

UNAMA NEWS

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Eighth anniversary today of 2001 Afghan Interim Authority

22 December 2009 - It has been eight years since the inauguration of the Afghan Interim Authority (AIA) created by a group of Afghan leaders who – under the auspices of the United Nations – drew up plans in Bonn, Germany on how Afghanistan should be governed.

Eight years ago today on 22 December 2001, the AIA was established upon the official transfer of power from the government of then Afghanistan President Burhanuddin Rabbani to the 30-member AIA whose six-month interim administration would be chaired by Hamid Karzai.

The participants in the UN Talks on Afghanistan had earlier invited the former King of Afghanistan, His Majesty Mohammed Zaher, to chair the Interim Administration but King Zaher indicated that he would prefer a suitable candidate acceptable to the participants.

Before this historic date, Afghanistan had been without any national government for 22 years since 1979.

As Afghanistan ushered in a new Interim Administration in Kabul eight years ago, Lakhdar Brahimi, the Special Representative in Afghanistan of then UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, said the historic chance for stability in the war-shattered country must succeed.

"With the Interim Administration that is being established today, the people of Afghanistan have a unique opportunity to put behind them the divisions, hatred and bloodshed of the past two decades and rebuild a peaceful and stable nation," said Mr Brahimi during the hand-over ceremony in Kabul on 22 December 2001.

After years of bitter war and conflict, power is being transferred from one administration to another – not under the fire of guns, but peacefully, and pursuant to a political agreement," the UN envoy added, referring to arrangements earlier worked out during the 5 December 2001 UN-sponsored talks among Afghan factions in Bonn.

Otherwise known as the "UN talks on Afghanistan," the Bonn Agreement was officially titled the Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan Pending the Re-Establishment of Permanent Government Institutions. It is a series of agreements that intended to recreate the State of Afghanistan after the country was invaded by US forces following the 11 September 2001 attacks.



Under the agreement, "The Interim Authority shall consist of an Interim Administration presided over by a Chairman, a Special Independent Commission for the Convening of the Emergency Loya Jirga, and a Supreme Court of Afghanistan, as well as such other courts as may be established by the Interim Administration."

To adopt a new Constitution for Afghanistan, the Bonn Agreement had also mandated the AIA to convene a Constitutional Loya Jirga within eighteen months of the establishment of the Transitional Authority.

And to assist the Constitutional Loya Jirga in crafting the proposed Constitution, the Bonn Agreement further tasked the AIA to establish – with assistance from the United Nations – a Constitutional Commission within two months of its commencement.

Used as the basis for the making of the new Constitution was Afghanistan's old Constitution of 1964. The New Constitution would be adopted by the Loya Jirga on 4 January 2004.

The Bonn Agreement had also requested the assistance of the United Nations in the establishment, among others, of the following institutions:

The Judicial Commission "to rebuild the domestic justice system in accordance with Islamic principles, international standards, the rule of law and Afghan legal traditions";

The Central Bank of Afghanistan that will "regulate the money supply of the country through transparent and accountable procedures";

The Independent Civil Service Commission "to provide the Interim Authority and the future Transitional Authority with shortlists of candidates for key posts in the administrative departments, as well as those of governors and uluswals, in order to ensure their competence and integrity"; and the

The Independent Human Rights Commission "whose responsibilities will include human rights monitoring, investigation of violations of human rights, and development of domestic human rights institutions."

"This agreement, though far from perfect, has been warmly welcomed by the people of Afghanistan, and strongly supported by all the countries of the world," noted Mr Brahimi who then assured Afghanistan and the international community that the United Nations "will do everything it can to assist in the implementation of the Bonn Agreement and the success of the Interim Administration."

By Aurora V. Alambra, UNAMA





Insecurity and corruption hinder UN assistance in Afghanistan: UN official

21 December 2009 - The United Nations warned today that insecurity and corruption continue to disrupt humanitarian efforts to the most vulnerable groups in Afghanistan, hindering delivery of food and other forms of aid this winter.

Speaking at a press conference today in Kabul, Wael Haj-Ibrahim, the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) representative in Afghanistan, said that corruption was "increasing the cost of our ability to deliver and transport goods and services and makes it difficult for us to target the people who we feel are the priority."

He added that corruption is everyone's concern and should be dealt with on all levels.

"Fighting corruption is the collective responsibility of not just government but also UN agencies, community leadership and community members," Mr. Wael said. "We all have to play a role in resolving it rather than just to continue to talk about it as an abstract and pointing the finger at a particular individual or institution. It's a problem that we all face and we all have to deal with it."

Each year, some 400,000 Afghans are seriously affected by natural disasters such as droughts, floods and extreme weather conditions. More than six million people are in need of assistance to reach their food requirement.

This year, OCHA estimated the need of about US\$871 million in total assistance required, of which some US \$360 million is for food. The appeal was raised on 20 November in Geneva.

So far, OCHA has been able to dispatch 80 per cent of the food and assistance required to continue its winter programming, but faces insecurity, particularly in the southern and south-eastern areas.

The World Food Programme has reported that it was able to supply 30,500 tons of food to 800,000 beneficiaries depending on the varying security situation. In the northern city of Faizabad, 100 per cent of the food had been delivered.

UN helping Afghanistan's most vulnerable this winter

21 December 2009 - The United Nations has warned that despite the enormous efforts underway to deliver food and aid this winter, the adverse security situation continues to complicate efforts to reach Afghanistan's most vulnerable people.

"The deteriorating security situation is causing grave concern with agencies and organizations are apprehensive that distribution will not be able to take place in insecure areas," a UN official said.

Speaking at a press conference at UNAMA's Kabul office, the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) representative in Afghanistan, Wael Haj-Ibrahim also said "corruption and malpractices continue to have a negative impact on our ability to serve communities."

OCHA which re-established in January, coordinates and promotes independent humanitarian assistance based on the fundamental principles of humanity and neutrality for the most vulnerable people of Afghanistan.

Statistics reveal that around 400,000 Afghans are seriously affected by natural disasters such as droughts, floods and extreme weather conditions each year. This winter, too, UN agencies such as UNICEF, UNHCR, and IOM have procured non-food items, while the World Food Programme (WFP) continues with its regular winter programming that includes feeding 863,000 Afghans, with 91 per cent of the target already met.

"Depending on the logistics and security in some areas we've been able to deliver 100 per cent of the food, like in Faizabad. In other areas, as a result of insecurity and logistics problems, we were only able to deliver 60 per cent of the food, like in Herat," said Mr Wael.

Aid gaps are also existing in every region according to government figures, including in the north-east and south, where, Mr Wael says, a lack of humanitarian presence in remote areas along with a lack of government capacity and resources will add to reaching populations there.

Meantime, the World Health Organization (WHO) has warned that swine flu cases will increase this winter. However, the organization has taken the first delivery of 550,000 Tamiflu vaccines this month, with an additional 1.8 million to arrive by April 2010.

This year OCHA estimated the need of about US\$ 871 million in total assistance required for its efforts in Afghanistan.

By Aditya Mehta, UNAMA



"What is important for us is to be able to access people in a timely manner, to conduct assessments, to mobilize resources and to be able to deliver the assistance," said Mr. Wael.

Meanwhile, the World Health Organization (WHO) has warned that H1N1 could be a problem in Afghanistan. The Ministry of Health and WHO expect to have 550,000 Tamiflu vaccines this winter, with an additional 1.8 million vaccines available in April.

Bamyan literacy campaign

22 December 2009 - The provincial government in Bamyan has launched a campaign to make the province 100 per cent literate.

This campaign aims to eradicate illiteracy from Bamyan and declare it an illiteracy free province in the next five years.

Dr Habiba Sarabi, the Governor of Bamyan province has started this initiative with the support of UN agencies and NGOs.

"I want every literate resident of Bamyan to teach at least two illiterate persons and make them able to read and write through this winter," said Dr Sarabi.

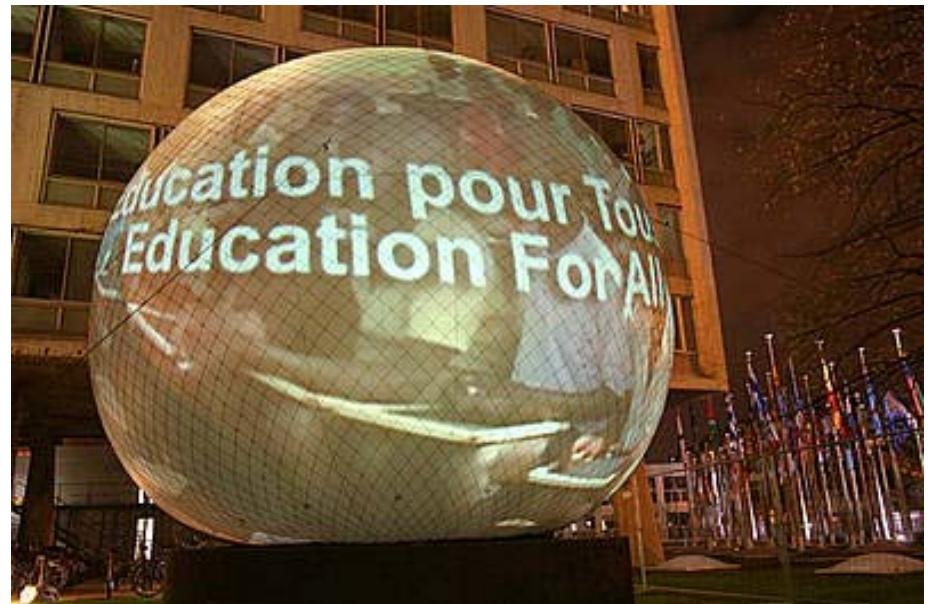
The governor is hopeful for the success of the effort adding that if half of the literate people in Bamyan participate in the campaign this year, the literacy rate will double by next spring.

Afghanistan's central province of Bamyan is one of the least developed in the country and has the lowest literacy rate among the provinces of Afghanistan; there's also a huge shortage of education facilities during the long winter month.

Figures from Bamyan's department of education show that around 110,000 students are enrolled in schools which make up some twenty per cent of the total population.

"We plan to announce Bamyan a province free of illiteracy by 2014. We have started registering volunteers for this purpose, many people are contacting us to volunteer," said Raza Ada, the head of Bamyan's education department.

According to the education department, the literacy campaign will first focus on the government departments and non-government organizations.



"The first phase of this campaign will target all the line departments including the police and prison services to start the campaign within their departments and continue throughout this winter. Civil society groups and NGOs have joined us for this first phase," Mr Ada added.

During the first phase, Bamyan University students and high school students will teach their illiterate family members during their winter vacation.

UN Agencies in Bamyan are supporting the provincial government's efforts for education in the province.

"Education is the most sustainable means to peace and development, we support this initiative and we are working to mobilize resources for this campaign," said Ms Heran Song, the head of UNAMA's office in Bamyan.

Following the announcement by the provincial government, non-government organizations have increased their efforts on literacy projects.

The Arzu organization is among those who are engaged in literacy and women empowerment activities in Bamyan.

The organization has recently opened a women's community centre for returnees from the Dara-e-Azdar village, a refugee settlement close to the main town.

Besides organizing literacy, health and hygiene classes for elderly women and girls, the centre provides space for carpet weaving and laundry.

Arzu is involved in generating small scale business opportunities for women in Bamyan and the women's community centre is part of those projects targeting vulnerable families.

"Our goal is to empower Afghan women and education is the best way to do so," said Razia Jan, the programme director of the Arzu organization.

Four hundred families from the Dara-e-Azdar village benefit from the Arzu women's community centre.

"I like reading books, and I come to this centre to learn how to read and write," said Marzia, 40, who along with 20 other elderly women and girls attend literacy class in the women's centre.

By Jaffar Rahim, UNAMA

