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Press Briefing by UN Special Envoy for the Future Status Process for Kosovo Martti Ahtisaari, in Pristina

Martti Ahtisaari: Ladies and Gentlemen of the press, I will make a statement and then I am prepared to answer your questions.

In the past three days, I have had two meetings with the Unity Team of. I talked with representatives of Kosovo Serbs here in Pristina and in Zvecan. Together with the Air Marshall Miller, -the Deputy Commander of joint NATO forces, Naples- I visited Camp Nothing Hill in Leposavic and I also met COMKFOR General VALOTTO, to whom I bid farewell. And I thanked him for the good cooperation we have had. In Pristina, I met with the Contact Group and the EU representatives. I also met with SRSG-designate Joachim Ruecker and his deputy Steven Schook. We just finished our meeting a few minutes ago.

With the Team of Unity I had two sessions of good discussions on decentralisation and community rights, issues which were pending after the meetings between the experts on Monday and Tuesday.

We will continue working on both issues and are looking forward to holding more direct talks in the coming weeks.

I have continuously reminded my interlocutors that the process is about the creation of such living conditions that all communities can live decently in Kosovo, that nobody has to leave Kosovo after the Status, and that those who wish to come back are given a chance to do so. To attain this goal and conclude the status process, all parties – Pristina included - are expected to make concessions.

At the same time, I repeat my appeal to the K-Serbs to participate in the Kosovo institutions. The CCK directive, as well as the separate decisions taken by the Municipalities from the north to stop cooperation with the PISG, will only create additional difficulties for the Kosovo Serbs.

In order to narrow the differences between the positions of Belgrade and Pristina, it is my intention to continue the discussions on the “status neutral” issues. Our expert teams will

travel to Belgrade to have discussions on the outstanding issues. Then hopefully we can convene additional rounds of talks in Vienna some time in the first half of September.

I plan to attend a meeting on 31 August and 1 September with the Balkan directors of the Contact Group countries in Vienna, and then another one in Sofia on 11 and 12 September. Then I will fly to New York where we will have a meeting with the Contact Group. I will also meet the Secretary General and brief the Security Council on where we are in the process.

I thank you.

Questions/Answers

Q: (BBC): Mr. Ahtisaari, can we say after all these discussions about the Status that you can conclude by the mid of September that there are conditions to give the final recommendations for the final status of Kosovo?

Martti Ahtisaari: I would rather formulate the answer to your question in such a manner that we should keep separate the actual Status talks, which we had once in Vienna, and these talks that we have had now here, which we started in February this year. These are the Status-neutral issues which have to be solved whatever the Status might be because we have to be able to create conditions where everybody, both the majority and the minorities, can have a decent life in this society. And everything that we talked about, whether in the area of decentralization, or community rights, or protection of the cultural heritage – the religious rights- into this process. My answer to that part – if you allow to answer your question in this manner – is that I think we are making continual progress on this. And if I compare to where we were at the beginning of the process, we have gone a long way.

Q (Koha Ditore): How do you evaluate the process in overall? Are you satisfied with what Pristina is doing? And Belgrade? Which one is doing more for the Status talks if we can put it that way? And how important is the meeting that you are going to have in New York with the Foreign Ministers [of the Contact Group]?

Martti Ahtisaari: I was pleased with the meetings in that sense that some of the aspects –I am not going into details because, please understand me, in this sort of negotiations, I usually follow the principle that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed, because otherwise you do not get any discussions going, and it would be very unfair to my interlocutors if I would start going into details. But we have continuously made progress. And I hope that the other side will respond as well. We will see that. We try to schedule new meetings as far as we can. I hope that my colleagues will go already on the beginning of the week starting the 4th [of September] to continue these discussions in Belgrade. And we received while we were here one inquiry from them: “when are you coming people?” We have answered today that we are on our way.

I do not think you are surprised if I do not start to give medals here, who has the gold or silver. We have sort of ideas ourselves where the things on different questions are. And we are trying to use this process in time to advance and narrow the gaps. I have said long time ago that I and my colleagues are prepared to continue as long as we feel that we are narrowing the gaps. Can we actually see eye-to-eye with both parties on all issues, that is still to be seen. Or it may be that even on these issues -which are not the Status-related issues- at the end of the day it may be that we have to come up with our own compromise proposal if it cannot bring the parties. But I hope we can bring them as close as possible.

This is a very important month now, from here onwards. Whether we meet the Foreign Ministers [of the CG] remains to be seen. I hope that sort of meeting takes place. At least there is a meeting scheduled for the political directors. But as you know, this is a busy time in New York. I am a former UN employee. I have lived I think 13 years this process and there is nothing busier time than the week when I am there. And there are other issues which I always say are slightly more urgent than ours, even if this is important as well.

But it is important that in different consultations with the Secretary-General, with the Contact Group, with a number of other people who are around there, that we get some sort of sense: How do we utilize the time? Are we able to maintain the timeframe that has been put forward by the Contact Group in January this year? And how? What are the steps ahead? Because I want to do this in time, because at the end this is the Security Council that has to make their decision. And in the Contact Group I have four permanent members [of the SC]. And it is important to keep the fifth one also properly informed.

Q: *Blic.* Mr. Ahtisaari, representatives of the Belgrade negotiating team have accused you of saying in Vienna that Serbs have to be blamed as a nation. Do you accept this accusation or not? And do you accept their statement that, due to your statement, you put in doubt your position as the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General of the United Nations?

Martti Ahtisaari: I am extremely thankful that you raised this question. Here is my answer: I said then, and I want to repeat and I am saying now something more than I said then, that in the world where I operate – and this is not the only conflict I have been involved in - every nation has its own burden to bear. And whilst today's democratic leadership in Serbia cannot be held accountable for the policies and actions of the Milosevic regime, leaders in Belgrade must come to terms with its legacy and have important responsibilities in this respect. The historic legacy cannot be simply ignored but must be taken into account in the search for the resolution of the Status question. Thank you. I have nothing else to add to that.

Q [unidentified Serbian media]: The Prime Minister of Republika Srpska has recently stated that the fate of Republika Srpska and Kosovo cannot be viewed separately in the sense of self-determination of nations. Do you think that both questions are somehow connected?

Martti Ahtisaari: I think this is a free world and everyone can say whatever they like. I am in the lucky position that I have only to answer your questions in connection with Kosovo. Thank you.

Q (Beta): Mr. Ahtisaari, you said there was progress achieved in these issues that you call Status-neutral. But reality says the opposite. There is very slight movement towards better when it comes to the Serbian community. Serbs are still living in a very difficult situation without freedom of movement and so on. Will the negotiating process lead in a way to resolve this issue concretely, not just in word, so the situation gets better?

Martti Ahtisaari: I think many of you live here. So I think you should know maybe better than I do. But when I look at survey that are carried out in Kosovo, I am puzzled sometimes I have to admit, that people say that they cannot move freely. When I see these opinion polls where people over 90% -I have seen those- over 90% of people say that the situation from their point of view is fairly satisfactory -you may have seen the same opinion polls I have seen because I have no secret opinion polls, so that ones may be fairly public. And when it comes to freedom of movement, they have not had any major problems. So, where is the truth? What I would appeal to all of you – and I have appealed to the political leaders in Kosovo, on all sides, that if something happens within this society, let's not brand this incident as ethnically motivated because many of them are sheer criminal activities. I think you are aware of the incidents, and I try through my staff to follow these incidents. If they are ethnically-motivated incidents, as we have witnessed in the last couple of days - I saw one- I condemn that. And I find it extremely unfortunate that things like that happen. But life in today's Kosovo, I do not think it is heavenly for any community in this society. There are enormous amounts of things that I would like to see better for everybody: better employment possibility, investment climate created, and let's hope that the Status process in the end will create the conditions when everybody can look for a better future.

Q (Reuters): President Ahtisaari, you said that everyday you are narrowing the differences between the parties on some issues. How much optimist are you? How long do you think that it would take to find a compromise on these issues?

Martti Ahtisaari: Of course when I am here, I can only say that in my negotiations we have made progress. In other words that means "narrowing the gap". I hope that my colleague expert will make progress when they go to the other capital where they need also cooperation. I do not think this sort of process can continue forever. These are important issues and I have to discuss this with the Security Council members in closed session, as we normally do. And I will discuss also with the support group I have in the Contact Group. Because time will come when we are not any more in a position to make movement. I think it is my responsibility then to let the Secretary-General and the Security Council know that "here we are". And see when we can actually then take a position out of that. We all know the timeframe that the Contact Group has had in mind, and this is: this year. So that already puts a certain timeframe for all what we are doing. That is why I presented in the Status talks in Vienna a very tight schedule for these discussions on the Status-neutral issues. And we have been able so far to actually follow

that timeframe. And parties have cooperated with us. I have nothing to complain on that. They come to the meetings. Progress, that is another matter. Let's hope that this will come as well.

Q (*Express*): President Ahtisaari, are you going to send to New York by mid-September the first results? Someone said that you would come with a first package by mid-September and the tackle for the Status itself in October. Where do you stand on this?

Martti Ahtisaari: What will happen in my meeting with the Security Council is that I will brief the Council as I have done every time I have been in New York. Council has kindly accepted my request to brief them. No, there is no package gone to be put in September to the Council. I think it is premature. They of course are continuously seeing where we are in the different concrete issue. So it is a little bit like writing a book: you do your first draft, you go through it and in the end –I am talking to a converted here– it may go to ten or twenty or thirty drafts before it goes to the publishers. No. We are looking at the moment at separate issues. I am seeing that here we have something already, here we have to do more work. But we are far from the moment when I can start even thinking of putting things in that sort of format.

Q: [*unidentified Serbian media*]: Mr. Ahtisaari, has Slobodan Milosevic made the Serbs lose all rights for the Serbs on Kosovo?

Martti Ahtisaari: I do not think that anyone can make this kind of categorical statement. So I am definitely not associating myself with that sort of statement. I have always seen Kosovo as a society where we have different ethnic groups who hopefully can in the future live in a more harmonious manner. I think we basically need in all the Balkans a new beginning. It is not going to be easy. When I talk about multi-ethnic society, I realize that it will take years to achieve that. I think we all are realistic in that sense. But what I said earlier in a response to another question that I had: one cannot ignore the legacy either. Because denying the History none of us can. I have to look squarely at what had happened in my own society in the early times of my own country's history. So, this will of course have an influence. But I definitely see a hopefully bright future for all communities in Kosovo.

Q (*RTK*): Mr. Ahtisaari, you said several times that you can explain to the Security Council where you are in the process. Could you please tell us where exactly you feel you are yourself in the process? When do you think you would be ready to come out with the package?

Martti Ahtisaari: I will try to tell in all honesty my masters in the Security Council what we have done and we intend to do. I still have a couple of weeks of work to do before that and I have to tell you that the Security Council has to be the first one, not you, not anybody else but the Security Council, who will hear from me where we are. As I said, we have made progress. We have discussed the decentralization issues and I can tell you -without going into details- that we made progress here. There are still issues that need to be discussed. That is why we have alerted everybody that we want to have early

in September, before I travel to New York, another round in Vienna. So here we are but there is a lot of work still to be done. When can I make any sort of report which would be perhaps then debated in an open meeting in the Security Council – because these are closed consultations that I am talking about - that is still to be seen. At the moment, I have no other timeframe except to try to finish this job before the end of the year. If there is going to be another timeframe, then I am sure I will hear of that. But at the moment that is my timeframe. I cannot give you an exact date yet. But that is the timeframe. I hope that is enough for you. So it would have to be before the end of the year if we intend to follow that [timeframe]. These are issues that I need to discuss with the Contact Group particularly.

Q (TV21): Mr. Ahtisaari, I am interested to know your stand in relation to the municipalities that have been discussed to be governed by a Serb majority, having in mind the figures for the Serb population in Kosovo and the territory that they will control through these municipalities. There is a disproportion. Do you think that this will create in the future unstable situation that would make the Status not sustainable?

Martti Ahtisaari: I think the important things when we talk about municipalities where the Kosovo Serbs would have majority, I think it is important to look how many people should be living there. I think of the general principles, before we even start talking on how many they are. And I cannot today honestly tell you how many they are going to be at the end of this exercise. But I think there is a fairly good understanding on what grounds we should start looking at those societies. Then I think that of course one of the difficulties is that there are a fair amount of people who are living outside – Kosovo Serbs from today's Kosovo - who basically should have a right to return when the Status issue is solved. How do we take that into consideration? I do not think anyone can say for certain how many people first of all *want* to come back. But the voluntary nature of the desire should be established in every individual case. So you can understand it is a fairly complicated issue. Everything we want to do we should hope that it will increase the stability of this society and not create that instability that we have at the moment. In the end I think it will depend on all people who live in Kosovo. Whether you belong to the majority or to minority groups in a society, how people live together, how people treat each other, that will be finally the most important things and a lot of work needs to be put into that process.

Q (BBC): Mr. Ahtissari, you have discussed as well the Mitrovica issue. How do you think you are going to solve this issue and do you support the idea of unifying North Mitrovica with Zvecan municipality?

Martti Ahtisaari: It is absolutely rather irrelevant what *I* think about this. I am supposed to find a solution to these problems and we are not yet there. I think further discussions are needed. I can only tell you that. And I think everybody realizes that we need to discuss further that issue. This is a very tricky issue, there is no question about that. That is one of the most difficult issues that we need to try to find a solution for. But I hope that goodwill will actually win in the end of the day. But we are not yet there.

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