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CONFERENCE OF FOREIGN MINISTERS
Rebuilding Afghanistan: Peace and Stability
Petersberg, 2 December 2002

Press Conference by

Mr. Joschka Fischer, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Germany,
Mr. Hamid Karzai, President of Afghanistan,
Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan,
and
Mr. Javier Solana, High Representative of the European Union for Common Foreign and Security Policy

Following is a near-verbatim transcript of a press conference held at the conclusion of the Conference of Foreign Ministers on "Rebuilding Afghanistan: Peace and Stability" at Petersberg on 2 December 2002:

Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer: (Translation from German) We have organized this conference, because one year after the original Petersberg Conference and the start of the reconstruction process in Afghanistan, we thought it was urgently necessary to do so in the face of international developments. We thought it is important for the international community to remain fully committed to the reconstruction process of Afghanistan.

The crisis in that country, the many years of tragedy, from occupation and civil war in Afghanistan to the terror dictatorship of the Taliban, the development of what became fruitful soil for international terrorism. All these events made very clear that the issue of war and peace in Afghanistan is not merely a question concerning the Afghan people. It is rather a question which will impact the whole neighbouring region and is and was also important as the international community had to see on the 11th of September 2001, it has an impact on peace and stability globally.

The consequences of that meant that there was an intervention of the international community in Afghanistan. This spilled the end of terror and war and the beginning of reconstruction. A lot was achieved in this passed few years but there is still a lot to be done and it was our idea to turn the intention of the international community and the international public on that. This was the main task of our conference. We had a very extensive and I think also a very good and comprehensive discussion on all relevant aspects. You will find these discussions reflected in the final communiqué, which we passed a moment ago. You will find in that all the relevant aspects.

It is however of particular importance to say that today President Karzai has signed a decree on the establishment of an Afghan National Army. This Afghan National Army is not only important to restore security within Afghanistan. It is also important in order to ensure the coherence and territorial integrity of the country. It is an important and very significant signal that President Karzai has signed this decree today here on Petersberg. Another decree I would like to mention in this context, Ladies and Gentlemen, concerns the preparation for a declaration, which will be passed on the 22 December in Kabul on the occasion of another meeting dealing with the strengthening of regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations in the region.

That is so important because obviously the neighbouring countries of Afghanistan are and were also very important factors for the tragedy, which happened in that country. And against this backdrop a question of good neighbourly relations, assurances and mutual cooperation and of constructive developments of a joint regional future are matters of great importance.

Those countries represented here today made clear that when it comes to setting up security systems, and here Germany is going to play a comprehensive role in the establishment of a police force quite apart from obviously the fact that together with our Dutch friends we are going to take over lead function in ISAF, we are all going to do a lot when it comes to infrastructure projects, building roads, transport infrastructure in general, but also when it comes to the civilian structure, setting up of educational institutions for example. All these were matters emphasized in the speeches and statements given by the countries represented here today. More commitments were made.

What is also very important - and that has already become tradition here at the Petersberg meetings - because like last year the civil society representatives, NGOs, had a meeting on the eve of our conference looking at the constitutional process, human rights, rights of women and they also gave their report at our conference today that certainly also sent out an important signal. All together, we think that this conference constitutes a very important contribution and a very successful completion of this conference is a major step towards the further reconstruction work in Afghanistan. That is what we have committed ourselves to do and that is the foundation stone, that is the spirit of what a Petersberg Conference is all about. In this spirit I would like to thank you all and give the floor to President Karzai.

President Hamid Karzai: Thank you very much. My friend, Vice Chancellor and Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, Excellency Brahimi, Excellency Solana, today's event, once again reminded us of the friendship of the people and Government of Germany with the Afghans and of the commitment and friendship of all those countries which have participated in the conference today, of the support for Afghanistan in reconstruction and security, and strengthening of peace in building governmental institutions. Today indeed we announced the decree on the National Afghan Army. We also saw today the agreement by our neighbours for the Kabul Declaration to be done later in December. We also today saw a stronger commitment from the countries that participated and from Germany in carrying on the work in ISAF and taking in a few months time the leadership of ISAF together with the Netherlands.

Afghanistan has gone a long way since last year, from tyranny, from oppression, from hopelessness to freedom, to constitutionalism and to peace and economic prosperity. We are trying our best to meet the deadlines set for us. We hope to have a constitution by the end of the agreements of our term, and we hope to have elections soon afterwards so that the Afghan people can elect their Governments in the future. The commissions necessary for all these jobs have been set up and they are working.

We are grateful that today the Bonn conference once again focused attention on Afghanistan. If the conference last year brought us peace, the conference this year brought us renewed attention and the declaration to be signed in Kabul by our neighbours, more help for the

reconstruction of Afghanistan, more understanding of the needs of the Afghan people and help with regard to the National Army of Afghanistan. As you already know, Germany is helping with the national police of Afghanistan and today I mentioned to Chancellor Schroeder that Afghanistan would like to have a stronger partnership from Germany with regard to the whole spectrum of work in the Ministry of Interior in Afghanistan. Not only the training of the police but the transformation and reform of the Ministry of the Interior is what we have in mind in cooperation with Germany. I am grateful again for Germany, for Mr. Fischer, for all of the friends here who participated here today, for pledging for Afghanistan who I am sure will continue to see to the progress and stability in peace of the Afghan people.

On our behalf, the Afghan people, I assure you, Ladies and Gentlemen, are going to be the best partners in building the kind of peace and stability and institutionalize the reconstruction of Afghanistan that will be good for us, good for the region and good for the overall security and peace in the world.

Something else I must mention to you here, is the question of drugs. Afghanistan is extremely strongly committed to the eradication of drugs. Afghanistan has suffered as a result of it. In our opinion - and we strongly believe that - drugs money, terrorism and extremism go hand in hand. We cannot have sustained peace in Afghanistan unless we have totally and completely eradicated drugs and the trade of it and the cultivation of it. And we seek international assistance in that regard. Thank you very much.

Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan: It is really an honour to be back in Bonn. Certainly there is much less tension this year than there was last year. Our time in Bonn this year has been shorter than it was last year. But I think the results this year have been just as important for Afghanistan as the results were last year. I see the symbolism, as the Secretary-General said in his message this morning, of this meeting as a recognition of the progress that has been made, and a recommitment of the friends of Afghanistan to continue to provide the support that the peace process started in Bonn still requires from the international community. Germany has taken the lead last year in providing the venue for the work to start the process. They are taking the lead again this year in mobilising, or re-mobilising, the support and we are really very grateful to them.

This is a message also to all those, whoever they may be, inside Afghanistan and outside Afghanistan, who see their interest in the continuation of the problem rather than in its solution, that they had better reconsider their position and accept that there is much more to gain in the long term for everybody from peace than from conflict. There is every reason, I think, for the people of Afghanistan to be optimistic, and I think I would like to join the President in thanking everybody who was here today for this strong message of hope they are sending to the people of Afghanistan. Thank you very much.

Mr. Javier Solana, High Representative of the European Union: Thank you very much. Very briefly, on behalf of the European Union, first of all thank you very much Joschka Fischer, my friend, for having invited us for I don't know how many times to Petersberg. Whenever we come to Petersberg, we always find something positive in the way of peace or stabilisation in the world. We remembered at lunch that we were also meeting here about Kosovo not long ago. Last year was about Afghanistan; today is another push in the way of helping Afghanistan in the commitment of the European Union.

So the message from here to the citizens of Afghanistan, on behalf of the European Union, should be: hope things are going to go right, and we are going to continue being committed. We are, as you know, the most important group of countries and institutions committed, as donors, to the Afghanistan people and Afghanistan Government, and we would continue to do so. We

are not going to abandon Afghanistan until the process that has been described by President Karzai is over. A stable Afghanistan, with stable institutions, with the possibility of reconstruction, and with the hope to have a future to be a country which will be a source of stability in the region. Not only the countries of the region will help Afghanistan, but Afghanistan would help the countries of the region to be more stable.

I would also like to say that, as it has not been mentioned, the peacekeeping force, which has been deployed in Kabul, from the very beginning, it has been mainly a European force. And as you know very well, beginning 1 January, the countries that will be leading that force will be Germany and the Netherlands, again two European countries. So I think that Europeans are doing their utmost they can to help the people of Afghanistan, to give them a future, to give to the region also the stability they deserve. Mr. President, you have said very important things today, you have come here with a decree signed which is very important for the stability and the security of your country. Be sure that we will bear with you until your country has what it deserves: peace, stability, and prosperity.

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Question: (Reuters) President Karzai, can you give us an overview on the situation in combating terrorism and efforts to root out Al-Qaida members? Can you give us a sense of how many Al-Qaida members are there? How are efforts going in fighting Mullah Omar and his family?

President Karzai: Well, it is very difficult to tell you how many are there. But I can tell you that from what we began last year to today, terrorism in the form of the Government that it was last year in the form of the military force, didn't exist two months after the operation that began around October. Today Afghanistan is free of such kind of force. Today Afghanistan has a Government elected by the representatives at the Loya Jirga. Terrorism still goes around in that part of the world and, indeed in other parts of the world, in the form of individuals and groups. Our commitment to fight them is strongly there. We will continue to look, we will continue to search (for) them, as a matter of fact, we were capable of arresting some people about four days ago, closely related to the leadership of the Taliban in south-western Afghanistan. And we may come across such arrests again in the future if they come our way. In short, our commitment to continue to look for them is very strong. We have not yet found Mullah Omar, we have evidence and information that he is alive and that he is around that part of the world. That is what I can say at this point.

Question: Can you specify these arrests?

President Karzai: There are some individuals who are close to the Taliban leader Mullah Omar, who are trying to go around and contact some of their members. Our security forces spotted them and arrested them. I can't give you names.

Question (in German), on whether Mr. Karzai is in favour of expansion of ISAF, and on how much of the aid pledged actually reached Kabul.

President Karzai: The ISAF mandate has been extended for one more year by the Security Council, which is the right decision. The ISAF command will be taken over by Germany and the Netherlands in a few months, which is very good. If you are talking of the expansion of ISAF operations to other parts of the country, I have not discussed that in this meeting today, nor have I discussed it in our bilateral talks with the German Government.

Question: (New York Times): President Karzai, two questions on the decree you signed today. One is, given the history of the Mujaheddin leaders and the war lords, to saying they will co-operate and then going off in their own directions, what confidence can you give the world that

this decree will stick and that these various regional leaders will go along with your plans; and then secondly, how do you plan to finance the army, how much do you figure it might cost and where would the money come from?

President Karzai: Good question! (Laughter.) The formation of the Afghan National Army, the new Afghan army is intended to give Afghanistan an efficient, mobile, well-paid armed forces, not exceeding 70,000 troops and officers altogether. The regional elements and war lords that you referred to, the people that are associated with the Afghan army that have appointments signed by the Minister of Defence, will have to remain committed by the decisions of the leadership of the Ministry of Defence, and the leadership of the country. So there is no question there. For example, a certain core commander, in a certain part of the country, if he was asked to go away to another part, or to reduce the strength of his forces he cannot say, "No". Those who are outside of the Ministry of Defence, who consider themselves independent, are declared illegal, from the signing of this document onwards and there are a very few of them. So, there is neither a compromise nor room for saying yes or no to anybody.

The finances of the national army of Afghanistan, at this point the majority part of that is coming from the United States, and also the UK is helping in. And a lot of our countries, over 44 countries, are helping, with either monetary assistance or assistance in equipment. And weapons. Especially small arms. That's what we have for now.

Question (in German) on the demobilisation of the army in Afghanistan to other parts of the country, how soon, and whether it is proposed to sell back weapons to other countries:

President Karzai: The maximum time given for the total centralisation and effective control of the Ministry of Defence of all forces, is one year. And all the weapons that belong to various groups, belong to the Afghan Army. All the weapons, all the heavy weapons, will have to be delivered to the new national army of Afghanistan. By the way, am I the only bad guy in this group of four that you keep asking me questions, ask others, too?!

Question (translated from German) The German Government has strictly refused to deploy ISAF troops outside of Kabul because of the greater risk involved. If we cannot pacify the country as such, the peace process will stop half way. Can you imagine that Germany, which will try somehow to contribute to the National Army, for example with special new models?

Foreign Minister Fischer (translation from German): Well I think that we will make our contribution in a variety of different ways. Today's discussion, without, of course, telling you any secrets, the discussions we had, particularly the talk between President Karzai and the Chancellor of Germany, has made very clear that the Afghan friends do wish Germany to provide more comprehensive help when it comes to an establishment of internal security - Ministry of the Interior, police force in various aspects, police work, also covering regional police forces, was mentioned. I think it is very important that individual countries helping Afghanistan, all concentrate on certain focal points. We have heard a moment ago that the United States, but also to a lesser extent the UK, as well as France, are the ones looking into the army side of things. Other countries are focusing on the judiciary. Yet other countries, the Swedes, the Japanese, for example, are focusing on the transport infrastructure. I think that is a very sensible division of labour, if you like, and we should stick to that. But of course, within the framework of ISAF there are diverse contacts with the army as well, and obviously we will use these contacts to contribute all we can, but I don't think that we are going to have a new focus for our attention, that would overtax us, and nor would it be very sensible because we have already got a focus.

Question (in German): Mr. Foreign Minister, do you very clearly see a further, or longer-term commitment of German soldiers in Afghanistan then? Or do you expect German soldiers to help the establishment of an Afghan national army?

Foreign Minister Fischer (translation from German): I would say that our obligation, though not always of a scale as we have now, is such that we hope that internal developments within Afghanistan will also help so that we do not have to maintain the commitment at the level we have now, but for the foreseeable future, I think, it is going to be very important for German and soldiers from other countries, who are already committing themselves in a risky area to ensuring peace and stability, will continue to do so. I was able myself to look at what they did. I think it is very important that, jointly with our partners, we fully commit ourselves and fulfil all the requirements.

But today and, above all, President Karzai's signing his decree on the Afghan National Army is a very important day. The setting up of an Afghan National Army, the idea of creating peace and stability for the sustainable future, but also, and this is very closely related, and if you know the situation in Afghanistan, you will see how true this is, it is very important to guarantee also the territorial integrity of the country. That is very important in Afghanistan, and that also means to ensure that the central government will be competent and will have authority in all the provinces in order to ensure stability throughout the country. These are three elements that we all need to consider when we today speak of setting up an Afghan National Army, which will initiate from the decree signed today. That was the very idea behind it all. Lakhdar Brahimi is going to be able to confirm that. One year ago, when we discussed the security elements and discussed what sort of security that should be given the size of the country, its history, the difficult geographical area. At the time we decided, quite rightly, to have a small international security element, and basically to try and promote the establishment of an Afghan army, and an Afghan police, that can then operate countrywide.

Question (translated from German): My name is Mustafa Dannish. I am a freelance journalist. My question goes to President Karzai. Even though I am a friend of Afghanistan, I don't share your optimism. I have been to your country 17 times, and one of these journeys now really sticks in my mind. 1993 I was a guest of Mr. Rabbani's government for a week, and when I was in the Arch Palace, I saw that the different groups of Mujahedin which formed one cabinet together, they all embraced each other, they all hugged each other, and their warriors, actually in that week were fighting each other in the streets of Kabul. And it's a 3-million-inhabitant city. Ten thousands of people there, and the city was destroyed. People were killed. You spoke of the glorious Mujahedin today, without saying at the same time that these very Mujahedin were the very ones who destroyed the city of Kabul, who cost ten thousands of lives, who caused hundreds of thousands of people to lose their lives. Without taking into consideration this history into consideration, I don't think you will manage to set up a truly democratic future. First you need to look at your own cabinet, the members of your cabinet as they are today. First you criticise what they have done with the past, then you can build a future. Thank you.

President Karzai: Was that a question? OK, all right, I would like to answer that. You were in Kabul at the wrong time in 1993. It's 2002, and at that time in Afghanistan, all the neighbours were interfering like hell. And Afghanistan had no means to stand on its own feet. Now we have the whole world community helping Afghanistan. We have ISAF there in Kabul, we have the allied forces, we have the tremendous will of the Afghan people not to experience exactly what you described. My optimism is because of the exact experience that all Afghans had that you had, now they have a chance not to fall back to the time of groups fighting each other, of neighbours interfering, of the world not paying attention. Coming to the Mujahedin, it's right that they fought, some of them, and they killed each other, and they hurt the Afghan people. But there were also Mujahedin, who are also still in our Government, some of them, who defended Afghanistan against the former Soviet Union. Afghanistan has lost more than 1.5 million people fighting for the liberation of Afghanistan. And they are all buried in Afghanistan. And as a consequence of that fight, that struggle, we had more than five million refugees all over the world, mostly in the neighbouring countries of Afghanistan. So that period of Afghan history, the fight for our independence, was legitimate and true, and the asking of the Afghan people. Now if

somebody makes a mistake, you don't wash away all that he has done. You may punish him, but you may not forget history. (Applause.)

Question: Could you give us some more details of the declaration to be signed on 22 December? The good neighbourly declaration. What are the specific points it will cover, and how do you deal with the sceptics, who a little like my previous questioner suggest it may just be a piece of paper, given the history of the bad neighbourly relations around Afghanistan.

President Karzai: First of all, why did Afghanistan go through the disastrous experience that it went through? Afghanistan was invaded by the former Soviet Union. Before that invasion Afghanistan was one of the most stable countries in that part of the world. It had foreign reserves exceeding 800 million dollars in the 1970s. It was self-sufficient in agriculture, the best producer of fruits in that part of the world, the biggest exporter of raisins in the world. Afghanistan suffered as a result of that invasion. The invasion gave an opportunity to the neighbours and others to intervene and to find a place in Afghanistan. The consequence of that was support to the various political groups that brought disaster to the Afghan people. The incident of September 11 refocused attention on Afghanistan in a different way, in a way to free the world and Afghanistan of menace there, of terrorism there. So now, the Afghan people have support from outside and the means within Afghanistan to make it good, and we have seen in the past that they have done it well. The neighbours of Afghanistan have also pledged. We will take their words as trustworthy, as good. We will proceed from there. And in the meantime we shall strengthen Afghanistan's national institutions to defend itself, towards its interests, and to protect the interests of its neighbours. As far as Afghanistan is concerned, Afghanistan will never be a source of trouble to any neighbour, nor will Afghanistan allow its soil to be used against any neighbour by somebody else. And that is the premise on which we based the Kabul Declaration. We are very optimistic that they will understand, that they have.

Question: (Financial Times Germany): President Karzai, I saw that you will be the Head of the new national army, may I ask you.....?

President Karzai: I will not be the Head of the army in an operational way. I will be like all other civilian governments, the President will be the overseer of the army.

Question (continued): So, this is not an attempt to take away this job from the Defence Ministry and reduce the influence of Marshall Fahim?

President Karzai: Oh, no, no, no, Ma'am. No, no, no, Ma'am, it's not like that. The President of the United States is the Commander-in-Chief. It doesn't mean that Mr. Rumsfeld cannot go about doing his job, exactly what we are doing here: To bring legal structures to the Afghan army and state.

Question (translated from German): In the preparation phase we always heard that even you, Mr. President, have said that international financial aid was fine, but you also needed more direct access of funds, so that you could pay, for example, the salaries of the people in the administration have the problem with teachers and university lecturers who are not getting enough money. Was that an issue today, and if so, what was decided?

President Karzai: Afghanistan does not want to be asking for help with regard to its own living expenses forever. We have sources that are not yet fully centralised. We have revenues. We have customs all over Afghanistan, and if we centralise all of the revenues and customs, Afghanistan will be able to live off its own money. We are trying to do that. Some progress has been made. More has to be done in this regard. An area where so far we have not been able to make significant progress is the question of central revenue collection. And that is on top of our agenda to achieve. Because Afghanistan does not want to be extending a hand for help all the time. We want to be over this in a year or two. But we already are doing well with the

national revenue system. Transportation money is coming to the Government, tax collection has somehow come to the Government, part of the custom collection has come to the Government, and we want to centralise all of that. I would consider that part of our activity as not so satisfactory.

Question: Mr. President, there should be no doubt that the political stability in Afghanistan and the democratisation of the Afghan society have many things in common, but the question is, which way you prefer to go. I mean, a concentration of political power in the long term, or delegating to the democratic organisation.

President Karzai: Definitely, a country where people will have the right to vote, where people will choose their government. Now whether that government should be presidential or parliamentary, or some other form of government, it is up to the Constitution to determine. The Constitutional Committee is working on that, they will be preparing their draft sometime, and the Loya Jirga will approve of it. Whatever form of government, whatever structure of administration Afghanistan will choose, has to be democratic, has to be chosen by the people of Afghanistan.

Thank you very much.

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