

UNAMA

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Transcript

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PRESS CONFERENCE (near verbatim transcript)

Ján Kubiš, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan

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First of all, thank you very much for coming. Good morning to everybody. Thank you also to this centre for giving us the opportunity to be here. We are very happy to be together with you using this beautiful facility; it's very comfortable and frankly much better than our UNAMA facility. Once again thank you for your hospitality. Before going into my introductory statement, I would like also to express my best wishes to all of you on the occasion of Nowruz although it took place some time ago, but nevertheless it's still not too late. The sun is shining and spring is hopefully here. This is the time of the year that we can rejoice and indeed start a new life.

For all of us, in a way, this period of the year means new life because I just returned from New York where I was at the Security Council just several days ago and who confirmed the new mandate for both UNAMA and my mission but also for the whole of the UN family – the United Nations agencies, funds and programmes here in Afghanistan. I am very happy that the Security Council took the decision unanimously. I would like to stress this because very often the Security Council is not able, not in a position to take decisions on certain issues and then, very often they are not unanimous decisions. With regard to Afghanistan, they simply agreed, all of them, on the mandate and it's the necessary strength. So, I am very grateful that the Security Council came to this [unanimous decision].

I would like also to inform you that the mandate was developed and prepared in close consultation and coordination, and with a very strong engagement of the Government of Afghanistan. Although Afghanistan is not a member of the Security Council, representatives of Afghanistan be it here in Kabul or the Ambassador of Afghanistan in New York, Ambassador Tanin, they played a very strong role in working with members of the Security Council delivering their concerns and requests of the Government and the civil society of Afghanistan. Many of their points are reflected in the new mandate.

I would like to draw your attention to the most important element of this new mandate and perhaps the most important change that we noticed there. This is indeed in full conformity with the request of Afghanistan. The new mandate of UNAMA and the United Nations recognises very clearly that Afghanistan is assuming more and more sovereignty and ownership of all the processes that are happening here in the country, that indeed the transition process goes on, that indeed all of us we are facing new realities on the ground and also in the region. And indeed this might be the guiding element and force as we orient also the work of the United

Nations family here in Afghanistan. I am very glad that all that was reflected in many parts of the mandate.

When we speak about concrete task of the UN here in the country in the coming period, you will find in the mandate strong references to Afghan leadership and ownership, strong request towards the United Nations family to work in support of the Afghan authorities and society in many areas, in many aspects of our work – be it in the area of good offices, support for political processes, in the area of human rights, women's rights, protection of civilians, protection of women and children. That's extremely important from the point of view of the society, or from the point of view of helping the Government to radically improve governance, to fight corruption and to see real progress there, to work for improvements in the lives of the people, to work for development and to help the international community to organise itself to provide the support with more and more efficiency and indeed to align the support more and more with the national priorities of Afghanistan.

This is an important message. I believe this indeed reflects the changing realities in the country and also reflects the requirements of the society. I am very happy once again that it was endorsed unanimously. As my guiding lines, not only for the one year that is ahead of us because the mandate has the validity of one year, but there are many tasks, many areas that are definitely spanning over many years and providing guidance to our work for the years to come, not only for one year. I would mention political processes, peace and reconciliation, good governance, protection of human rights, issues linked to the elections as at this point of time are envisaged according to the schedule, political schedule I would put, the Presidential election in 2014 and Parliamentary elections in 2015. All these issues and areas of work are there and we will work taking as the basis of the current mandate that is for one year but definitely taking its guidance that will lead us in many years to come after 2014.

Allow me to just highlight a couple of points from the mandate itself to give you a feeling of what kind of concrete language the Security Council is using as far as our new tasks are concerned. It has clearly said that UNAMA will and should be guided by the principle of reinforcing Afghan sovereignty, leadership and ownership, and that we should continue to lead and coordinate the international civilian efforts. Another part of the mandate is that we as UNAMA as the co-chair of Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board should provide and promote more coherence by the international community to the Afghan Government's development and governance priorities, or that we in UNAMA should provide outreach as well as good offices to support the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned process of peace and reconciliation and work for confidence-building – all that within the framework of the Afghan Constitution, or that we should support at the request of the Afghan authorities, organisation of the future Afghan elections and strengthen support of the Government of Afghanistan's efforts towards sustainability, integrity and inclusiveness of the electoral process and provide capacity-building and technical assistance.

We should support regional cooperation and again there are many instances of this. And another part, as UNAMA we should leverage the competencies of the United Nations Country Team, i.e., funds, programmes, agencies and that we should take this into account in the transition process. We should put emphasis on enabling and strengthening the role of the Afghan institutions to perform their responsibilities in a number of priority areas, for example: we should support the efforts of the Afghan Government to improve governance and rule of law in many areas including transitional justice, budget execution and the fight against corruption. For that we should cooperate with and build capacity of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission and we should monitor the situation of civilians, coordinate efforts to ensure their protection, promote accountability, and assist in the full implementation of the fundamental

freedoms and human rights provisions of the Afghan Constitution, coordinate and facilitate delivery of humanitarian assistance. There are many, many other parts of the mandate, frankly sometimes going into great details about what we shall do in the future. Once again, I am very happy that I received this [mandate].

To conclude perhaps my opening remarks, as I said I returned from New York, it's true and at the same time I returned but then I paid a very quick visit to Dushanbe, Tajikistan. I had my bilateral consultations there and I attended the regional cooperation conference session. The session was important because it dealt with concrete projects of economic cooperation in support of Afghanistan, projects that engage the neighbouring countries, projects that can get, as they should get, the support of the international community. And I am very happy to know that there were some members of the international community engaged in discussion on how to provide financing for certain activities.

But, what was equally important was the fact that Presidents of four countries of the region – Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran – took part in the meetings there, celebrating also the world day of Nowruz as declared by the United Nations. And there, they had their own bilateral meetings, trilateral meetings, quadrilateral meetings. This is just speaking how strongly the countries of the region are now mobilising the efforts in support of peace, stability and development in Afghanistan. I was very happy to have my own bilateral meetings with Presidents participating there. I was happy to hear their words of support, pledges and commitments to continue their support.

I was also glad to hear that after a period of many, many months without meeting representatives of three countries – Afghanistan, Pakistan and the United States – met together in a meeting of the core group. It is an important development because it means that there is a resumption of working together of these three parties, again a good signal as regards processes that are going on in Afghanistan and in support of Afghanistan.

To conclude my opening remarks, I would like to stress that I am very happy that we as UNAMA, as the United Nations family here, received a new mandate, unanimously endorsed by the Security Council. After ten years, ten years since the first UNAMA mandate was endorsed, we see a change of the focus of the work, we see a shift towards supporting sovereignty of Afghanistan, and we see a strong requirement towards the United Nations to work not as a sort of detached party but in support of the Afghan Government and the society of Afghanistan. With this, indeed expressing my appreciation to the Security Council – they approved this mandate unanimously providing necessary strong support for us. I am ready to open the floor for questions.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

CHANNEL ONE [translated from Dari]: You mentioned that you participated in the RECCA [Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan]. What is your stance about President Ahmadinejad's statements who was asking for the quick withdrawal of international forces?

SRSG Ján Kubiš: First I would like to express my gratitude to his Excellency President Ahmadinejad who received me. We had a very interesting and very substantive bilateral meeting with his Excellency the President. I have also perhaps to add that I was grateful prior to

my trip to New York in the middle of this month I paid a visit to Iran and I had my consultations there with his Excellency the Minister of Foreign Affairs and many other top representatives of different agencies and Ministries of Iran.

And as regards the international [military] presence, yes his Excellency the President expressed the position Iran as far as the presence of the international troops here in the country. We discussed this. I heard that what is important is delivering this message notably to Afghanistan and other partners in the region. There is perhaps two layers – that is the withdrawal of the international military presence now as it is happening. And it is the fact of life it is a transition process as such so there is no surprise.

He was mentioning more the issue of continuous presence of some military presence in Afghanistan in the post-2014 period. And again I referred to perhaps the need to consult these matters first of all with the Government of Afghanistan because Afghanistan is a sovereign country. And as a sovereign country it is for Afghanistan first of all to decide what kind of partnership agreements it would like to enter into. With whom she would like to enter into these kind of partnership agreements, what would be the range, of areas and issues on which Afghanistan will cooperate with this or that strategic partner.

I would also like to mention that Afghanistan indeed in discharge of its sovereign rights concluded already a number of strategic partnerships with many countries and continues to negotiate with a number of other countries. In this kind of partnership they provide the necessary clarity and predictability of the future support for Afghanistan and as you know if you would analyze, for example, an agreement like with France you will see that they speak about areas like economic development, social development, education – some training perhaps for security forces and many, many other issues. But once again my point here is that it is for a sovereign country and Afghanistan is a sovereign country to decide what kind of strategic agreement and with whom she would like to have it. And it is also fair that it is now for Afghanistan to consult with the neighbours, to consult and to listen to the points that are raised by the neighbours. And once again the eventual decision is for a sovereign country to take.

KABUL NEWS [translated from Dari]: Some time ago the opposition warned that the Government of Afghanistan wants to reduce the role of the United Nations in the future elections of Afghanistan. Can you confirm this?

Ján Kubiš: I'm not sure that I know which leader of which coalition party you had in mind – maybe the translation was not the most precise. Oh. The question is on elections? Right, so if this was the question then I understand you are asking about the role, the possible role, of the United Nations in the electoral processes. If this is the case, once again, I would like to draw your attention to several parts of my new mandate that are speaking rather clearly about what are the expectations of, basically not only expectations, but what is the way and how we should act.

We will work here in Afghanistan in full respect of the sovereignty of the country. Elections are the responsibility of the country. This is one of the manifestations of sovereignty that all the political processes are under the umbrella of the country. But of course we speak about the quality of elections. We speak about the necessary integrity of the electoral processes. We speak about inclusiveness of electoral processes. We speak about the right of participation of all the population in electoral processes. We speak about free and fair elections that would then show the results as they are, and it means we speak about the necessity to support the integrity of electoral processes and this is the part of the mandate that I have so we will support all these

things, all the necessary rules that are there to increase the integrity and the quality of the electoral processes to enable the institutions of the state to work better, to deliver this quality of elections.

We will provide technical assistance, capacity building. We are ready to advise on the issue of electoral reform, reform of the electoral law, and we know it's under preparation. We are happy, with the request of course of the authorities because we cannot force ourselves into this, but we feel that the request might be there. We are ready to provide our support to strengthen the independence of the independent electoral commission, to indeed help with the adjudication process because there are always complaints after the election, that it is working as necessary, with the necessary quality and in such a way that the population and the political forces of the country have enough confidence in the process.

So my mandate is good and strong enough to enable us to play an active role as appropriate because it's still the function of the sovereign country to conduct elections. But for us, we have enough mandate to work at the request of the authorities, but in a very active way, in support of the authorities that will strengthen the integrity of the elections and make them more and more valid and accepted as a free and fair electoral process. This is what will guide our work in the coming period. Not only one year, but indeed leading us and leading the country up towards the elections as envisaged within the timeframe.

So yes, I think you will see an active role of the UN. I can also confirm that, for example, as far as technical assistance, capacity building, only relatively recently the work has started or continued on the basis of a new agreement between UNDP and the respected authorities, independent election commission to strengthen their capacities to improve their processes so we provide this kind of technical assistance and capacity building through this so called Elect-II process. So we are already engaged.

BBC [translated from Dari]: Although you are supporting the Government's policies you are also talking to some opposition leaders. One of your recent meetings was held with General Dostum. What were the central issues you discussed with him?

Ján Kubiš: The objective is simple. I am here and we are here as the United Nations, notably UNAMA, to talk to all the segments of the society, to all the political forces, indeed to talk to all that represent different parts of Afghanistan. It means that it is only natural that we are talking to the Government, to the civil society here in Kabul but also around the country. We talk to legitimate opposition, if I put it like this, to different political forces and I was very glad that now I had a chance to talk to a leader of one of the political parties that is part of a broader national front – a broader coalition of parties – not to create confusion here, and indeed that represents quite a strong segment of the population of the country.

We discussed I would say everything that is happening in the country, that is of relevance. We talked about the transition process, we talked about elections, we talked about good governance, we talked about peace and reconciliation processes, we talked about expectations but also challenges and concerns that all of that is bringing to the attention of the different parts of the society. General Dostum gave me his vision, his points, his concerns, his wishes. I will not reproduce them because it's for him to speak about his part, but for my part, I was able to refer to my mandate as it is just now approved. Indeed, there was a request for us to be actively engaged in many processes, if not in all processes. I confirm as a bottom line that yes we will be engaged and we will work with the society, with the Government, with all political forces that represent the Afghan people.

MAYWAND TV [translated from Pashto]: Mr Kubiš you promised to accomplish your mandate for the New Year, other Special Representatives also promised but they seldom achieved what they promised. What is your view on this and can you tell us whether you will succeed?

Ján Kubiš: I will yes. But again, once again, one must read exactly what I am promising. Yes, I definitely promise continuous engagement, I promise definitely active engagement in all the areas covered by my mandate. I cannot promise things on behalf of others. Again when I refer to the sovereignty, responsibility that is coming with sovereignty, accountability that is coming with sovereignty, these are matters that are for the Afghan authorities and for the society in many ways. I cannot be held accountable for anyone else but the UN, UNAMA and UN family.

From that perspective we can deliver a lot. But again certain results are not in our hands. We can and will make efforts. In many other areas it is more than that. For example, in the field of human rights our mandate is very strong and we will work very strongly, clearly, independently because all that is based on the universality of the human rights, based on the Constitution of the country, on the international obligations of the country, on the laws of the country and here we will act as we are acting now in a very, very proactive way. And again we deliver –not directly.

We cannot change the conditions in the prisons, but through our active monitoring and advising we see the changes are being made in response to our recommendations. And we are happy. All the changes as we would like to see them, perhaps not but many of them, but it is a process. So there will be a next set of recommendations and again at this point of time we have responses from the authorities so we hope for the next set of positive responses. This is how it works. So one thing that I would advise everyone when speaking about what was possible and what was not possible to achieve is indeed see who is responsible for delivery of what, and then to speak about concrete deliverables of the UN and request that other parties and partners are delivering according to their responsibilities.

RAH-E-FARDA TV [translated from Dari]: You said that you will support the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Process, but this process is a failed process and through this process, which lacks transparency, some people who are criminals are joining. What is your view on this please?

Ján Kubiš: Of course, you formulated your question in a way as you formulated it and it's your right. I would just say that perhaps the most important point here to make is whether the people of the country would wish to see peace and reconciliation or would wish to see continuation of the existing conflict, instability, war, killings. If you have a good response to this and our information is that the majority of the people of this country would like to see peace, more stability, less conflict and no killings. We must try, we must try to deliver and we as the UN must try to assist processes.

Every peace process, at least in initial stages, means you talk to those that are at this point of time fighting. It's inevitable – not necessarily the people that you like. But without them you can't move the peace process. And you would like to move the peace process, I assume. So, we will work with the partners, we will work with the parties in support of an Afghan-led inclusive process, where all the parties of relevance should take place. We are not in the phase of a real peace and reconciliation process. We are still at the beginning of many efforts. We are perhaps, in many ways, still in the exploratory phase. Still, we would like to see that this Afghan-led

process is indeed inclusive. I hope that, for example, as one of the instruments, the High Peace Council will reflect all of this, will reconstruct itself, reorganise itself and perhaps in the next phase of its life will serve as a truly representative body. But this is again for them, the High Peace Council to do it. We will as the United Nations support all credible, bonafide efforts, might not be perfect ones. But if they are opening or create openings towards peace and reconciliation, we will support them even if they are not perfect. It's better to support this than to sit aside and watch. I have the mandate and I am very glad that I have the mandate to do so – again confirmed in the Security Council mandate and we are engaged. We have the necessary capacity; we have the necessary support of the Security Council. So I am very happy that UNAMA can play a very strong role in this in support of the Afghan-led, Afghan-owned process. And we will continue doing so.

SALAM WATANDAR [translated from Pashto]: The people want justice and transitional justice is still pending with practically nothing done on this issue. The Government has done some things, but not much for many years. What you will do on this issue?

Ján Kubiš: I am very glad that you referred to the Government because it's not UNAMA that can provide justice. We can facilitate, we can help the respective authorities, the system, the institutions to be able to deliver. We will do this. We will also work politically and support all the efforts that will lead and enable that provisional transitional justice is given, that justice is here. Yes, we are and I can say it clearly, not very satisfied with the situation in this area, not because we are not satisfied, but we hear the people are not very satisfied with the situation in this area.

So, it's a part of our mandate to work for improvements, to push, strengthen institutions, to enter into dialogue here in Kabul, at the central Government level, but also work in many other places where we are as the mission and we will remain in many places, although we will consolidate our presence. So you will see a slightly different reconfiguration of our offices. But, we will try to refocus ourselves and to be in the areas where we can reach the majority of the population. We will work, we will continue our efforts. Once again it's good that you mentioned in your question the Government because this is the responsibility of the Government and we can work and support. And we will work and support.

Thank you very much for your questions, for your interest, for your patience and let's see each other again in two or three weeks for the next round of discussion.

Thank you very much.

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