

Statement by Lakhdar Brahim, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan to the Annual Conference of the Afghanistan Support Group, 5 December 2001

Berlin, 5 December 2001

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Following is a near-verbatim transcript of today's statement by Mr. Lakhdar Brahim, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan:

Thank you very much indeed, Minister.

I owe you thanks for many, many things. Not least for allowing me to travel with you in great comfort and because I enjoyed the privilege of your company and the company of the Chancellor this morning at the ceremony which ended our Conference on Petersberg.

I owe you really in depths for allowing us to use the excellent facilities of Petersberg to hold this Conference and not only were we treated like Royals there, but the help we have received from our colleagues in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Germany have contributed very very much to the success we have achieved.

We are grateful to Germany and we are looking forward to a continued partnership with Germany, with Europe and with other countries that are interested in Afghanistan.

On what happened at Petersberg, I think that we were lucky, we achieved a measure of success we did not know until this morning - I think at 6.30 or 7 a.m. that we are going to get where we are now. And we are glad we are here. We realize very very much that the difficulties we have faced over the last 10 days are absolutely nothing compared to what lies ahead. -Mr. Sackett will not disagree with me, I am sure.

When - I don't know whether it was two days ago or three days ago, we had a very long night and I told them that I apologize for keeping them so late, one of the Afghani said: „This is only your first sleepless night“. I am looking forward to those sleepless nights, because if we do have them it means we are in business.

The agreement that was signed in Bonn which will be known as the „Bonn Agreement“, offers a chance, a glimmer of hope, for the people of Afghanistan, perhaps to start rebuilding their country that has been so fragmented for so long.

That was made possible by a tragedy, the tragedy of 11 September. It took that tragedy for the international community, for all of us to realize that even a far away country poor, destitute, fractious cannot be left alone to its own devices without effects for all of us.

The warning signs were many. The first time, I met the ForMin of Afghanistan in 1997, he told me that because of the conflict in Afghanistan there were one million guns in the wrong hands in the city of Karachi alone. Because of the conflict in Afghanistan, there were three million drug addicts in Pakistan. And when I went to Iran they told me the same thing. Much less guns, fortunately in Iran, but almost as many drug addicts. And when I went to London, I heard from the British authorities, that in the high streets of London 30% of the drugs that were sold came from Afghanistan. There is no way you can stop all this, except by the return of peace and stability in Afghanistan.

The return of peace and stability in Afghanistan is first and foremost a responsibility of the people of Afghanistan. But I think we can help.

And this group, the Afghanistan Support Group, has been carrying the flag of understanding and support for the people of Afghanistan for quite some years now. And I think we are all extremely grateful to all of you, for this interest and for the support you have given until now. And we are looking forward to what we can do together in the future.

I think that - to go back to this agreement - it was extremely difficult because the people we managed to get together - and they themselves recognized this - were not really representative. There were three groups, mostly expatriates, living in refugee camps in Pakistan and Iran, or further away in the United States and in Europe, who got interested in their country. and were trying to devise ways of bringing peace to it. Along with them came the people who after 11 September and because of the 11 September and what happened after that in Afghanistan have taken control over a large part of the country. These are the people we got together in Petersberg. They do not represent the whole of Afghanistan. We were aware of it when we started and they are aware of it

But we have the impression that the people who are now in control of Kabul, who were before in control of Kabul and lost it in 1994, because of their behaviour, because of their totally irresponsible misbehaviour against their own people, these new masters of Kabul seem to understand that they cannot govern Afghanistan alone, that they got to share power, they got to associate others and they got to put an end to those despicable behaviour which have led them to lose power in 1994 - I think 1994 and they lost Kabul in 1996.

They seem to understand that. This agreement gives them a chance to demonstrate that they mean what they have been saying over the last few months. And the United Nations is going to try to help them keep that promise to themselves and to the people of Afghanistan.

The people of Afghanistan, I think, are now heard, perhaps for the wrong reasons. Because the press is at last interested in Afghanistan is interested in Afghanistan because there is a war against terrorism and terrorists, foreign terrorists that have occupied Afghanistan and used it for adventures that have absolutely nothing to do with Afghanistan. At last journalist are there

and now we can hear the people of Afghanistan talking to us. They are telling us that they want peace and security, first and foremost, and practically nothing more.

But I think if they are helped to get this peace and security, we need to do a little bit more. We need to give them a helping hand to stand on their own feet. These are hard working people, these are very dignified people, these are people who will use properly the aid that you will give them, if that aid is given to them properly by us. And the way to do it - we have a lot of people here who have forgotten about this issues much more than I will ever know. And I am sure they will tell you that the first thing to do is to make sure that whatever help you give, is given to the people of Afghanistan if possible by the people of Afghanistan. to help the people of Afghanistan reconstruct their country. Don't think you are going to reconstruct their country for them. You cannot. You just waste resources if you do that.

You must understand that the people of Afghanistan are capable of doing thongs for their country. Look at our Afghan staff. For months on end, not only now because of this crisis, but before for different reasons our international staff has been thrown out of Afghanistan, the work has been carried out by the Afghans alone very well. Sometimes we say that they did it much better than when we were there.

So I think if we look a little bit closer, as I think people like Mark Malloch Brown and others had have a chance to do a few days ago in Islamabad, we know that there are lots of Afghans who can work on behalf of. the international community for themselves and for their country at least as well as we can do for them. I think this is the big lesson that we need to learn from Afghanistan.

I always say that in fact their story is not told. The story in particular of the UN and Afghanistan has not been told by the press, not even by us. These are the real heroes of Afghanistan and of the United Nations. They have been working in incredibly difficult conditions, against the suspicion by the authorities, dangers, now guns, and they have been going up and down the country trying to help their fellow men and women and children on behalf of the United Nations.

I am very happy to come back to the Afghanistan Support Group after - is it three years now? - of absence in frustration and now there is hope again. So we are counting very very much on your support, on your help. Germany has been a very inspiring leader of this Group for the year and I am sure we are all looking forward to the chairmanship of Norway to continue the good work and the very high standards set for them by Germany.

Once again Minister, thank you very very much for your support for Afghanistan and also for your kind support to me personally. Thank you very much indeed.

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