to urge the international community to pledge also in Tokyo to the future socio and economic development. Are you afraid that there are some countries in the international community who are tired of spending so much money in Afghanistan?

Ján Kubiš: Political commitment is there. It was expressed in Bonn in December and in a way it was also expressed in Chicago although it was not about supporting socio and economic development, a long-term sustainable development of Afghanistan. But what they need indeed in my opinion is to urge the countries to show this commitment in practical ways, not necessarily in amount of money but, for example, committing themselves to such a mechanism that will provide for continuous checking and rechecking what is the support of the international community for Afghanistan but also what is the delivery of Afghanistan on governance issues, combating corruption, preparedness to finance not only for the central level but to provide for sub-national provincial financing, to having capacity, to having sound legislation. So this mutual accountability mechanism is something that I consider very important. Therefore I do not expect Tokyo to be a donor's conference or a pledging conference. It is much more complex.

But still we need such a strong political commitment for example by countries by committing themselves, for long-term support for Afghanistan's development and social needs. They commit themselves to this mechanism under which they will be accountable, whether they deliver, and on what conditions. As I have said mutually the Afghan Government on a yearly basis, for example, will be held accountable to how the Government delivers on promises, on pledges because as we know many of them although clearly stipulated in many previous conferences, Kabul Conference, London conference, they have not been fulfilled.

On your second question, indeed Afghanistan will remain a case of special support and special attention of the international community. So to say, there are many other competing priorities, the world is developing. There are many crises, and humanitarian catastrophes, and on top of

everything you see what is happening in some major donor countries, they have major budgetary problems, and one should not underestimate this. So from that perspective, there is a challenge. That is why mutual accountability is extremely important. I would say sometimes even more important whether there will be a concrete pledge in Tokyo but a long-term mutual commitment under very clear roles of mutual accountability, of both the international community and Afghanistan, to hold each other accountable on a yearly basis not conferences by conference but as a matter of repeat. That is more systematic, more pragmatic approach that I hope to see coming from Tokyo.

Guardian: I understand that as the ISAF withdrawals gather pace, there is going to be a retrenchment and reorganization of UNAMA's presence here as well. With, you know, the reduction in budget, everybody is going to be affected including you guys. If you could tell us about what's going to happen with UNAMA in that respect?

Ján Kubiš: I am aware that you formulated your question as you formulated it. I would prefer to start not with the ISAF withdrawal but with the transition process taking hold. Because that is what informs us in our thinking about the future posture of UNAMA. It is linking our more and more closely to the desires, demands, requests dictated by the transition although it's a security, a political transition. Also link more clearly to our roles to provide a centre for improved coordination of the international community with regards to economic assistance. This transition dictates or informs that we perhaps don't need such a widespread presence around the country. We can operate in a much more flexible way from regional hubs while at the same time ensuring that none of the provinces are without our attention. At the same time, we would like to see that not UNAMA but the respective parts of the UN community that are working on the development side are more actively and perhaps even more present in different parts of the country. So indeed, there is an adjustment going on. It's dictated by the transition processes with the whole country moving to a different stage of development and we are adjusting ourselves.

I am not hiding. A part of this might be also budgetary constraints given the fact that still we need, for obvious reasons, always to take into account security situation. So far, it is rather costly to maintain the presence that we have. That's not the first reason. The first reason is the logic of the transition and request also of the authorities of the country to reflect this logic of transition as our posture as UNAMA as far as UNAMA is concerned.

DPA: Regarding civilian casualties, you have been quoted as saying that there is a 20 per cent decrease in the civilian casualties in the first four months of 2012. Can you give us more details, numbers and statistics? Also, is this the first decline in how many years? The second question is regarding US\$ 4.1 billion, you have been quoted. Couple of times you said about accountability. Are you concerned that US\$ 4.1 billion fund would have transparency mechanism and corruption?

Ján Kubiš: As far as the second question is concerned, indeed we will need to ensure that the mechanism that will be used to transfer the amounts to the Afghan army and the Afghan police are transparent, fully accountable, audited from the best standards. This is needed and you know, from time to time, there are questions and we need very seriously to address them because this is also about mutual confidence, mutual accountability. So yes, there will be -- as you assumed -- two mechanisms. From our perspective, this is something that is needed because also of the many donors, they would be more prepared, for example, to support the military and less police. But there are other donors who would like to support the police but not necessarily the military. So, to prepare to, they have to agree, I mean the donors first of all with

the Afghan Government on the vehicles to funds that will be created. For us, what is important is to keep this separation. It is very important in brackets because as far as police is concerned, more and more we expect the country will develop its police not as a militarized, counter-insurgency fighting force. It will remain there at least for a while, but more and more as police that they serve the people of the country to provide justice, to ensure rule of law and this is the intention of many donors who provide funding exactly for this kind of development.

As far as the second question is concerned, indeed civilian casualties are unfortunately occurring during wars and conflicts. This is unfortunately the situation in Afghanistan. They are among the top priorities of UNAMA, of my organization. We not only monitor the situation, we come with proposals addressed to all the parties. We urge them to take measures and we sometimes see results. I am very happy to see results. I have to admit that they are on the side of pro-Government forces, ISAF and Afghan National Security Forces. Unfortunately, regrettably, the anti-Government forces, they don't show respect for civilians. They claim, they issue statements speaking about respect for civilians. But in practice, they use such inhumane and indiscriminating weapons, claim to ban landmines and they themselves ban the landmines like pressure-plate improvised explosive devices or something that makes a quarrel of Islam or sin that is un-Islamic suicide bombers. These are two tactics or weapons that they are using, that are indiscriminately killing everyone who is around. This is unexcusable.

As far as the trends indeed in the first four months, we registered and documented a 21 per cent decrease in civilian casualties from January to April in comparison with the same period in 2011. Still, civilian casualties continue to occur at unacceptable higher level. From the 1st of January to the 30th of April, UNAMA recorded 579 civilian deaths and 1,216 injured. 79 per cent of all civilian casualties were attributed to the anti-Government elements while 9 per cent attributed to pro-Government forces, Afghan national forces and ISAF, and 12 per cent unattributed. As I noted in my introductory remarks, the Secretary-General is drawing the attention to the fact that the progress in transition and assumption of leading role of the Afghan National Security Forces in combat, they should increase what they do on how to reduce civilian casualties. We have some proposals. We are talking to our Afghan partners. From the past, we know that they are receptive to ideas.

Perhaps to add, we are ready to explore, to investigate any report on civilian casualties, and we are ready to cooperate with everyone including the anti-Government forces because every civilian needs to be protected. We are ready to identify problems and work for solutions. It doesn't matter where they are coming from.

Freelance: We just heard civilian victims. One or two cases of last Saturday... Saturday night. According to the local Governor in Paktia, eight people of one family were killed. You told that you are ready to look for what is happening in these cases. Are you working on this case? And do you condemn this action from ISAF?

Ján Kubiš: As I know, the case is under investigation both by ISAF and by the Government and definitely we are on the case, as well.

Follow up question: Do you condemn?

Ján Kubiš: We care for all the civilians and we are always extremely unhappy to see that any civilian is harmed or killed, we take this very seriously. And it's frankly, about condemnations, but first of all, it is about looking into the ways on how to enhance their protection, how to work with the parties, how to in a way see that they are taking more and more steps that should

prevent these kinds of situations in the future. While the war is going on, situations unfortunately are happening.

And once again, it's not just about monitoring, reporting, condemning or not. The matter is about investigating, looking into the reasons and try to help the parties to find and take measures to prevent recurrence of these situations to the extent possible.