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PRESS BRIEFING BY AHMAD FAWZI SPOKESMAN FOR THE SRSG FOR AFGHANISTAN

Following is a near-verbatim transcript of today's briefing at 5 pm Bonn time by Ahmad Fawzi, Spokesman for the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Lakhdar Brahimi:

This is what the German authorities have done for the talks including this press facility so I would like to first start by thanking the German Government for hosting and financing the UN Talks on Afghanistan.

Let me tell you where we are at the moment. The UN Delegation is here in full. We arrived yesterday, Saturday and today, Sunday. So the Special Representative for the Secretary-General, Lakhdar Brahimi, who is the Special Representative for Afghanistan, as you know, is in Petersberg. Mr. Vendrell, his Deputy is here as well and both teams are here. A team from Islamabad and a team from New York. We have two of the four delegations participating in the UN Talks on Afghanistan which have arrived. The Cyprus Process, what we call the Cyprus Process and the Rome Process. Half of the Rome Process delegation actually arrived yesterday; the other half is arriving today. The other two delegations, the Peshawar Group and the Northern Alliance are arriving tomorrow.

I have had a lot of questions over the past two or three days about lists and the answer is still, I am afraid, no. We do not have complete lists. We are very reluctant to give you any lists until everybody is on the ground. Until we are sure that the lists are complete and accurate and at this moment, they are not. We have a group and a half on the ground. The other half will be arriving today as I said. The Northern Alliance will be departing from Afghanistan tomorrow morning. As soon as they board the plane and the plane takes off, we will have a complete list of who is attending from the Northern Alliance and I hope I will be able to make that available to you by tomorrow afternoon including all the other delegations.

The Conference will open on Tuesday morning. In answer to other questions about a further delay - we do not expect a further delay. We are hoping to start on time at around 10 am on Tuesday morning. There will be a plenary session as you have been informed to which you are invited on a pool arrangement. We hope that everybody will get a crack at this and we are trying to accommodate everybody so please be patient with us and with the German Foreign Ministry Press Office who have done a marvellous job to help us set this up. After the opening session, there will be no access to Petersberg (conference centre), as you know. The UN and the Afghans would like to keep this as focused and secluded as possible. But we will provide as much information as we can whenever it is available. So, I will come down and meet with all of you once a day at least. If I can drag anyone away from the talks, whether it be a member of the UN Delegation or a member of one of the Afghan Delegations, I promise to do so. So, I think we can start by saying that I will have a briefing tomorrow at 2 pm if that is okay with all of you. Tomorrow, Monday, 2 pm, to give you a final curtain raiser, if you will, and an update on where we stand. Thereafter, we will also have a daily briefing at 2 pm so that we can meet European and Asian deadlines and a second briefing later on in the day to be determined as the talks progress. Which I would announce during the 2 pm briefing.

We do not know how long the talks will last. They could last a week, 10 days, 3 days. It all depends on what progress we achieve. I don't think I have anything further to say at the moment but if anyone has a question, I would be happy to answer it.

Question: Is it possible for you to run through the schedule for Ambassador Brahimi for tomorrow specifically and for the group and a half who are on the ground, could we get at least a provisional list of those?

Answer: The question is, could I run through the schedule for Ambassador Brahimi today and tomorrow and for those Afghans who are on the ground can we provide lists.

Mr Brahimi today met with members of the Cyprus group, who arrived this morning. He also met with the leader of the Rome Delegation. He has also had a number of internal meetings with his UN team. Both from Islamabad and New York and he has been on the phone quite frequently with Islamabad and through other contacts with Kabul. Tomorrow he intends to continue bilateral talks with the delegations on the ground and we are also going to encourage bilateral talks between the Afghan delegations.

As far as lists are concerned, I am afraid not. We would rather wait until the four lists are complete before we release them. So, I am afraid I cannot give you any names at the moment.

Question: Mr. Brahimi has arrived today...

Answer: Mr. Brahimi arrived yesterday afternoon.

Question cont: How about Mr. Vendrell?

Answer: Mr. Vendrell arrived last night.

Question cont: Can I ask you how the discussions with Vendrell and Rabbani or Abdullah Abdullah in Kabul were?

Answer: He had very constructive discussions. I cannot go into them in great detail because I was not present and I haven't been briefed on them. But if you like, I can specifically ask him to give me readout of those meetings. The fact of the matter is that as a result of Mr. Vendrell's talks over the past two weeks in Kabul with various parties, we have a conference going and we have talks, we have four delegations that have agreed to come to talk. So, I can only characterise his talks in Kabul over the past two weeks as having been very positive.

Question: Could you give us a breakdown of how many members each delegation can have around the table during the talks?

Answer: Yes, that has been one of the subjects that we have been deeply engaged in and the delegations have been engaged in over the past few days. The breakdown will be as follows. There will be eleven representatives for the Northern Alliance present. Eight of which will be around the table and three will be acting as advisors. There will be a similar number - eleven, eight plus three for the Rome group, the King's group. And there will be five for each of the other groups with three at the table and two as advisors - so three plus two. Eight plus three for the Northern Alliance and the Rome group. Three plus two for the other two, the Peshawar Group and the Cyprus Group.

Question cont: Have they all accepted.

Answer: Yes

Question: What time is the arrival tomorrow for the other two groups? Is it confirmed?

Answer: There is a daytime arrival for Peshawar and I don't have that time and there is an evening arrival for the Northern Alliance.

Question: But at this point is the list confirmed of whom we can expect and there is no drama.

Answer: There is no drama, I am happy to say. There is a lot of anticipation. The Northern Alliance list is almost complete.

Question: What is the outcome of the meeting between Mr. Brahimi and the Head of the Rome Delegation? What is the outcome of this discussion?

Answer: They had a very friendly meeting. Mr. Brahimi thanked him for coming with the delegation. They discussed the agenda of the meeting and I will get into that in a moment. They discussed representation. They discussed what they expected of the meeting and why all of us are here today and that was it really. On the question of the agenda, before you ask me, it has not been printed yet. It is a very simple agenda. We are talking about the possibility of forming a transitional administration for Afghanistan as soon as possible because speed is of the essence in view of the situation on the ground. And secondly, the issue of security will certainly come up. I say this informally because we still do not have an agenda but those two items will be paramount on the agenda.

Question: I have some information that the Northern Alliance had some objection to the composition of this conference, such as, Peshawar Group has four or five people in its delegation and the others maybe [inaudible]. Is that correct?

Answer: We have been having a lot of discussion back and forth with all of the parties about the formation, about the talks, about them coming at all. And I am happy to say that whatever objections and comments we've had, they have been overcome. The fact of the matter is we hope that we can welcome the Northern Alliance Group to the Bonn Talks tomorrow as well as all the others.

Question: Apparently there have been some last minute changes in the form of the delegations for some members of the Alliance. I talked to [inaudible] of the Alliance and he was supposed to stay in [inaudible]. But apparently due to the problems in Kunduz, he has decided not to send anybody at this point. Would you confirm that?

Answer: No, I am sorry, I can't confirm the intricacies of these talks. However, what I can confirm to you is that the UN is not imposing any choices on the Afghan parties. The choice of the delegates is entirely up to them. We are not asking them to send one or the other. We are asking them to send groups that are representative and that can take decisions.

Question: What is the minimum you would like to see for the conference to come to a successful conclusion?

Answer: The minimum objective for a successful conference on Afghanistan would be to reach a consensus among the parties on the formation of a transitional administration. Now as you all know. There was a five-point plan submitted by Mr. Brahimi about ten days ago to the Security Council. The first stage of that was the formation of a National Council, the second was the formation of a transitional administration. But because of the rapid developments on the ground, we are now saying that maybe we should go straight to the formation of a transitional administration that can run the country which is in dire need of a representative and a broad based administration as soon as possible. So why not go to a transitional administration if we can. And if we can get the parties to agree on that – on a formula for that – then we will have achieved a great measure of success. Now there are other issues, of course, on the table, which we hope to address. But, if we can reach an agreement on a transitional administration, some transitional authority, then that will be a great measure of success.

Question: How much detail do you need in [inaudible] (the formation of the transitional authority?)

Answer: I think it is going to be a combination of both. If we can't have a complete list of people, then at least we will have an agreement on who is to be represented in that group. But I can't go into the details because it is all open – and I stress – that we come to the table with a lot of flexibility and we are asking the parties to do the same.

Question cont: Did I understand that correctly – it means that 27 of

Answer: Eleven and eleven is 22 plus ten

Question cont: plus five you said ..

Answer: No, I said five each. You have four groups. Two have eleven and two have five. There will be others present, but not in the conference centre itself. I am sure there are other interested parties from all over the world who will be in Petersberg or in Bonn rather. But not around the table.

Question: How many do you predict in total? How many Afghans, or other nationals, whatever?

Answer: I cannot give you a figure on that yet. Why don't we wait until tomorrow at 2 pm. I may have more on that.

Question: Do you have some sort of minimum number of participants to start the conference?

Answer: Well, the numbers I gave you are the numbers that we are expecting and we will open the conference on Tuesday when they arrive. The four parties have to be represented.

Question: You spoke about the other interested international parties. Does that mean that, for example, the Americans or the Iranians or the Russians would not be in Petersberg? Is there any chance they would be in the conference rooms or would they have to wait outside? Give us a sense for how this will work:

Answer: Our friends who are interested will be present in Bonn. They will have access to Petersberg but the parties around the table are the Afghans and the UN. There may be some interaction in the corridors but that remains to be seen.

Question: Concerning the eleven, eleven, five, five idea. How many UN people will be at the table?

Answer: Do you know, I really haven't counted them but off the top of my head, the principles around the table, we will probably have an equal number - about eight and some support staff as well. I would add another three or four to that. But I will get you a figure tomorrow. Let us say around eight to ten at the moment.

Question: Just for clarification, these four delegations – eight plus two times eight plus three - and two times three delegates plus two advisors or two delegates plus three advisors.

Answer: Three delegates plus two advisors.

Question: I just want to know, do you know for how long the conference will be held – for how many days do you expect? And the second question – how confident are you that the conference will be a successful and a fruitful one?

Answer: Thank you. We have no time limit on the conference. For as long as the German Government will have us here, we are happy to stay. And as I said, we are flexible and open and we hope that we can persuade the parties to be flexible and open. I must say, the people I have spoken to so far on the Afghan side and within the UN delegation have seemed cautiously optimistic about things. So, although, I will not say that we are going to achieve a remarkable break through - we will not reach peace in Afghanistan in 48 hours after a conflict of 22 years – I can say that we are going to stay here for as long as it takes to get a consensus on the immediate issues on the table. Does that answer your question? I think it does.

Question: Do you have any confirmation that Mr. Kanuni will lead the delegation of the Northern Alliance?

Answer: No Sir, I am sorry, I don't. But I will tomorrow. Tomorrow at 2 pm.

Question: You said that interested friends who are interested in the talks might be on the Petersberg. What do you mean by 'friends'? Are these representatives of governments or any Afghan group who is around here or members of '5 plus 2', '5 plus 5'? Who are 'friends'?

Answer: Well we hope that we have a lot of friends in the world, the United Nations and Afghanistan. And we have seen in the past few weeks an enormous expression of support for the Afghan people. The friends I was referring to are, of course, the parties who have interest and influence in Afghanistan and specifically the United States and the United Kingdom, the Russian Federation. The '6 plus 2' group in which the US and the Russian Federation already are included, members of the Permanent 5. But there may be others and I don't have a complete list at the moment.

Question: Are there any groups that you would have hoped to come and which are prevented or have refused to?

Answer: No. There are no groups who have asked to come and been refused. Are you taking about Afghan groups?

Question cont: I was referring to Afghan groups that you might have hoped that they would come and they don't.

Answer: Well, the answer is still no because we have left it to the Afghan groups. To those with the most, let us say, political activity. We have left it to them to choose the representatives they want to come to these talks. So we haven't imposed anything, we haven't asked them to bring certain people whom they haven't brought. It has been the other way around. They have said, this is who we want to represent us, and we have gone along with that.

Question: You said you wanted to go straight to a transitional administration. And then you said that you want to stay until you have achieved your issues. Is this issue the one you want to achieve and you won't leave Petersberg until you have a transitional administration?

Answer: I guess the short answer to your question is yes. But I would like to qualify that by saying that we hope to achieve consensus among the groups on the next step. If that next step is a transitional authority then we will have succeeded in this meeting. However, if the next step is an agreement to another set of talks, that will also be considered a success. So, we can't really define it a categorically as you put it.

Question: Mr. Vendrell said, one should not be expecting too much from the conference. And some other diplomats say, they are much less optimistic. Can you comment on that. Why this pessimism about the conference?

Answer: The problem is a very complicated one, as you know. After 22 years or more of conflict, the people of Afghanistan desperately need peace to rebuild their country. There are many factions, there are many groups, and there are many opinions. It is difficult to reconcile them all. I think that by agreeing to come to Petersberg, the parties have made a good start and I will just leave it at that.

Question: I would like to know if the revolutionary group of Afghan women are going to be at this conference – how many women are going to be here?

Answer: Thank you very much. We do expect a number of women in some of the delegations. I don't have a final figure yet. I saw the names of two women in the Rome delegation and another one in a second delegation, but I don't have a final count yet. I am not aware of the group you mentioned, I'm sorry.

Question: Hopefully tomorrow when we talk to you we will be in chairs but I wonder beyond that – you mentioned consensus – is that to assume that the process, the rules of procedure for this process has been totally consensus? No voting – its all agree or no one agrees? And secondly, you mentioned, Ambassador Brahimi's schedule for tomorrow. Can you be anymore specific for those of us with deadlines prior to your 2 pm briefing?

Answer: I have been informed by reliable sources that we will indeed have chairs here tomorrow. On your other question about Mr. Brahimi's schedule tomorrow. No, I can't be more precise. The situation is very fluid. He will be meeting with the groups who are here in the morning. He will also have some more internal meetings with his own delegation. We will also be monitoring the arrival of the other two groups, the Northern Alliance and the Peshawar Group and I hope that by 2 pm that I will be able to report on all of the above activities.

Question: Can you tell us, I know you can't say what the agenda is exactly, but at least who sets the agenda. Is it the UN or the UN in accord with the groups?

Answer: Yes, that reminds me that I didn't answer part of your question earlier on the question of consensus but it applies to both. No, there will be no voting. This is a question of consensus. There are four groups and there is the UN and we hope that we can all agree on the formula that I referred to on a transitional administration. We set the agenda together. We make proposals - they accept them. We shuttle back and forth between the groups. It is a question of building consensus. Even on the agenda before we go into the room.

Question: What time do you approximately expect the Northern Alliance Group and the Peshawar Group tomorrow?

Answer: I haven't got a precise time for the arrival but it will be sometime in the evening.

Question: Will there be provisions later to bring into the process those who are not here on Petersberg. Civilian groups, other people who have not been warring parties or exile groups who also might have some legitimate claim on having a say in the rebuilding of Afghanistan.

Answer: The question is on the transitional administration for those of you who missed the first have of the question. Are there provisions being made for the inclusion at a later date of groups who are not being represented in Petersberg and the answer is – that is up to the Afghans. We are leaving it entirely up to them. If we reach some consensus here, it will be for precisely that, a transitional administration and when that transition ends, we hope that we will have in place a National Council, another transitional council which will select a more permanent government that will be more inclusive. So this is the beginning of a process. This isn't a final blueprint. This is a road map for the building of the infrastructure and the institutions by which the Afghans can govern themselves.

Question: Can you tell me the difference between a delegate and an advisor in this case?

Answer: A delegate will be sitting at the table and an advisor will be sitting behind him whispering in his ear. I think we have exhausted this line of questioning, haven't we? Shall we call it a night and I hope you enjoy the joys of the 'Winter of Kings' as this city is known – Königswinter and I will see you tomorrow at 2 pm. Thank you all for being here.