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CONFERENCE OF FOREIGN MINISTERS

Rebuilding Afghanistan: Peace and Stability

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STATEMENT BY H.E. JAVIER SOLANA,
HIGH REPRESENTATIVE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION FOR COMMON FOREIGN AND
SECURITY POLICY

Thank you very much, Joschka. It is a great pleasure to be once again here in Petersberg in a conference which allows us to take stock of what has been achieved in the last year and also to look forward and to agree on the priorities for the coming years in Afghanistan. I want to thank the host country, Germany, and you, Joschka, for the preparation of this conference. I am very happy to see here President Karzai, and let me wish you all the best. And I am very happy to see also my good friend Lakhdar Brahimi, and I want to wish him all the best in the coming times.

Let me begin by underlining that remarkable progress has been made since the first time we met here in Petersberg. Afghanistan has re-emerged as a sovereign state and is consolidating its position within the family of nations. The European Union commends the effort made by everybody, but in particular by President Karzai, and Mr Brahimi, and we reconfirm today our commitment to assist the Government and fully support today's declaration. As has been said, the European Union has been the key donor from the very beginning and will remain committed to Afghanistan's reconstruction and development, also, in the years to come.

However, a lot remains to be done. I would like to briefly address four or five points that I think to our mind are the most important ones.

The first, it is of the utmost importance that the country unites and the local leaders help to build a nation. In view of what has been said on the longer-term reconstruction, and all the stabilisation efforts, it is necessary that the State of Afghanistan gain full control of all armed and security forces in the country. It has been said, but I think it's worth repeating. The international effort in order to establish Afghan national army and police forces has to be speeded up, and at the same time it is of utmost importance that the Defence Commission and the Afghan Transitional Authority reach an early agreement on the structure of the future army. Police, including narcotic units and border police, are essential for securing law and order and establishing normal conditions for collecting regular taxes, as has been said already, and (inaudible) for the (inaudible) is (inaudible). The European Union, I want to say it once again, is fully committed to support in this area.

The second point I would like to mention is that it is equally important that Afghanistan's neighbours continue to play a constructive role in consolidated Afghanistan. Regional stability will be in danger if traditional alliances of outside actors with all the favourite ethnic leaders are not dealing in favour of the Afghan Transitional Authority. We support the idea of a Non-interference Declaration and urge all neighbouring states to join it. The United Nations Security Council should ensure regular follow up of this declaration. Flow of heavy weapons and flow of small arms outside the control of the Authority must be stopped. Otherwise we risk that international efforts (inaudible) the national armed force. (Inaudible) construction assistance should be co-ordinated to establish structures and not to benefit anti-Government forces.

The third point I would like to address is that one of our top priorities should be to continue fighting the poppy production. President Karzai has mentioned that; we would like to underline this point. Although production fell sharply in 2001 it is now once again on the rise. The United Nations information on the opium production in Afghanistan shows that Afghanistan in 2002, this year, is once again the world's major source of opium, providing over 70% of the world total. It is crucial that the international donors take an enhanced role in developing a strategy focusing on institutional building, effective law enforcement, demand reduction, and judicial reform. We, together with other donors, continue to contribute to reducing poppy cultivation and distribution. And we particularly support the efforts of the United Kingdom, which is taking a leading role in this strategy. And we are ready to continue helping finance this effort.

The fourth point I would like to address is the need to reinforce the capacity of the Afghan State. We will enhance the support for the creation of a viable Afghan state, based on democracy, a rule of law, and universal standards of human rights. The European Union, the Commission, the member states continue active engagement in the build up of the national institutions, relating in particular to law and internal order and external security. I said before, the question of the armed forces, and I would like to stress again that commitment of the European Union to ISAF. In 2003, as has been said, two countries from the European Union will take the lead from Turkey, and we will continue to be committed to this peacekeeping operation. For their part, we expect the Afghan Government to speed up the formulation for the new Constitution, for the preparation for the constitutional Loya Jirga to be held next year, and the general elections to be planned in 2004 have to be launched soon, and we commend the effort already of Mr. Brahimi, and the United Nations, for the preparatory work.

The Afghan State can be consolidated only through a democratic process that ensures free and fair participation for all legal groups. Regardless of their ethnic, religious, or gender background. The next couple of years will be decisive in the history of the reformed Afghanistan. It is vital to hold elections in accordance with the Bonn agreement. The legitimacy of the state authorities needs to be on a solid ground so that reconstruction of the political and economic system can be secure as a long-term effort.

It is important also that, in order to implement this task, a proper legal system, including the Constitution, and electoral laws, needs to be in place so that political life can evolve with a solid framework.

The key of all this, no doubt, is security and above all successful anti-terrorist actions by the coalition, and the activities of ISAF, and increasing Afghan ownership of security through the build up of national capacity.

Let me move on to the last point I would like to make, which is the reconstruction aid. And I would like to speak on behalf of the European Union. We pledged in Tokyo 2.3 billion Euros for reconstruction during the period 2002 to 2006. We have, as the key aims in this period of time, to support stabilisation and reconstruction of the country, to improve the availability of access to food, humanitarian aid, and also alternatives to poppy production, and we have also to support the sustainable return of internally displaced persons and refugees. For the year 2002 we have dispersed all what we promised and I think we have done probably the most complete operation in the years of the European Union, as far as a speedy dispersal of our commitments. We will continue to do so. We will continue at the base, and (with) the commitment that we showed in Tokyo, and have proven this year.

Our aim is to contribute to have an Afghanistan, which is democratic, which is peaceful, which is stable. And we will not stop until we see it through.

Thank you very much.