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OPENING SESSION OF THE UN TALKS ON AFGHANISTAN

This transcript is not an official document. It is a near-verbatim transcript of the English interpretation of the opening session of the UN talks on Afghanistan at 10 a.m. Bonn time and it has not been checked by the Afghan speakers:

Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Mr Lakhdar Brahimi:

Distinguished representatives of Member countries, ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the opening session of these UN-sponsored talks on Afghanistan. We are delighted to have you with us, your Excellency, and we are grateful to you for receiving us in Germany and in this beautiful place, and we are also grateful to you for being with us to open our conference. You have the floor your Excellency.

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Germany, Mr Joschka Fischer:

Honourable representatives of the Afghan people, Mr Brahimi, Mr Vendrell, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to welcome you to Germany, here on the Petersberg. Our Government gladly accepted the request of the United Nations to hold this round of talks in our country. We will do everything possible to provide you with a positive environment for your negotiations.

I extend an especially warm welcome to the Afghan representatives. You first and foremost bear a tremendous responsibility for the future of your country. After two decades of a horrible war your fellow citizens long for peace and stability. They long for a future in peace, and wish their country to be rebuilt. They long for a future which will guarantee all Afghans, women and men, their fundamental human rights and dignity.

Afghanistan has a great opportunity now to win peace and reconstruction, in a united, independent Afghanistan. Now a future where terrorism and violence will have no place is at hand. Now is the time to make use of the combined efforts and strength of the international community for rebuilding your country.

The responsibility is yours. No one can relieve you of it, and no one wants to. I urge you all to forge a truly historic compromise that holds out a better future for your torn country and its people.

The international community is prepared to make this great effort. This readiness is linked with clear expectations.

First, agreement on binding rules for a peaceful political process and on a broad-based, representative transitional government. Second, respect for and protection of human rights. That includes first and foremost guaranteeing the rights and dignity of women. Their active participation in the social and political life of the nation is essential for the country's peaceful future.

Ladies and gentlemen,

There is broad international agreement that the United Nations has a critical role in the peace process. The UN is the indispensable framework for the political process and the guarantor of Afghanistan's internal agreements.

Mr Brahimi, Mr Vendrell,

I wish you both good luck as you will skilfully guide the talks. And I wish all of us a result that will prove to be the first step in the five-point plan you set out in the UN Security Council. We stand ready to give the Secretary General of the United Nations and you any assistance you may require.

Not only the people of Afghanistan have high expectations of the talks here on Petersberg. A peaceful, stable Afghanistan is at the core of peace and stability in the whole region. A necessary condition for such a development, however, is that all other countries stop pursuing competing national interests at the expense of the Afghan people.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The immediate concern of the international community is to get humanitarian aid to the suffering population. One result from this conference should therefore be a political signal for quickly solving the security problems that are still holding up the distribution of supplies in many parts of Afghanistan. Only if they are solved, the massive humanitarian project now underway will have a chance to see the people, above all the children, through the harsh winter. The German Government has invited the *Afghanistan Support Group* to another meeting in Berlin on 5 December to take decisions on further humanitarian aid.

The commitment of the international community will not stop in the spring. We want the people of Afghanistan to know that they will not be left on their own when the conflict with the Al-Qaida terrorists and the Taliban regime comes to an end. A first conference on the reconstruction of Afghanistan took place in Washington last week. It was attended by many Western and Islamic states and organizations and has established first important guidelines. A donors' conference has already been scheduled for Tokyo in January.

The European Union is ready to make a considerable long-term contribution towards Afghanistan's economic and social recovery. Germany has already set aside about 80 million Euro for this purpose. We will concentrate, above all, on restoring education and administrative infrastructure and on empowering women and girls to make a contribution to civil society. Among other things, we want to support the traditional Amani High School in Kabul, which was founded in 1924 and where German teachers taught well into the early 80's. We will also seek to support a similar secondary education for girls.

Ladies and gentlemen,

German-Afghan relations have a long-standing and positive tradition. Germany today offers a second home to nearly 90,000 Afghans – more than any other country in Europe. In Afghanistan itself, evidence of the close cooperation with Germany, especially in the sixties and seventies, is still visible. By bringing about a transition to stable government in Afghanistan let us also open a new chapter in our bilateral partnership.

Distinguished guests from Afghanistan,

Now you have to shoulder your responsibility to pave the way for a peaceful political future for your nation, a way which reflects your society's diversity and traditions and which will be acceptable to all Afghans. It is up to you, the representatives of the Afghan people, to seize this historic moment. Germany, the European Union and the international community led by the United Nations stand ready to help – now and in the long term.

I wish you every success in your talks and above all wisdom and the will to compromise for the good of the people of Afghanistan.

Thank you and welcome. (Applause)

Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Mr Lakhdar Brahimi:

(Opening words missing from tape) We hope we will live up to the expectations of the people of Afghanistan and the rest of the world have of this meeting. I would like now to read to you a message from Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

This is the message of Kofi Annan to this conference:

I am pleased to welcome this group of Afghan representatives to this United Nations-hosted meeting in Bonn. Let me begin by expressing my profound gratitude to the Government of Germany for their leadership and generosity in providing the resources and facilities for this meeting.

Let us hope that history will record this day as the beginning of a new age for Afghanistan – an age of peace, of harmony, of good relations with its neighbours, and of growing prosperity for all its people under the rule of law.

For this to be possible – for this dream to come true for the people of Afghanistan – you, who are taking this responsibility, must show unprecedented courage and leadership. You must place the interests of your people first, above all other concerns. Only then will this process – this attempt to break the cycle of misery and destitution, conflict and violence – stand a chance of success.

This is a historic opportunity to begin the process of finally achieving peace and national reconciliation in Afghanistan. You must not allow the mistakes of the past to be repeated, particularly those of 1992. To many sceptics, it appears that that is precisely what you are about to do. You must prove them wrong, and show that you can choose the path of compromise over conflict.

It is essential now to create credible institutions in which all Afghans are represented, and which are regarded as legitimate by the Afghan people. It is not the role or desire of the United Nations – or of your neighbours – to impose any particular arrangement on the Afghan people. These are decisions for Afghans to make, and the United Nations' role is to assist in this process.

The international community is also ready to assist Afghanistan in the monumental task of recovery and reconstruction. To do so, however, it is essential that Afghan Government be in place to guide this process for the benefit of the Afghan people. A critical responsibility for this Government will be to respect and uphold the human rights of all its citizens – men, women and children. It will therefore also be necessary to ensure that previously excluded groups, particularly women, are full participants.

I wish you every success in this meeting, and urge you to do all in your power to ensure that a spirit of compromise and cooperation opens the way to a brighter future for the people of Afghanistan.

Thank you very much. (Applause)

I now give the floor to the heads of the four delegations to say a few words and I will start with Mr Mohamed Yunus Qanooni. You now have the floor.

Mr Yunus Qanooni (United Front) (English translation from Farsi):

(missing from tape)... My country is proud that after 23 years of war today it has become possible to live in peace and dignity in our shared country. Today because of the holy resistance of our nation, it has become possible that we are closing in to a future which promises dignity and peace. This is the beginning of a new era. Yesterday we were proud to be resisting against aggression, but today we all want to be champions of peace, stability in our country. Today we long for peace and stability.

For us the continuation of war, monopoly of power, longing for power is not what we want. That is why we are sincere in our attitude towards the talks and that is our support to this process which is leading to a peaceful solution, we heartily support that. We are giving our attention to creating a system which will bring about national unity within the country, reconstruction of the country, and after 23 years of war, we will be proud to be the initiators of peace, and will be known for bringing about peace.

Therefore, monopoly of power and relying on the gains of the past, military gains, it is not important for us. We have a message, our message is peace, our message is national unity, our message is that we want a system in Afghanistan which will involve all sections of the population, all sections of nation, men and women, people from every corner of Afghanistan.

We want a system where there is a obscurantism does not rule, we want a system where justice rules, where people live in prosperity and lead us to a prosperous Afghanistan. We want Afghanistan to take its place in the international community with other members, and to help the international community in their struggle step by step against terrorism. We are against extremism, we want Afghanistan to be out of the middle ages, we want it to once again take its place in the international community.

We have therefore come with all sincerity to the talks, and our expectation is that we will be lead to constructive solution here and we will support that. We want to bring about a mechanism which will provide a legitimate framework for the future. The great Massoud, the hero of Afghanistan, had always insisted on peace, on a peaceful solution for Afghanistan. We have a legacy with us now, we therefore want to see a day where the Afghan people

themselves will be taking a place on which they decide their future. We are walking on the path that Massoud has left behind. We want to bring about a system whereby our people will sit together, representatives from all corners of the world, and will provide the basis for the future, a prosperous Afghanistan. I am thanking wholeheartedly all guests that have come here and am delighted to see that an opportunity has been provided for Afghans to come and work for peace.

Thanks and praise to God. (Applause)

Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Mr Lakhdar Brahimi:

I thank you very much for this statement and I now give the floor to Mr Abdul Sattar Sirat.

Mr Abdul Sattar Sirat (Rome delegation) (English translation from Farsi):

In the name of God ..(missing from the tape)

... His Excellency Mr Francis Vandrell, the deputy to Mr Brahimi, ladies and gentlemen, honourable guests.

From the friendly statement of His Excellency Mr Foreign Minister and Mr Secretary General, I would like to thank for that they have opened this meeting with such friendly word. The selection of venue and time makes the meeting important.

(missing from tape)... and the members of the Security Council and other members of this World Organization for holding this important meeting and for their efforts for the sake of peace.

Honourable guests, ladies and gentlemen,

You are today in a meeting which we hope will put the foundation block for a ravaged and oppressed country and a brave nation. The Afghan nation during one decade has been defending its rights and the rights and dignity of the people all over the world, more than another decade was the victim of the actions of the international community, the foreign interference and the civil war. The national disaster of Afghanistan during the last 22 years not only brought destruction of the infrastructure and the whole of Afghanistan. It is also the humans of Afghanistan and a complete generation of Afghanistan with the whole deprivation from their natural human rights have been suffering a lot. The death of two million Afghans and the fact that there are more than 6 million refugees are some examples of this painful human disaster.

We are happy that this golden opportunity has been created, with the help of the United Nations and our friend Germany and the feeling of responsibility by the Afghans. To be able to bring and stability and to organize the political life of Afghanistan, we have been able to gather here.

In order to achieve these goals, not only is a dire need and a legitimate right of the Afghan people but also the region and the world also are interested and they need it. Therefore, different solutions still are a problem, and the recovery of the political life of Afghanistan, while respecting the right of self-determination of Afghans and based on the principles of Islamic and national values and with respect to human rights and international norms is our task. But urgent cooperation, economic cooperation and contribution to the construction of Afghanistan and helping to bring about peace and security depends on the international community and especially the United States of America and the European Union.

We hope all of us have an effective role in this regard. We hope that this beautiful hall and this historic city and this friendly country witness a successful movement towards a free Afghanistan, a new Afghanistan, with dignity in the international community.

Thank you very much. (Applause)

Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Mr Lakhdar Brahimi:

I thank you very much for your statement and I now give the floor to Mr Humayon Jareer.

Mr Humayon Jareer (Cyprus delegation) (English translation from Farsi):

In the name of God, we give our praise to God.

His Excellency Mr Fischer, the Foreign Minister of the Federal Republic of Germany, His Excellency Mr Brahimi, special envoy of the Secretary-General to Afghanistan, His Excellency Mr Francis Vendrell, brothers and sisters, I would like to give you my greetings.

Before everything, I would like you to allow me, on behalf of the Cyprus process and the delegation, to thank the United Nations and the Federal Republic of Germany for holding this series of meetings, and I would like to thank the chair and the leadership of this meeting.

The miserable condition of Afghanistan, the continuation of war and bloodshed in Afghanistan, calls for that Afghans, more than any other time, feel responsibility in order to take steps for solving the problem of their country with a wise solution.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We believe that the Afghan problem is not a local or regional problem, but the Afghan problem calls for all the international community and our friendly countries in these historic and sensitive conditions: help the Afghans with honesty in order to bring peace. The Cyprus process would like to thank the honest and sincere efforts and helps of the United Nations and all other countries and hopes that we Afghans can under the auspices of the UN and with the cooperation of the international community and different countries, reach an appropriate and a national and a broad solution to the Afghan problem.

The Cyprus process believes that the peace will come in our country when the basis for all changes is that self-determination of the Afghan people, and all Afghans are equal before law, and there should be no kind of discrimination in Afghanistan. The Cyprus process certainly believes that the Bonn conference is an important step towards tackling the Afghan problem and would like to do all their efforts with good intention and with cooperation with other members of this conference to make this conference successful and reach appropriate and effective results.

And once again, I would like to thank the United Nations and our friend the Federal Republic of Germany and we hope that this is a successful conference for the future and destiny of our country.

Thank you. (Applause)

Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Mr Lakhdar Brahimi:

I thank you very much for your statement and now give the floor to Mr Hamed Gailani.

Mr Hamed Gailani (Peshawar delegation) (English translation from Farsi):

Your Excellencies, Foreign Minister Fischer, Ambassador Brahimi, Ambassador Vendrell, honourable guests, my dear compatriots, ladies and gentlemen.

I am delighted to be here today. On behalf of the Assembly for Peace and National Unity of Afghanistan, I would like to thank the Government of Germany, the United Nations, and the international community in general for initiating, organising and convening this very important meeting. As we all know, the peoples of Afghanistan have suffered a lot in the past 23 years. Since the withdrawal of the Soviet forces from Afghanistan our resistance organisations have consistently supported the political solution of the conflict in Afghanistan. However, because of the strong foreign dimensions of the conflict it was not possible to achieve peace in Afghanistan without a concerted

international effort. Unfortunately until very recently peace-supporting Afghans were not able to obtain a strong commitment from the international community to undertake a significant amount of resources and effort to the resolution of the conflict in Afghanistan.

Of course we are very saddened by the September 11th terrorist attacks on New York and Washington. We condemn terrorism anywhere, in any form. And we share the grief of the families of the victims of these terrorist attacks. We are also saddened by the tragedies that have resulted from the alliance in the strikes in Afghanistan. The only solution and the only consolation that we find in the tragedies of the past two-and-a-half months is the fact that the international community has become very serious about resolving the conflict in Afghanistan. We are thankful for this new international interest in Afghanistan.

Of course the Afghans themselves will have to be willing to live in peace with each other in order to have a durable peace. A just peace in Afghanistan is a major objective of the Assembly of Peace and National Unity of Afghanistan. We believe that the United Nations approach to peace in Afghanistan is a very good initiative and a good start. We accept the principle of a broad-based government and after the transitional period we support a democratic policy. We believe that with the international help the Afghans will be able to agree on their transitional government. The Assembly for Peace and National Unity of Afghanistan will exercise great flexibility to reach an agreement with other Afghan groups on a just peace, national unity and a broad-based government in Afghanistan. I am pretty optimistic about the prospects of agreement.

Once again I thank the Government of Germany who in a very strong way demonstrated once again a deep-rooted relationship and friendship with the Afghan nation. I would also like to thank the United Nations and the international community for this effort to bring peace to Afghanistan and I thank my compatriots for their willingness to seek peace with their fellow Afghans.

Thank you very much. (Applause)

Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Mr Lakhdar Brahimi:

Thank you very much. This concludes this part of our proceedings. Your Excellency, we cannot thank you enough and the Government and people of Germany for your generous hospitality and your support. This part of our work, the beginning has brought together these distinguished representatives of the people of Afghanistan, the United Nations, and the Federal Republic of Germany. I think that Germany has done its part very successfully. It is now up to the rest of us – Afghans, and the United Nations – to do our share, and live up to the expectations so well expressed here by the people of Afghanistan and by you, Minister, representing the international community. We are grateful to our guests and the representatives of the media, who attended this opening session with us. We would now adjourn for 15 minutes to escort His Excellency the Minister and allow our other guests to leave and we will reconvene in this room 15 minutes from now.

Thank you very much indeed. (Applause)

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