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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 2 pm Bonn time by Ahmad Fawzi, Spokesman for the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Lakhdar Brahimi:

I'm sorry I'm a few minutes late but I tried to put together a little information for you. It's amazing to see this number of accredited journalists here. The German authorities who have done a marvellous job helping to put this together have told me that we have about a thousand requests for accreditation which is much larger than any other meeting they've had in or around Bonn. So thank you all for being here and showing an interest in the story and Afghanistan.

Yesterday and over the past few days I've had a lot of requests for the list of participants and it's been, I know, a long wait for you all but I do have a provisional list for you today and we will make that available as soon as this briefing is over. My colleague from the United Nations Information Centre in Bonn, Axel Wüstenhagen, is taking care of printing it but I would apologise in advance for a few things – any printing mistakes or spelling mistakes. There are one or two names that have not been confirmed in one of the delegations but you'll have the general gist of things in this list of participants.

The next list we're going to make available to you today is the list of the United Nations delegation accompanying Mr. Brahimi. We have a total of 11 people between principals and support staff. Well not really a total of 11, a few more support staff, but he has some special advisors in political affairs and other areas with him. So this list is available, too.

Yesterday I had a few questions about the countries who are planning to be here with us in Bonn during the course of the meeting so we have put together a list of those countries who have requested accreditation to the UN Talks in Bonn on Afghanistan and I'd like to take a moment to read them out because it really is significant. We have such interest in this Conference. The Member States of the United Nations that have requested accreditation are Austria, Belgium, Canada, China, France, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Italy, Japan, Norway, Pakistan, the Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation, Turkey, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Others who have also requested accreditation are Switzerland and the European Union. Great interest. So we have this list for you which will be at the back when we finish.

One other item and then I'll take your questions, or two other items. What should be of interest to you as well is that there is a meeting of Afghan Civil Society going on in Bonn. It starts on the 30<sup>th</sup> of November and runs until the 2<sup>nd</sup> of December. The meeting will include non-governmental organizations, academics, journalists and professionals, women's organizations, trade unions, members of the Afghan diaspora and others, about 40 or 50 participants from civil society will be participating. This is being organized by the Swiss Peace Foundation and the German Foundation for International Affairs and Security, I believe. I don't have the title right but we do have a note for you on this meeting of Afghan Civil Society ready at the back after the briefing.

A brief word about Mr Brahimi's day. Today he continued his bilaterals with those parties who are on the ground, we have at least two groups here: the Rome group and the Cyprus group, a few members of the Peshawar group arrived this morning, more are arriving as I speak and the United Front are arriving this evening. We have also encouraged, and they have done so, the Afghan groups to talk to each other, so bilaterals amongst the Afghans themselves. This evening Mr. Brahimi is the guest of the German Foreign Minister over dinner. They will have a working dinner tonight and later on in the evening he will be meeting with members of the United Front who, as I said, are arriving in the evening.

As I said yesterday, the Opening Ceremony will be tomorrow at about 10am and we have organized a pool. I hope everybody gets a shot at this and please forgive us if we couldn't include everybody. The space is limited. The seats around the table are about 36 and then we have seats for the advisors of each group. You'll see that each delegation has a group of principals and a group of advisors who will be with them in the room during the session. We also have a space for the countries who have requested accreditation. They will be present at the opening session. The list that I read out earlier will be present during the opening session. We will have space which I hope will be satisfactory space for photographers at the ground level, and there's the balcony level where we will have space for television cameras. I hope we have a few print journalists as well invited to the pool, I expect that we do. Now the opening session will begin with a speech by the German Foreign Minister, Mr Fischer, followed by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Afghanistan, Lakhdar Brahimi, and there may or may not be a statement from the Afghan side. We're not sure, we're waiting for all of them to get together and decide. The opening session will then adjourn and we will give time for you guys to leave the hall and then the serious work will start, in a plenary to start with and then they're going to break up into four groups. These four groups will represent the four Afghan groups present but then they will also be conducting bilaterals between themselves, and Mr Brahimi and Mr Vendrell, who is his deputy, will be shuttling back and forth between the groups in an effort to reach a consensus on the issues on the table. Once a consensus is reached they go to a plenary and formalise it. That roughly is the shape of things to come over the next few days, and now I would be happy to take any of your questions.

Yes, Madam, please.

Question: A question from the Los Angeles Times. What exactly have you asked the delegates to agree on, what do they have to have agreement on to go to this plenary level?

Answer: Are you asking what they have to agree on before they come to the meeting?

Question: No, you said once they have an agreement between these four groups it will go to a plenary level. What do they have to agree on? Is it the exact list of people who will be in this Transition Council?

Answer: I see, yes. Well, as I indicated yesterday, roughly speaking the agenda will deal with the question of a transitional administration in Afghanistan. You may find that the terms that I am using are going to change over the next few days from transitional to interim, or from administration to authority. It's all academic really, it depends what the Afghans want, so let's stick with transitional administration for the moment. Yes, a provisional list of members of a transitional administration, to start with. The head of that administration. The time period during which that administration will run the country, leading to a Loya Jirga. The time period, thereafter, although what we are dealing with here is the period immediately after this conference and up until a time to be determined, which could be next spring for example. We need to get a transitional authority in the country as soon as possible. All the parties agree that this is imperative, that speed is of the essence. We can't spend a lot of time on this. It has to be accomplished as soon as possible, that is one of the main items. The second item that we will be discussing and is of paramount importance is security. Under security, as you know, there are several suggestions which we can go into in a minute.

Question: I am from the German news television ntv. Could you elaborate a little on the bilaterals which Mr Brahimi had today with the Afghans and the bilaterals amongst themselves?

Answer: Certainly. He met with members of both the Cyprus group and the Rome group and discussed with them the proceedings of the conference. He was of course very grateful that they had come. They spoke about the agenda. Let me once again make this very clear. The United Nations proposes and the Afghans decide what they want to do. We are not forming a government for the people of Afghanistan. The Afghans are forming a government for the people of Afghanistan. They have the first and last word. So what he is doing is discussing a format with them. We are trying to help them along the way. He has made a few suggestions and they are taking these suggestions on board and we hope they will agree and adopt the agenda before tomorrow, and I'll have that for you I hope early tomorrow morning when the United Front arrives because we really need to consult with them before we print anything. So the bilaterals discussed the agenda, they discussed the proceedings of the conference, they spoke about how long we intend to be here, how soon we need to do this, and Mr Brahimi has stressed on the fact that speed is of the essence, that we need to move extremely fast and all the parties he has spoken to thus far have agreed that time is very important.

Yes, sir, the gentleman.

Question: (inaudible about Pashtun representation at the talks)

Answer: This is not a meeting of ethnic groups, this is a meeting of political groups who represent the people of Afghanistan. As far as we can, this is the best we could do at this stage but it's only a first step on a very long road to achieving the ultimate goal of a fully representative, broad-based multi-ethnic government. There are 20 or 30 ethnic groups and tribes, and sub-tribes would go into the thousands. It's going to take a little time to have a fully representative group. This is the best we could do at the moment.

Question: You describe the talks as Mr Brahimi shuttling between people. Is this the kind of all-proximity talks that the UN used to hold in the past, and will the plenary session then just announce the decision, or will there be a real discussion between the groups. That's one question. The second is are you satisfied with the seniority of the United Front delegation, are you satisfied that it's senior enough to be able to take important decisions here?

Answer: Proximity talks imply that the parties don't meet and talk, these parties are meeting and talking. We were trying to create an atmosphere that's conducive to decision-making, so while the parties will have their own working rooms and Brahimi and Vendrell and their staff will be shuttling back and forth, the parties will also be meeting in each others' rooms. And we will have a general discussion at the plenary as I said on the first day. On the question of seniority, we are very pleased with the groups that have arrived so far and the groups that are arriving tonight, and again let me stress that we did not select these groups, these groups were chosen by the political parties and the leaders themselves. We have not imposed anything and do not intend to impose anything on Afghanistan. They have chosen these participants and we are happy if they are happy.

Question: Are there irritations today among the members of the four delegations and maybe the UN representatives here as well that tomorrow the talks on Afghanistan should start and today you have US troops sent into the Kandahar region, ground troops?

Answer: Irritation is not a word I would use, we've all been concerned about the fighting in Afghanistan for many years - you know it's been over 22 years. The events that are happening on the ground now justify even more what we're doing here today. It underlines the urgency of these talks and how important it is for us to reach a political consensus among the political parties as soon as possible.

Question: If irritation is not the word then what is the word?

Answer: I can think of a few, but I'll just limit myself to the fact that the members of the UN delegation and the Afghan delegations are monitoring events closely.

Question: Could you elaborate on security and exactly what does that entail, does it entail a multi-lateral force or what are the options. The second question was on the fall of Kandahar, now that it has fallen who will represent them?

Answer: On the question of security, I think you've all seen, all those of you who have been following the agenda closely, the report submitted by Mr Brahimi to the Council on the 13<sup>th</sup> of November, which includes a five-point plan. Under security there are three options, the first option is an all-Afghan force, the second option is a multi-lateral force and the third option was a peacekeeping force. He immediately went on to dismiss the third option, because the terrain and the situation does not lend itself to a classic peacekeeping operation where there's no peace to keep. The first option is one that is going to be difficult to achieve in the few weeks to come when we really need to have law and order and peace and security, especially in the capital Kabul, to allow this new interim administration that we're trying to help the Afghans form here in Bonn to function. So, the second alternative is the one that seems most viable now, and that is a multi-lateral force with a UN mandate, a multi-national force with a mandate from the Security Council.

On the other half of your question, I will just say that the four parties coming to the table today are the best we could do under the circumstances. We intend to open this meeting tomorrow, and to try and get a consensus as soon as possible. We have four groups coming to the table today, if we can turn this group into one group then that will be a success in itself. Then that group could go back to Kabul and will need to reach out to other groups, both youth and women and trade unions and professionals in Afghanistan to form a broader based government.

Question: You have been stressing that you are not forcing anything on the Afghans, what is plan B. What if they do not accept any of the advice and the help and the assistance and if what prevailed over the last two decades happens again here – what's plan B.

Answer: Well, all I can say is that this is a golden opportunity for the people of Afghanistan, when the attention of the world is focussed on them; that there are huge commitments in terms of aid, both financial and technical aid, waiting to pour into the country; that this is a heavy burden on the shoulders of the political leaders of Afghanistan who are coming to the table today, that they should shoulder their responsibilities and turn around the situation, because the people of Afghanistan have been disappointed in the past and we certainly hope they won't be disappointed again.

Question: In other words there isn't a plan B?

Answer: I wouldn't say there isn't a plan B, I would say that the UN and the team who are working on Afghanistan would be very concerned if this opportunity slips by without an agreement, but we are constantly thinking of ways to overcome difficulties and disagreements. I don't want to give you any more platitudes, except to say we are trying to get a consensus in Bonn. If we fail, then the leaders who came to the table in Bonn would have to shoulder their responsibilities, and the international community, the international organizations, the UN system as a whole that is standing by to help the people of Afghanistan rebuild their institutions and their economy are going to be very disappointed.

Question: The United Front seems to reject a multi-national force. Do you detect any change in their position?

Answer: We will wait until they come tonight and talk to them about it and see what their position is over the next few days. We certainly hope that they accept that some formula must be reached that is acceptable to them and to all the other parties. And the one that I indicated earlier, a multi-national force with a UN mandate seems the most appropriate but it is entirely up to them to accept or refuse it. They can even choose the structure of the force and the composition of the force, so if as some suggestions have been it would be a mostly Muslim force then that is one option, or a force that is mixed with Muslim and non-Muslim troops would be another, but we are going to try our best to find a formula that's acceptable to all of them.

Question: The Rome group seems to think of this interim government as some 120-man council. How are you going to bridge the gap between a 120-man supreme council and an interim government that can be efficient?

Answer: I think there is some confusion here between the transitional administration and the transitional council, or the provisional council. There are two bodies that we are talking about here: there is a provisional administration, a cabinet and what you could liken to a parliament. And we're talking about both, but which one they will be able to form first is on the table, is a matter for discussion. It can be the interim administration, the interim authority first, which will be a reasonable number of cabinet members, 20 or 25, and they will simultaneously be talking about a provisional council of a larger group, 100 or 200 or 150 or whatever the numbers are, and all these numbers, we're drawing them out of a hat at the moment, but it will be a large group that forms the provisional council.

Question: Can I ask about the role of some of the foreign nations? Are they actually in the room during the talks, are they mulling around the hallway, what is the role of these foreign delegates that will be here as well.

Answer: We are very happy that our Member States have shown an interest and are going to be here with us. It is always good to talk to our Member States. They will have access to the building, they can contact members of the delegations, and that's about it really. They will be present at the opening ceremony, but not at the actual talks themselves, the talks are 100% Afghani representation and the United Nations. But of course they play an important role as they always have done, especially the '6 plus 2' who will have diplomatic representatives here.

Question: Are the talks on the transitional government and the talks on security separate, in the sense that could there be an agreement on some sort of multi-national force and that force starts to be put in place before there's an

agreement on a multi-national force. Second question: What figures are you working with as far as the composition of the Afghan population? I've seen figures on the Pashtuns ranging from 60% down to 35%

Answer: That's a very good question actually, on figures. Nobody has accurate figures. The last census of the population of Afghanistan was in 1978 and that was not accurate either. What I'm trying to say is we don't have accurate numbers, the number of 25 million is the one we have before us at the moment of the population of Afghanistan. Again the Pashtun are the largest ethnic minority, there is no doubt about that, but is it 40, is it 45, is it 48, we have no way of saying. And we hope that we will have an interim administration as soon as possible so that within the next stage we can have a real census of the population of Afghanistan and this will come during the recovery period and the reconstruction period and the rehabilitation period when we are rebuilding the institutions and the economy. Regarding the second half of your question, the two items are on the agenda, the two items will be discussed in an order, perhaps the interim administration first and the security second, or security first and the interim administration second, and we'll try to reach agreement on one and then move on the other. But we're not going to link the two in terms of the progress of the conference.

Question: Do I understand you right in thinking that the UN will say to the delegates that international involvement is conditional on them accepting a multi-national force of their choice within reasonable grounds? But that's the only element on which we as outsiders will say to the Afghans you are not going to get aid or diplomatic support until we can guarantee the security of staff on our aid programmes etc. Am I right in thinking that?

Answer: I think that's a very good point, but I think the Afghan parties themselves will realise that security is an important issue for international involvement in Afghanistan, security of staff and of the Afghans themselves first and foremost in the days and weeks to come. Securing Kabul and the other regions in Afghanistan is going to be a tremendous responsibility, so I think they will see the advantage of having the assistance of a multi-national force in the first few stages, because without peace there will be no development, without peace there will be no investment, so the two are linked.

Question: Who will represent the Pashtuns in the conference, officially, the people who were before Taliban. And second why is there no representative of the Islamic Conference present, or is Iran attending as a member of the Islamic Conference?

Answer: On the first question, as I said earlier, this is not a conference of ethnic groups, but the Pashtuns are represented, in more than one delegation there are members who are Pashtuns. The second question, I would ask you to ask the Islamic Conference, as simple as that, but Iran is here, as you said.

Question: You made the point that the composition of the conference, the four groups that you've got here is the best that you could possibly do. There's been some criticism that there haven't been specifically for example groups representing women, who were oppressed in Iran, I beg your pardon in Afghanistan. Has it been put to the existing four groups that perhaps there should be a group representing women or professionals, the various groups that you mentioned?

Answer: Can I say first that there are women in some of the delegations, so we have suggested to them some time ago as they were considering the formation of their delegations that it would be a good idea to have women representatives and to make it as representative as possible, so it's a very good thing that the two largest groups in fact have women members. On the other question of other participants, we've left it to the Afghans themselves, we have said make it as broad-based as you can, as representative as you can and we'll work with what you've got. This is what we've got for the time being and we're happy to work with it.

Question: You mentioned security as an obvious condition before aid could flow or investment could flow. Have you as the UN actually set out any other conditions before aid for reconstruction could begin?

Answer: The UN has made no conditions, we don't intend to impose any conditions on the Afghans. It's their choice. They know what the UN has to offer and what the international community has to offer. It's their choice.

Question: My question is on this month of Ramadan. Are you taking that into consideration?

Answer: Yes, definitely. Many of the participants if not all will be fasting, so I don't think we'll have water on the tables. The German government has very kindly arranged this for us, I must stress here, that what the German authorities have done to make this work is quite formidable, not just on the press side but on the organization side. The facility is remarkable and all the conditions they have created for this conference to be a success are quite remarkable and we are very grateful to them and we really don't want to abuse their hospitality and stay longer than we should to get an agreement. But they are going to serve an evening meal at sunset and meals will be available late in the evening for those who need to eat late in the evening before they go to bed. There's also a room set aside for prayers. Thank you for that question.

Question: But in Ramadan if you are travelling you don't have to fast.

Answer: Thank you, we have an expert here who says you don't have to fast if you are travelling. Well, there are different interpretations of that, when you travel you don't fast, but when you arrive what do you do?

Question: Is Mr Brahimi fasting?

Answer: Yes Mr Brahimi is fasting. And I won't go further than that so don't get me into trouble.

Question: What role is there for the '6 plus 2'?

Answer: The '6 plus 2' have played a very important role in the run-up to these talks, they have played a very important role since the Afghan question re-gained international stature and they will continue to play a very important part.

This is a conference of the Afghan parties, there are members of the '6 plus 2' present, and they will have access to the building and can contact the delegates, but this is an all-Afghan conference, sponsored by the UN.

Question: From your soundings, can you say whether it's possible that Zahir Shah might be a candidate for the head of the interim administration. And also, what is the legal position of the administration going to be, will it displace Rabbani in the seat of the UN.

Answer: As you all know the former King is quite popular in Afghanistan and his name has been mentioned numerous times as a candidate, and a very viable candidate, for the eventual head of whatever structure the Afghans will agree to. The legal status of the interim administration is one that will be defined as we go along. Yes, eventually the interim administration will have to replace any existing administration, but through the various systems that are going to be established, and when we say a transitional authority and a provisional council these will all be studying the various, creating the various institutions that make a state, that can govern a state and that these institutions are legal as well as practical and other kinds of institutions. So, between the interim and the provisional, there will be legal institutions set up and eventually when the provisional becomes permanent that will replace any existing administration.

Question: Concerning the peacekeeping force, Javier Solana has suggested that the troop be formed by Muslim countries. Have you any proposal by Muslim countries for that?

Answer: The proposal is on the table and it is up to the Afghans to decide what kind of force they want. We are proposing ideas and it is up to them to accept. This is one of the ideas. Have any Muslim countries come forward – this is not the time for them to come forward. Yes, there have been some suggestions and I know that Mr Solana has visited a number of countries, but until such time as the proposal and the recommendation is submitted by Mr Brahimi to the Security Council and the Security Council decides to mandate such a force, there is no need to go to individual countries. We are sounding them out informally, but the invitation to participate in a multi-national force will come when the Security Council issues a resolution.

Question: Will the UN have separate talks about multi-national forces with the foreign representatives up there. And also will the foreign representatives meet with Afghan delegates about these issues on a regular basis?

Answer: The UN at Petersberg, on Petersberg, will be talking with the Afghans about the agenda. It's a bit premature to talk about the multi-national force with the countries who are present at this time, but we will certainly take it up at a later time if the Security Council decides to do so. The diplomatic representatives of the countries accredited to the talks will have the opportunity, if they want to, to talk to the delegates outside the conference.

Question: Are you sure that the leaders of the four groups that are not here, e.g the former King, President Rabbani, will accept the result of the meeting. Secondly, did I get it right that you will go back to plenary discussion at a time where you have any kind of list of any body, of a council or of another body.

Answer: The answer is yes to both questions.

[Can I just do some housekeeping here: Are you happy with this time of 2 p.m. Then we'll do 2 p.m. and if events merit a briefing after 2 p.m. then we'll do another one at about 6 or 7. If you'd like a readout of the meeting of the evening, do you want me to come down at midnight, it won't be over by 10. I can come down to this briefing room if you like and whoever's here will get the benefit of a briefing, or we'll keep it till 2 next day. OK, we'll see how late this goes on for, if it's too late then we won't be able to do this. I will consult with my German friends who are organizing this and we will make an announcement later on.]

Thank you all very much.

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