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Statement by Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari during his joint press conference with NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer in Brussels

Following is the statement made by Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari during his joint press conference with NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer in Brussels today:

Martti Ahtisaari: Ladies and Gentlemen, I see familiar faces here. You seem to be either following me, or I am following you because we met in Luxembourg and you heard me already then explaining what we are up too.

I think this has been a very important meeting with the Secretary-General this morning and thereafter in the North Atlantic Council, where I had the opportunity to brief and answer questions. There were plenty of those from the membership. I think it is extremely important that I have also enjoyed the cooperation of NATO throughout my assignment. I have had Liaison personnel from NATO, both civilian and military, at my disposal and that has facilitated the contacts and liaison with the Secretary-General and his staff.

I am heartened by the warm support that I got from the audience today. Everyone realizes where we are at the moment. I have been tasked by the Contact Group after their ministerial meeting in New York on the 20th September to start preparing ideas for a settlement. I will be discussing that issue with the Contact Group later on this month, as I said in Luxembourg I intend to have another meeting with [the Contact Group] during the first half of next month.

I plan my activities that 2006 is still my target date. I haven't heard anything else from the Contact Group and I don't want to participate in any hypothetical speculation about [what consequences] possible elections or referendum might have. At the moment my plan is to be ready to present the plan before the end of the year. Thank you.

Questions/Answers

Question (*Vecernje Novosti*) -- Yesterday, Mr. Solana, the High Representative, said that you would probably take into consideration the new political situation in Serbia regarding the elections. Is this a fact for you that will be relevant and important and, if it is, will you take this into consideration?

Martti Ahtisaari: I am seeing Javier Solana this afternoon, so I have to ask him if he has turned into a mind reader. Knowing my friend, I don't think so. I saw reporting from Luxembourg by your news agencies saying that they have said that I decide on the timeframe. That is not entirely true because we have a Contact Group that has been there from the beginning and we have four permanent members in that group. Let's not forget that. And they have been publicly taking position on the timeframe. So I don't need to start speculations at all on the timeframe, we have heard about the elections that they are in March, they are in July, they are in October next year. I am simply concentrating at the moment getting my part of the work ready. It is not yet ready. All those news that the plans are already ready, that is not true. We have preliminary ideas and those will be floated and discussed with the Contact Group and New York because I have to go to New York in the first half of November. Bear with me but I am not going to participate in any speculation of any elections. We will see when we come to that. First of all: are there going to be any elections? Everyone is speaking of them, but I haven't seen any firm dates for any elections.

Question (Koha Ditore): The statement of Contact Group is also that your proposal would serve as basis to move forward. Somebody is reading this as a new beginning. Is your proposal going to be a new beginning for future talks or the beginning of the end of this process?

Martti Ahtisaari: I don't want to start interpreting too much what the Contact Group says or doesn't say. But I would assume that what they were saying was that the plans should be moved forward; the process should be moved forward. Of course it has to be presented to the parties and we have to hear when that moment comes and hear their views. They are supposed to go to the Security Council so I thought that that was a reference for that.

Question: Mr. Ahtisaari, your personal opinion: are elections in Serbia a credible reason to break the promise and break the principles of the Contact Group?

Martti Ahtisaari: I thought that I had answered your question because there is nothing actually to explain except to repeat that my plan has not changed. I am implementing the plan, which we have had throughout this year and I am making myself ready to move according to that.

Question: Sorry to insist Mr. Ahtisaari, but I just wanted to have your reaction to what the Finnish Foreign minister said yesterday at the end of the EU meeting in Luxembourg, saying that, anyhow, if there were to be any elections of whatsoever in Serbia, it would delay the delivery of your report by a few weeks. Could you confirm this is a reasonable guess?

Martti Ahtisaari: I think he is a grown man. He is younger than I am but I think you have to ask him what he meant. I am not going to be a mind reader here. Look, we are living in a democratic, perhaps the most democratic part of the world, in Europe, ladies and gentlemen, and I think it is as part of that that we discuss these issues. My distinguished minister is known to be having his own website where he discusses continuously world issues. So, ask him what he meant. But listen what I say. My message is very clear: there is no change in my plans. I could be criticized if I were not ready when I should be ready. But I intend to be ready. Thank you.