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## Press Briefings

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### Press Briefing by Adrian Edwards Spokesperson for the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Afghanistan

12 December 2005

#### TALKING POINTS

##### London Conference

Here at UNAMA we have a very busy schedule over the next weeks, as preparations continue for the London Conference being held at the end of January. As you may know a preparatory conference was held here in Kabul last weekend, immediately before the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference. There remains much work to be done over the next weeks in developing the Afghan Compact, which is the main agreement between the international community and Afghan Government that is expected to emerge from London.

I would like to make one point in regard to media reporting of this: London is not simply a pledging forum for new aid money, although some pledging may take place. As you probably know a number of donors made multi-year commitments at Berlin running till 2008 or 2009 and thus are unlikely to be committing new funds now. Instead London is about a broader renewal of the overall international commitment to Afghanistan's rebuilding, now that the Bonn Process has ended.

##### New staff at UNAMA's Office of Communications and Public Information

At UNAMA's Office of Communications and Public Information we are strengthening our team ahead of the London Conference. Among the aims are to help in our coordination work and to provide journalists with information about the conference and its aims. We are joined by two colleagues who previously worked with the Afghan Joint Election Management Body – Sultan Ahmad Baheen and Aleem Siddique -- and by Leo Dobbs. Leo will be known to some of you from his work as a journalist here in Afghanistan and in other parts of Asia. Contact details can be found on our website ([www.unama-afg.org/news/Contacts.htm](http://www.unama-afg.org/news/Contacts.htm))

##### Ceremony to mark official opening of Afghan Parliament to be held next Monday

Next Monday, as you know, is the opening of parliament. To help you in your work we have available today a number of fact sheets, including about the Parliament Secretariat itself, the Office of the Speaker and Parliamentary Committees.

The Parliament Secretariat tells us they will advise details over the next days about the inauguration plans, including about press access. As journalists, you may be interested to know that in the interests of openness Afghanistan's new Parliament is being equipped with a press room and facilities for live TV and audio feeds of sessions of both the Upper and Lower houses.

Please note that there will be no UNAMA press briefing next Monday. This is to avoid a scheduling conflict with parliament's opening.

### **Transitional Justice Conference begins on Tuesday**

Next Monday, as you know, is the opening of parliament. To help you in your work we have available today a number of fact sheets, including about the [Parliament Secretariat](#) itself, the [Office of the Speaker and Parliamentary Committees](#).

The Parliament Secretariat tells us they will advise details over the next days about the inauguration plans, including about press access. As journalists, you may be interested to know that in the interests of openness Afghanistan's new Parliament is being equipped with a press room and facilities for live TV and audio feeds of sessions of both the Upper and Lower houses.

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### **Counter Narcotics Trust Fund receives 15 million Euro boost from European Commission**

The Afghan Government's Counter Narcotics Trust Fund has had a boost over the past week in the form of a 15 million Euros contribution from the European Commission. The money will support initiatives for expanding sustainable livelihood options for the people of Afghanistan and help the government implement its counter narcotics policies.

Agreement on this funding was signed on December 6th. The Afghan Government's Counter Narcotics Trust Fund is managed by the United Nations Development Programme.

Click [here](#) to read the press release.

### **DIAG: Hundreds of weapons voluntarily surrendered in Takhar province**

In a ceremony last Wednesday (December 7) a large number of weapons were turned in to the Provincial DIAG Committee in Takhar province.

One former Governor and two former Jihadi commanders handed in a combined 645 weapons.

The weapons will end up at a collection point in Kunduz before being transferred to Kabul. The serviceable ones will be used by the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police for the security of the country. The rest will be destroyed.

Click here ([English](#), [Dari](#), [Pashto](#)) for a breakdown of weapons handed in by each individual as well as overall figures.

### **ANBP distributes food to most vulnerable ex-combatants, families**

Last week (December 7) Afghanistan's New Beginnings Programme began distributing food packages to ex-combatants and their families in immediate need of assistance. Nine hundred and thirty-three (933) families will benefit from this programme which includes wheat, oil, salt and beans or peas.

The assistance, measuring 76.7 metric tons of rations provided by the World Food Programme, is surplus food remaining from packages distributed to demilitarized and

demobilized Afghan Military Forces when they underwent the Disarmament Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) process last year.

The distribution will continue until mid-January.

Click here to read the [English](#) and [Dari](#) press releases.

### **UNFPA: Child marriage kills women and children**

Last Thursday, the Ministry of Women's Affairs organized a workshop on the prevention of child and forced marriages, which continues to be a major problem in Afghanistan.

Child brides typically give birth soon after they are married. Ten percent have children before the age 15.

According to the Afghan National Human Development Report, which was published last year, the maternal mortality rate in Afghanistan is one of the highest in the world. A woman dies of pregnancy-related complications every 27 minutes. 1,600 out of 100,000 women die giving birth. Less than 15 percent of deliveries are attended by trained health workers. Over the long run this has a direct impact on Afghanistan's development.

Click here to read the UNFPA [text](#) and government [press release](#).

### **Human Rights Day theme centres on absolute ban on torture**

This past Saturday, December 10, was International Human Rights Day. This year's theme was torture, which according to the Secretary-General "remains unacceptably common".

In recent days the media's attention has focused on the illegal transfer and detention of prisoners in secret prisons.

Click here for copies of messages and statements from UN [Secretary-General Kofi Annan](#), [Louise Arbour](#), the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and [Jan Eliasson](#), the president of the UN General Assembly.

### **FAO celebrates International Mountain Day**

Yesterday was International Mountain Day, a day designated three years ago by the General Assembly to create awareness about the importance of mountains to life. This year's chosen theme is: "Sustainable Tourism for Poverty Alleviation in Mountain Areas".

As lead agency the UN Food and Agriculture Organization took the opportunity speak about the advantages and opportunities existing in Afghanistan in terms of tourism revenue, and how it can financially be of benefit for mountain dwellers who are among the world's poorest and hungriest.

One example, suggested by FAO representative Serge Verniau, is developing mountain bicycle or mule and horse tours of certain mountainous regions.

Click here to read the press release ([English](#), [Dari](#)) and speech ([English](#), [Dari](#)) by Serge Verniau.

### **FAO dairy workshop to help small farmers**

Still with the FAO, tomorrow a one-day workshop will be held at Kabul's Guzargah Dairy Processing Plant to help develop a dairy policy to ensure a vibrant and sustainable enhancement of the dairy sector in Afghanistan.

Click [here](#) to read the press release and speech ([English](#), [Dari](#)) by Serge Verniau.

### **Ministry of Interior, UNODC hand over equipment to Border Police in effort to control Afghan-Iran border from drug trafficking**

Before we move on to our guest, yesterday the UN Office on Drugs and Crime and the

Ministry of Interior held a ceremony to hand over law enforcement equipment to the Afghan Border Police.

The event marked an important step in the implementation of a project aimed at strengthening the border police with a view to controlling more effectively the border between Afghanistan and Iran and preventing drug trafficking.

Click [here](#) to read the press release.

### Today's guest

Our guest today is Doris Buddenberg, Representative of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in Afghanistan. She is here to talk about UNODC's poppy cultivation survey for 2005, which has just been published in full.

### Doris Buddenberg, Representative, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

There are two reports that I would like to present to you today, the first is the Afghanistan Drug Use Survey and the second is the Afghanistan Opium Survey.

I will begin with the 2005 Opium Poppy Cultivation Survey ([press release](#)). In 2005 in Afghanistan there was a 21 percent reduction in opium poppy cultivation. According to UNODC data in reference to the year 2004 this is a significant step forward in narcotics or drug control. There is no other country in the world that has ever achieved, within one year, such a reduction. Only in one exception, Colombia, has there been similar success, but Afghanistan is among the top success stories regarding this reduction.

The most important figure is the reduction in hectares [under cultivation], which was 131,000 hectares in 2004 and 104,000 hectares in 2005.

Production, in terms of metric tones, did not fall by the same 21 percent because, as you know, the weather last year was excellent. There was a lot of water and many of the farmers profited from very good rain and thus also poppy cultivation profited from the good weather and also the yield per hectare increased.

In the survey, UNODC also estimates the value of the crop at export level. How much is opium tonnage, coming from Afghanistan, worth in dollars when leaving the country? For 2005, UNODC estimates that the value of the crop is USD \$2.7 billion, equivalent to approximately 52 percent of the licit Gross Domestic Product. We also investigated how much of this goes to farmers. The farmers who are the actual workers, received USD \$560 million at the farm gate, meaning bought directly from the farmers.

This represents 20 percent of the USD \$2.7 billion total value, which also means that 80 percent of this amount goes to traffickers and traders. It is these traffickers and traders that are seen as subverting the economy of Afghanistan.

The great question now is whether, for the year 2006, this 21 percent reduction can be sustained, held or even increased. What will happen in 2006? Is this percentage sustainable?

Here the news is not very good. Currently UNODC receives informal information from many of the provinces saying there will be an increase in poppy cultivation in 2006.

The second topic I wanted to discuss is the 2005 Drug Use Survey. Everybody talks about, and is familiar with poppy cultivation. But very few so far have talked about what the situation is with drug addiction in Afghanistan. Together with the Ministry of Counter Narcotics, the Ministry of Public Health, the Ministry of Education, UNODC conducted in 2005, for the first time, a survey on drug addiction in Afghanistan. The full report will be available in January 2006.

The most important findings of the report are indicative of the developments in Afghanistan. All-in-all the survey estimates there are close to one million drug addicts in Afghanistan - from heroin, to alcohol, to pharmaceuticals. This is the total figure for drug addicts.

The survey also estimates the number of male, female and children who use drugs in Afghanistan. Three percent of the population is addicted to drugs. And this places Afghanistan between Iran and Pakistan, not only geographically, but also in terms of drug users. Afghanistan has more drug users than Pakistan but less than Iran.

While the situation regarding drug addiction is not yet a catastrophe, this data clearly shows that there is reason for concern. It also shows that a country which produces drugs, in the long run this also translates to drug addiction.

Please visit the United Nations Office to view the full reports ([www.unodc.org](http://www.unodc.org)).

### **Questions & Answers**

**Question:** You mentioned the provinces that had an increase in cultivation. Can you name those provinces? Does this concern you and is the government doing enough about this problem?

**UNODC Representative:** There is very informal information on an increase so far. We do not have more systematic evidence at this point in time. I would not like to give you a list of provinces, however you can imagine that some of the usual suspects are included and that includes above all reports from Helmand. This information however has been shared with the President and has been shared with the Cabinet. So they are aware of this detailed information and they are also concerned. Action will definitely be taken. What form that action is, will be the decision of the Cabinet. UNODC is not involved.

One positive aspect is that there is expected to be a decrease in Kandahar. So within the southern region you have two different experiences right now. In order to follow up all this superficial information UNODC and the Ministry of Counter Narcotics are conducting a rapid assessment survey which will come out in February. In this report a general trend will be indicated on which province will increase or decrease its cultivation.

**Question:** What measures have the United Nations taken for alternative livelihoods?

**UNODC Representative:** The international community has been active in trying to support the farming community in switching from one crop to another. For the financial year April 2005 to March 2006, a total sum of USD \$490 million has been put at the disposal [of Afghanistan] for alternative livelihoods. This amount will focus mostly on the poppy producing provinces of Afghanistan. There are a lot of ongoing discussions as to what is the best way to deliver these funds to farmers. I can tell you that the poorest provinces in Afghanistan do not cultivate opium. The richest provinces in Afghanistan are the one's cultivating. Thus the question for the international community is whether investment in rural development should focus on the provinces that do not cultivate. And these discussions need to continue and be shared by everyone, including the media.

**Question:** The province of Nangarhar showed a reduction [full question inaudible]. What do the early reports show and what are the reasons why overall production has increased in the country?

**UNODC Representative:** Nangarhar had a record reduction from 2004 to 2005 – a drop of 96 percent of the cultivation. For this year we have indications that there is an increase in certain districts of Nangarhar, however we are not sure of how much,

because a small increase or a big increase, will it be substantial, will it go back to its old production level or will it remain at the same level, we do not know. The reasons: In the poor provinces farmers do not cultivate. They are poor people. So if in the richer provinces, farmers continue to cultivate or re-cultivate, or cultivate even more, a certain interest in profit or income might be the reason. I do not see any other reason for an increased poppy cultivation. Let's not forget that 80 percent of profits go to traders and traffickers. This is the group we need to deal with.

**Question:** Can you compare the situation in Afghanistan and Colombia?

**UNODC Representative:** Some comparison is possible but one must be very careful because the political, social and economic situation in Colombia is very different from Afghanistan. Both countries are major producing countries, Colombia for cocaine, Afghanistan for heroin. But that is about where it stops. That is the only possible comparison. Economically Colombia is quite a developed country, it is a middle-developed country whereas Afghanistan, after 20 or so years of war, is a very poor country. Thus at that level it cannot be compared. Also the political situation in Colombia, for a long time, has been between the government and guerrilla-controlled areas plus para-military groups. So you have three groups in Colombia fighting against each other and profiting from the trade in different ways. In Afghanistan there is not one or two groups, but rather a diverse picture of provinces and different regions with different levels of income.

**Question:** There are some high-ranking government officials involved in drug trafficking, what measures are being taken to deal with this?

**UNODC Representative:** Everybody talks about the involvement of middle to high-ranking officials. Maybe it's right, maybe it's wrong. The problem is proof and evidence. That's number one. The second is, it is only the government that can take action. It has to be action directed from the President, from the cabinet, and from the parliament that needs to take action, if so desired.

**Question:** Talking about Nangarhar, an observer said this year there was a 96 percent increase and that there was an historic opportunity to switch to other crops and that there was a lack of alternative livelihoods programme. Do you think that the international community missed this opportunity or it simply takes time to set up this programme?

**UNODC Representative:** This is a very important and very difficult question to answer. On the one hand in agricultural production, to switch from one crop to the next, another crop that has to be as profitable as opium production, is very difficult. For example, studies show that what brings a comparable income to opium poppy is fruit orchards. Be it from melon, be it from pomegranate, or well maintained raisins - these have approximately the same income for farmers. However, if you want to have pomegranate trees, they need many years to grow. So in that sense there is always a time lag. And to judge the procedure on one year only is just too early. Especially in agriculture, things just take time. I am sure that some of the potential increase in poppy cultivation in Nangarhar has to do with the fact that farmers said, 'we didn't get anything. There is a school, there is a hospital, there is a road, but there is nothing in my pocket. So what do we do?'

Colleagues returning from Nangarhar talked to poppy cultivating farmers who had tried, through NGOs and the UN, to do training through orchards and in the neighboring village some farmers had taken this up. A comparison was made and income from the fruit orchards was definitely comparable. So the question was asked to one of the farmers: 'why are you not interested in doing this?' They had worked with that farmer for years and years. He said the money is the same and good, but he wouldn't do it [switch crops], because in his village if you stop growing poppy they will tell me that 'you are working for the foreigners'. We grow poppy in this village and we will not stray off that. You would also do it [the same]. Thus there are many pressures from the

farmers from different sides.

**Question:** How long will it take to put an end to opium poppy production in Afghanistan?

**UNODC Representative:** In Thailand where they had poppy production it took 25 years and they had less production than Afghanistan. In Pakistan it took 22 years, but they also had considerably less than what is being produced. It will take time.

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