



UNITED NATIONS TALKS ON AFGHANISTAN

Note for Correspondents

27 November 2001

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

MESSAGE TO THE MEETING OF AFGHAN LEADERS

Bonn, 27 November, 2001

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.

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