

**STATEMENT TO THE PRESS ON AFGHANISTAN**  
**UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS AND**  
**EMERGENCY RELIEF COORDINATOR, VALERIE AMOS**

**New York, Tuesday 15 May 2012**

*Checked against delivery*

I have just completed a three day visit to Afghanistan – my first to the country. I wanted to see for myself the level and severity of humanitarian need that people in Afghanistan face today, and to look at ways in which we, the Government and our partners can improve the way we address not just immediate needs, but also the underlying cause of that need.

More than a third of Afghanistan's population has personal experience of displacement, including the 5.6 million refugees who have returned; another 5 million people still in neighbouring countries – principally Iran and Pakistan - and 500,000 internally displaced. There are many reasons for that displacement, including the impact of the on-going conflict, recurrent and debilitating natural disasters, and the lack of rural development. It affects almost every urban and rural centre in Afghanistan. Afghans in acute need require timely relief and assistance, delivered impartially.

I visited an informal settlement in Kabul and witnessed the shocking conditions of the 80 families living in that settlement. There are about 42 of them in Kabul. They have extremely poor shelter, little access to water and sanitation, basic hygiene, health education or regular income. They are the poorest of the poor and deserve our collective support. Longer-term support efforts are vital, as are creating durable solutions that address underlying issues such as land tenure, basic service provision, and economic opportunity.

I also visited Mazar-i-Sharif, where I met internally displaced families. They shared their tragic stories of violence and intimidation at the hands of all parties to the conflict. After decades of war, people want peace, stability, and an environment free from fear and torment. All parties to the on-going conflict need to meet their obligations under international humanitarian law and ensure that civilians are kept free from harm.

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In Balkh province, I saw the devastating impact of the erosion of the Amu Darya riverbank on local communities. More than 500 metres of land each year is being eroded, destroying homes, agricultural land and livelihoods together with schools, roads, and clinics. In the last six months alone, five villages have disappeared. Natural disasters occur in Afghanistan on a regular basis: annual flooding is the norm and there have been eight droughts in the last eleven years. More must be done to help local authorities be better prepared and we must make a greater effort to build the resilience of communities in vulnerable areas, and we have to build the capacity of service delivery institutions.

Afghan women continue to endure some of the highest child and maternal death rates in the world, as well as extremely poor access to medical personnel and education, despite the improvements of the last ten years. The impact of continued gender inequality seriously curtails women's social and economic options, while they continue to face high levels of violence, including through sexual violence and the impact of armed conflict and explosive devices. Improving the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan must be a central part of the development agenda going forward.

The United Nations and its partners will continue to deliver humanitarian assistance where it is needed, but clearly relief alone is not enough to deal with the recurrent problems that people face.

During my time there, much was said about the transition and the departure of the ISAF forces. The needs of the people in Afghanistan remain vast. Security is indeed a priority. But for the Afghans I met, security is not just about physical security. It is also about the importance of investment in human development and the delivery of critical services to support livelihoods, primary education, healthcare, and the functioning rule of law.

Although overall international assistance is expected to reduce as the transition progresses, we must continue to mobilize resources to help people in acute need. Our appeal for this year for Afghanistan seeks US\$437 million to provide assistance to people affected by conflict and natural disasters, including displaced people and returnees. People need help now, and funding for that 2012 Appeal currently stands at only 27% of the total required.

Many people I spoke to talked about the positive changes in the country. Others focused on what remains to be done. I saw for myself the commitment of officials and of my colleagues in the humanitarian community, but I was struck most of all by the determination and pride of the Afghan people. They need and deserve our continued support.