



Königswinter, 5 December 2001

CLOSING SESSION OF THE UN TALKS ON AFGHANISTAN

Following is a near-verbatim transcript of the closing session of the UN talks on Afghanistan at 10 a.m. Bonn time:

Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, SRSG for Afghanistan:

Your Excellency Mr. Chancellor, Mr. Foreign Minister, Ladies and Gentlemen --

It is an honour to welcome you to the closing session of the UN Talks on Afghanistan. I would like to thank, in particular, His Excellency Mr. Gerhard Schröder, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, and His Excellency Mr. Joschka Fischer, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Germany, for being among us today.

I would also like to reiterate the deep appreciation of the United Nations to the Government of Germany for hosting this conference and making the Petersberg available to us. We are all extremely grateful for your warm hospitality and patience during the last ten days.

The United Nations and the entire international community feel a tremendous sense of hope in the knowledge that an agreement has been reached here in Bonn that provides an opportunity to end the tragic conflict that has plagued Afghanistan for over two decades.

But nowhere is the feeling of hope greater than among the people of Afghanistan, who during 23 years of tragedy and loss, have maintained the hope that peace and stability would be restored in their country. Although the international community's assistance to Afghanistan has been significant, there have also been moments when we have closed our eyes to the suffering of its people. Throughout, the Afghan people have maintained their pride and dignity, and they deserve to be acknowledged here today.

The agreement that has been reached provides for the establishment of an Interim Authority on 22 December 2001. This Authority will consist of an Interim Administration, which will be responsible for the day-to-day administration of the country for a period of up to six months, and a Special Independent Commission for the convening of an Emergency Loya Jirga.

The Emergency Loya Jirga will decide on a Transitional Authority, which will govern Afghanistan for up to two years, until a new Constitution has been adopted and a fully representative government can be elected through free and fair elections.

Recognizing that security is critical to the achievement of lasting peace, the participants in the talks have requested that the United Nations Security Council consider authorizing the early deployment of a United Nations mandated force to Afghanistan.

This force will initially assist in the maintenance of security in Kabul and its surrounding areas, and could progressively be expanded to other urban centres and areas.

At the same time, the participants have recognized that responsibility for providing law and security in the country resides with Afghans themselves, and have requested the assistance of the international community in the establishment and training of new Afghan security and armed forces. Throughout the interim and transitional periods, Afghans will have sole responsibility for governing their country, but the United Nations will be available to assist in the implementation of the agreement.

This agreement may not be perfect, because it was devised rapidly to address an emergency. No one claims that the Afghan participants gathered in Bonn speak for the entire Afghan population, or that an interim plan of this nature can provide a solution for all of the country's many grave problems.

Nor should we forget that this gathering in Bonn took place as wars were still being fought in Afghanistan. Ultimately, however, this agreement will be judged by what it achieves, rather than by the circumstances in which it was reached.

If there is one thing the world has learned, it is that the situation in Afghanistan is far too complex for quick or simple solutions. Instead, what this agreement represents is a "breathing space" – an interim period during which the people of Afghanistan can take the first of many steps that will be required before a broad-based, multi-ethnic and truly representative government can be established.

This agreement was reached in a cordial and constructive atmosphere, but required long and difficult discussions and compromise by all sides. Whatever these difficulties, however, they pale in comparison to the enormous challenges that the people of Afghanistan will face as they set out to rebuild their country.

To those who will lead Afghanistan in the months and years ahead, I would like to convey the following message: The eyes of the world will be on you and you carry a heavy responsibility. You will face tremendous challenges, particularly since your country has been ravaged by war and many of the wounds are still fresh.

You will have many immediate concerns, such as lifting people out of the misery and despair of the past 23 years, by re-building the economy, governing institutions, infrastructure, schools and hospitals. You must create conditions that would allow the return of the millions of refugees and internally displaced persons who long to go back home, but will need food, shelter, health care and other assistance, especially now that winter has arrived.

At the same time, you must live up to your commitment to promote national reconciliation, protect human rights, establish the rule of law and maintain peaceful relations with your neighbors. Above all, you must serve your people in a democratic, transparent and accountable manner. Because the suffering of your people has been so great, their expectations are high, and you cannot afford to fail them this time.

And because many voices were left out in the preparation of this agreement, you have an added duty to ensure that these voices are now heard, and that the interim and transitional periods are inclusive of all ethnic and religious groups represented in the population, and of women.

The underlying approach to the Bonn meeting was that the solution to the problems of Afghanistan could only come from Afghans. All the elements in the agreement were proposed by Afghans – either here in Bonn, or by those whom the United Nations consulted in Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan and elsewhere prior to this meeting.

A few days ago, the participants in the Bonn meeting met with a delegation of Afghans attending a parallel civil society meeting, who presented them with some of their ideas for the future of Afghanistan.

These groups are composed of dedicated and experienced individuals who represent a cross-section of Afghan society, and have given a great deal of thought to the problems facing the country. I hope that Afghan leaders will work in partnership with civil society when tackling the challenges ahead.

The desire of the international community to assist Afghanistan is enormous – perhaps unprecedented – and we will stand by your side. But when we gathered in Bonn on the first day of these talks, the Secretary-General of the United Nations reminded all of us that the outcome of these discussions and the results of the interim period would have a direct impact on the international community's willingness to assist.

The international community's determination is very strong now, but it is bound to fade unless the Interim Authority and the Transitional Authority that follows it live up to their commitments, and prove to the world that they are up to the task that has been entrusted to them.

For its part, the international community, starting with Afghanistan's neighbours, has the duty not to interfere in the country's internal affairs.

We are heartened that an agreement has been reached in Bonn. The rest is now up to the people of Afghanistan. With wise leadership and perseverance, it will be possible to build a new Afghanistan -- secure, peaceful, democratic and prosperous.

Once again, I would like to express the sincere gratitude of the United Nations to the German Government for facilitating and hosting this meeting, and for having gone to such great lengths to create an environment that was conducive to successful negotiations among the participants.

Thank you very much indeed.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Gerhard Schröder, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany.
(Applause)

Mr. Gerhard Schröder, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany:

Present ladies and gentlemen,

First of all I would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations to all you. All of you together brought about something which no one would have thought possible only a short while ago, and this is why this is indeed a great day for Afghanistan and a great day for the United Nations. After all those years of war, of terror, of want and humiliation, you have opened up for the first time for the people of Afghanistan - and indeed they are the most important part in all this - you have opened up a complete perspective for peace and prosperity, and the international community will and needs to continue to be helpful in order to ensure this. We owe a debt of gratitude first and foremost to the Special Representative of the United Nations, Mr. Brahimi and Mr. Vendrell, who through their untiring personal efforts, through their diplomatic capabilities and through their competent stewardship have made it possible that this meeting here has brought about a success. And I think indeed in an impressive way the United Nations have demonstrated yet again that they are able to take a leadership role in situations such as these.

I am obviously more than pleased that we have been able to host this conference here and that apparently you have been satisfied with what the members of our staff here have been able to give you by the way of support. I think that the successful conclusion of this conference is an encouraging signal for the whole of the region, but I think basically it's an encouraging signal for the whole world, not least in view of the important role that the United Nations can play and ought to play in settling this conflict and other conflicts, and indeed coping with the challenges ahead of us - that is something that ought to be underlined. The representatives of the different ethnic groups of Afghanistan, who have negotiated this historic agreement here have all of them had to be ready to compromise and I think that we really owe deep gratitude to all of you, because you have demonstrated courage and far-sightedness, you have set aside your own interests because you believe in the future of your own country, Afghanistan, and because you believe that in this Afghanistan all ethnic groups ought to live in peaceful coexistence and can do so. Let me assure you, we too believe in the future of your country and wherever we may be in any way helpful in trying to build up the country again and secure what has been achieved, we will certainly do so. By signing this agreement you have created the essential pre-conditions for the start of a process of rebuilding and indeed a peace process for this country that has been tested so sorely. What is important and indeed essential now is that all of the parties around this table implement what they have been agreeing here. We, the Germans, would like to be helpful and continuously helpful in this process, together with our European partners, and the international community. The fact that Germany is currently the chair of the Afghanistan Support Group, bears eloquent testimony to this. This means we will give substantial contribution to ensuring that all of the men and women in Afghanistan may finally live in peace, dignity and prosperity in Afghanistan.

Ladies and gentlemen, the end of this conference certainly does not mark the end of our work. It is indeed a page that has been turned to open up a new chapter in the history of your country, and I hope that this is indeed a successful new chapter, and on behalf of all Germans, I would like to wish you every luck and success.

Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, SRSR for Afghanistan:

Thank you very much, Your Excellency.

If I may now, I would like to give the floor to Professor Abdel Sattar Sirat, on behalf of the Rome group.

Professor Abdul Sattar Sirat on behalf of the Rome (English interpretation from Farsi):

His Excellency the Chancellor, His Excellency the Foreign Minister, His Excellency Mr. Brahimi and His Excellency Mr. Vendrell, friends, my compatriots and their guests – peace be to you.

As an Afghan and a representative of the delegation of His Excellency the former King of Afghanistan, I welcome participation of Their Excellencies the Chancellor and the Foreign Minister at this centre, which had become the home of Afghanistan for the last 10 days, and I welcome them to a place where we felt at home in the last 10 days. The selection of a friendly country, the Federal Republic of Germany, for this kind of a conference, which we hope will signify the end of the suffering of Afghanistan, and we hope will mark the beginning of a new Afghanistan. The gathering of Afghans, and also coming to an Agreement of Afghans in this environment, which in the context of the historical friendship between Afghanistan and Germany, we take it as a good omen for the future. The national calamity in Afghanistan, especially over the last few years, was to a large result a result of the fact that the international community had forgotten Afghanistan during the period that Afghanistan was fighting and was leading Afghanistan as an example of freedom for the world, however, when Afghanistan expected to have the right to live in peace and to have an honourable and peaceful life, Afghanistan ended up in a situation where the foreign interference of foreign hands and also the neglect of the rest of the international community led Afghanistan to a situation where the terrorist made it a haven for themselves. We hope that today the world has been alerted, and now they've been reminded of the fact that they have some responsibility to fulfil. I hope that the beginning of fulfilment of this responsibility in relation to Afghanistan – I'm glad that this beginning starts from this friendly country, from this friendly city and from this nice centre. On behalf of my Afghan brothers and sisters I give my hopeful thanks to the Government and the people of Germany because they left no opportunity to serve us and to organise a very successful and extremely organised conference for us. It wasn't only a hospitable environment, it was also a conducive environment because it made it practically possible for us to feel, and be able to, and so on behalf of each of my friends here, of each of the Afghans, I thank his Excellency Gerhard Schröder on behalf of the people of Germany for all of their assistance. I shouldn't forget to say that the untiring efforts of Their Excellencies Mr. Brahimi and Mr. Vendrell and their team. We are grateful for that and I hope that the result that has been achieved through all these efforts will be the first break in building a new Afghanistan and I take this as a new start for my country. I thank both the United Nations and this country, Germany. I hope that Afghanistan in the future will become a country when we will be able to welcome in the same nice centre and the same nice weather in Afghanistan.

Mr. Sayed Hamed Gailani on behalf of the Peshawar Group (English interpretation from Farsi - start barely audible):

In the name of God, there Excellencies Mr. Schröder, Mr. Fischer, Mr. Brahimi and Mr. Vendrell, welcome ... which was necessary to be done. As Mr. Sirat has stated and he said on our behalf as well, in this room we are all Afghans. We deeply appreciated and we are thankful to our German friends who gave their assistance and they showed their friendship to the Afghan people showed them today and that was for, and they provided the opportunities to and the hospitality they had. None of the Afghans will forget it. It is obvious that yesterday's cloud will never dare to rain, this cloud will never cry.

We are thankful for His Excellency (Change of interpreter.) We are hopeful that this will be successful and will result into a free, independent Afghanistan, in which Afghanistan will determine its own future.

Mr. Houmayoun Jareer on behalf of the Cyprus Group (English interpretation from Farsi):

In the name of God, His Excellency Mr. Schröder the Chancellor, His Excellency Mr. Fischer the Foreign Minister, His Excellency Mr. Brahimi the Special Representative for Afghanistan of the United Nations, their brothers and sisters,

I am very happy that after a long conference of discussions and negotiations, we Afghans were finally able to reach an Agreement about the future of our county. Personally, on behalf of my delegation, and my friends, I congratulate my own fellow Afghans for this historical achievement. I am hopeful that this Agreement, which has been achieved in good will by Afghans, will be able to resolve the problems of Afghanistan in a certain manner. I am also hopeful that in view of this, or as a result of this agreement, the people of Afghanistan will witness relief to their suffering.

And also I hope that the interim administration will be created as a result of this Agreement in Afghanistan very shortly; I hope that that administration, with assistance from the United Nations, will take in particular steps in making free elections possible in Afghanistan in which the people of Afghanistan can choose their own government. I think that this Agreement can only resolve the problem of Afghanistan in a comprehensive manner only if this will have the full support of the international community and the United Nations. From what we heard here this morning, from the words of Their Excellencies, I am certain that that full support is available. So the Cyprus Process' only intention was to work for peace and to make a peaceful solution possible. We are very interested and very committed to the implementation of this Agreement. On behalf of the Cyprus Process delegation, and all our members and our friends, I give my full commitment to this Agreement and ensuring its implementation. Once again I want to mention that, on behalf of all my fellow Afghans and particularly the Cyprus Process, I want to thank the friendly country; to Afghans, Germany, I want to thank them wholeheartedly, and also I want to thank His Excellency Mr. Brahimi and his team of the United Nations for their efforts.

Mr. Mohamed Yunus Qanooni on behalf of the United Front (English interpretation from Farsi):

In the name of God, with many thanks to Mr. Gerhard Schröder, the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, His Excellency the Foreign Minister, Their Excellencies Mr. Brahimi and Mr. Vendrell, the UN Team, my dear fellow Afghan brothers and sisters, thanks to all of you.

Indeed if our friendly country, Germany, and the untiring efforts of our friend Mr. Brahimi were not there, we would not be the witness of a historical achievement in relation to Afghanistan today. If it is possible to thank our friendly country Germany, that sentence would be that if the signing of the Agreement is an achievement for the international community, or an honour to Afghans, then our friendly country Germany, shares that honour with Afghans particularly. On behalf of Professor Burhanuddin Rabbani and the United Front, we came to this Conference with full commitment and willingness. Our intention was that at the end of a period of several wars and the fact that we fought two wars during 20 years, we wanted to become champions of peace this time. We declared that we clearly came to this conference with the clear intention that we wanted Afghanistan to be transformed to a new period, which will be ruled by peace, democracy, and respect human rights, women's rights, and respect to international community – these will be the ruling principles. Today I am happy to say that what we promised at the opening session, we achieved it and we fulfilled that promise. Today Afghans have succeeded, and today they have signed an Agreement, to put an end to a period in Afghanistan and to symbolise the fact that the Mujahideen who fought for the freedom of the country became also the heroes of peace. We have succeeded in that. The bit that related to us, to Afghans, and there were all sorts of rumours about this – and all sorts of uncertainties – now the proof is that Afghans have done their bit. We have agreed. We hope that this will be a first step. We are committed that we will continue our struggle against terrorism, and become close to the international community. We believe that the part of the international community is now to play – the moral expectation of the people of Afghanistan from the international community is that not only in implementing the provisions of this Agreement but also comprehensively building the country, our country, the international community is expected to help and give us assistance. The Agreement that was achieved in Bonn today, this is a proof that if Afghans know how to fight or can fight well, they also now how to make peace. Outside Bonn there were all sorts of rumours, there were all sorts of expectations that Afghans can never achieve peace. There were all sorts of talks about the fact that Afghans will never move beyond their positions, but now Afghans have proved that to achieve a peaceful Afghanistan and to deliver their country to a brighter future, Afghans can give up their positions and can compromise their positions. With renewed thanks to His Excellency Mr. Brahimi and thanks to Professor Rabbani, the head of the Islamic State of Afghanistan, for making it possible for this transformation to become possible. I hope that the tomorrow of Afghanistan and the tomorrow of this Agreement, will be a tomorrow of national unity, a tomorrow of peace, and a tomorrow in which Afghans will build their common home. I renew my thanks to His Excellency Mr. Schröder, to Mr. Brahimi and all friendly countries who, step by step, helped Afghans towards achieving the success that we have achieved today. On behalf of the United Front delegation I promise that whatever is our part, or responsibility, in relation to ensuring that this Agreement will be implemented and materialised, we will spare no attempt. We are fully committed to that and we hope that this Agreement will achieve a united and peaceful Afghanistan in the future.

Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, SRSG for Afghanistan:

Mr. Chancellor, Mr. Foreign Minister, this is now the last moments of this Conference. Allow me to say a few more words to recognise diplomats who have been with us throughout these days, encouraging us, helping us, very discretely, very unobtrusively, and we are extremely grateful to them for being here.

Allow me also to recognise the work that has been done by the staff of this hotel. They have been working literally day and night, we had everything. And their work, their help was really extremely useful and helpful to all of us.

The interpreters – one of them stayed eight hours translating from English to Pushtun and Dari or vice versa, all the time – all the time alone, seven-and-a-half hours alone, non-stop. We are deeply grateful and indebted to them. If I may also say a word about my colleagues, the staff of the United Nations, from New York, from Islamabad, from Geneva and of course from Bonn. They have also been extremely helpful throughout these 10 days. But most of all I would like to pay tribute to the Afghan men and women who are sitting around this table and behind this table who have shown the spirit that Mr. Qanooni has just spoken about, that Afghans who are, indeed, fierce fighters, can also make peace. This is a beginning, now Inshallah, we will meet all in Kabul very soon and I hope very soon the Chancellor will come and visit you in a peaceful Kabul that you will have started to create. (Applause.)

The meeting is adjourned and the Conference is over. (Applause.)

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