

Königswinter, 29 November 2001

PRESS BRIEFING BY YUNUS QANOONI, HEAD OF THE UNITED FRONT DELEGATION

Following is a near-verbatim transcript of the English interpretation of today's briefing at 3.30 pm Bonn time by Mr Yunus Qanooni, head of the United Front delegation:

Many thanks to the journalists, the reporters and their friends. I'm here today to clarify a few things and make corrections to a misunderstanding that has occurred since yesterday. Today, with a bit of further discussion that we have had following from yesterday, we have had more progress in our talks about Afghanistan. Today I am more optimistic than yesterday about a peaceful solution. We have seen more common ground among the different delegations. I hope that in the next couple of days that remain of the conference we will come to a concrete agreement, which will respond to the aspirations of the people in bringing about peace in our country. Yesterday one of the main points that were raised in the questions that came from the floor was related to the issue of the international force in Afghanistan. We clarified our position yesterday and we said that the issue of the deployment of foreign international forces is debatable within a peace package. What we said was that at the moment because there is peace in Afghanistan and security we do not see reasons for the deployment of the international forces. The intention was not to oppose the deployment of foreign troops to Afghanistan. We aren't yet in a transitional period. At the moment the United Front is in control of most of the country.

Our official position is that once there is a transitional mechanism for Afghanistan established, and if that evolves, due to reasons that require or necessitate the presence of international peacekeeping force, then we will go with that. We will not oppose that.

We will be proud to be the champions of peace for our people and to make sure that transition to a peaceful Afghanistan takes place. We will be proud to be the champions of reconstruction in Afghanistan and the champions of peace. Therefore, any initiative that will guarantee peace and security in our country, we will support that. I hope that the misunderstanding that took place yesterday will not happen again and that has been resolved now.

Question: So my understanding is that you do agree now to a presence of an international security force. Do you insist on Muslim forces for this international force, or could it also be troops from different western countries, for example including Germany?

Answer: We don't have any particular emphasis in the composition of nationality of the foreign forces in Afghanistan.

What's important for us is the establishment of decent security. However, the people of Afghanistan will prefer it if the international forces come from Islamic countries.

Question: (Start inaudible.) Do you expect that you will be able to find the names of the interim administration before you leave here?

Answer: We are interested that the interim mechanism, i.e. the interim administration, should be formed as soon as possible. However, the formulation of such a mechanism, an interim administration, requires a systematic approach, a rational and logical approach, so that any possible faults that will result into problems later on will be predicted and solved.

In our efforts to come up with that administration now, because we are discussing it, our efforts will be focused and we would prefer that to happen here.

Question: Mentioning peacekeeping forces, could you detail whether it should be peacekeeping or peace-enforcing forces?

Answer: I think that Afghans themselves, or the peace-enforcing people, they should do that. However, peacekeeping should involve international forces.

Question: In the press conference that took place earlier here Mr Fawzi; the Spokesman for the UN said that the two main delegations, the Rome process and the United Front, are close to an agreement on the interim council and administration. Does that agreement involve an agreement in principle about how many people should participate from each side, or does that go as far as nominating individuals for those two institutions, and if that is the case then who will take part from each side?

Answer: We have agreed with the other delegations, the Rome process as well as the others, that we will form the Supreme Interim Council. There is agreement also about the interim administration. However, in relation to particular individuals to take part, no such nominations have been agreed yet.

Question: The other subject that came up a number of times yesterday was the King, and I wonder if you have any further elaboration today on how you see his role in the new administration?

Answer: As I said yesterday and I'm saying again that the former King is an important national and political figure in Afghanistan and he can play an important role in ensuring national unity and political integrity of the country.

Question: Some members of your delegation have said that there are differences within the delegation between the Hazaras and Uzbeks and the Tajiks on the other hand on the issue of peacekeeping forces, with the Tajiks being opposed to that. Is that the case and is that a problem in you agreeing to this peacekeeping force?

Answer: I am a member of the delegation and I am a Tajik. And as I said, I declared my position and that is that, whenever it is required and if it is necessary then we are not opposed to the deployment of international forces. Very fortunately there is no disagreement among our delegation and we are dealing with issues together, jointly.

Question: Mr Qanooni, during the days that you have been here, Mr Rabbani has left Afghanistan for the first time. Yesterday he was in Dubai, but since yesterday he left Dubai, but we don't know which country he has travelled to. Can you just clarify, can you comment on reports that Burhanuddin Rabbani has either gone to Saudi Arabia or to Pakistan, and that he's travelling around the region now to seek support from the regional countries in case the Northern Alliance doesn't reach agreement here, and the Northern Alliance then needs to install a government of its own backed by some of the countries surrounding Afghanistan?

Answer: Professor Rabbani, the head of the Islamic State of Afghanistan travelled to Dubai yesterday, but after that he went to Kabul and today he is in Kabul back. He hasn't gone either to Saudi Arabia or Pakistan. Professor Rabbani, in his first press conference after returning to Kabul, indicated firmly that he is prepared to transfer power to a transitional mechanism. And the official position of the United Front is that we fully support the efforts of the United Nations in order to bring about such a transitional mechanism.

Question: Mr Dostum yesterday expressed regret that he is not well enough represented at this conference. First of all, do you agree with his statement; and second do you think that if he is not feeling well represented that this might be a cause of danger in the future?

Answer: There was a misunderstanding about the representation from General Dostum in the delegation. There was some discussion about this yesterday, that issue was resolved, the delegation took part in the discussions, and now there isn't any issue any longer about that.

Last question.

Question: The message that we took from yesterday's press conference was very different from the one that we've taken from this afternoon's press conference. Can you tell us what has changed in the past 24 hours to change that message?

Answer: I think since yesterday there is no change, at least that I see, in our position. The only thing was that the message I wanted to get across yesterday was actually distorted in the translation, and I wanted to correct that today.

Question: Although you did not yet agree yet on name, I would like to know whom according to your opinion should preside over the interim government. Is it Mr Rabbani, do you have another name? Which name do you propose? And secondly, on the issue of the deployment of international forces: will you be ready to open the country as such, or you consider that the presence of the international forces should be restricted to areas or cities like Kabul, Kandahar, Kundus or specific roads?

Answer: On the question of personalities and who should take part and also lead any of the institutions, we leave this choice to the people of Afghanistan. As far as the question of the international force is concerned, I also expect that they will control borders of Afghanistan in order to make sure that it is not violated by neighbouring countries, which could stabilize peace and security.

Last question please.

Question: You said that yesterday's message got distorted in the translation. Is that why we have another translator here on stage today?

Answer: That's one of the reasons. I hope that there won't be a third translator tomorrow.

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