

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

Kabul, 11 May 2012

Checked against delivery

Good morning. This is my first visit to Afghanistan. I wanted to see for myself the level and severity of needs that exist in Afghanistan today and to remind everyone that there are on-going humanitarian needs in the country.

I visited an informal settlement in Kabul and witnessed the shocking conditions the 80 families there are forced to endure. These are the poorest of the poor and deserve our collective support. I also support longer-term support efforts to come up with durable solutions that address underlying issues such as land tenure, basic service provision, and economic opportunity.

More than a third of Afghanistan's population has personal experience of displacement, including the 5.6 million returned refugees, another 5 million still in neighbouring countries, and 500,000 internally displaced. Of course the reasons are many, including the impact of on-going conflict, recurrent and debilitating natural disasters, and the lack of rural development. Afghans in acute need require timely relief and assistance, delivered impartially.

We are and will continue to deliver humanitarian assistance where it is needed, but clearly this alone is not enough. In parallel to our humanitarian efforts, longer-term investment in human development and prevention measures are urgently needed to reduce vulnerability in the face of recurrent challenges. We must also invest in efforts to strengthen the resiliency of communities themselves and the capacity of service delivery institutions.

Internally displaced families in Mazar-i-Sharif shared with me their experiences at the hands of all parties to the conflict. Their stories were heart wrenching. After decades of war, people want peace, stability, and an environment free from fear and torment. I again call on all parties to the on-going conflict to meet their obligations under international humanitarian law and for more to be done to ensure civilians are kept free from harm.

During my time here, much has been said about the transition and the departure of 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 the human development and the delivery of critical functions such as livelihoods, primary education, healthcare, and the functioning rule of law.

I leave this morning with many different impressions. This is a country of contrasts. 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 the government officials and my colleagues in the humanitarian community. I was struck most of all by the determination and pride of the Afghan people. They need and deserve our continued support.