

Speech by

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of the Federal Republic of Germany**

Opening the

UN-Talks on Afghanistan

**at Bonn (Petersberg)
27 November 2001**

**Check against delivery!
Embargoed until 10 a.m.**

Honourable representatives of the Afghan people,
Mr Brahimi,
Mr Vendrell,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to welcome you to Germany, here on the Petersberg. Our Government gladly accepted the request of the United Nations to hold this round of talks in our country. We will do everything possible to provide you with a positive environment for your negotiations.

I extend an especially warm welcome to the Afghan representatives. You first and foremost bear a tremendous responsibility for the future of your country. After two decades of a horrible war your fellow citizens long for peace and stability. They long for a future in peace, and wish their country to be rebuilt. They long for a future which will guarantee all Afghans, women and men, their fundamental human rights and dignity.

Afghanistan has a great opportunity now to win peace and reconstruction, in a united, independent Afghanistan. Now a future where terrorism and violence will have no place is at hand. Now is the time to make use of the combined efforts and strength of the international community for rebuilding your country.

The responsibility is yours. No one can relieve you of it, and no one wants to. I urge you all to forge a truly historic compromise that holds out a better future for your torn country and its people.

The international community is prepared to make this great effort.

This readiness is linked with clear expectations.

First, agreement on binding rules for a peaceful political process and on a broad-based, representative transitional government.

Second, respect for and protection of human rights. That includes first and foremost guaranteeing the rights and dignity of women. Their active participation in the social and political life of the nation is essential for the country's peaceful future.

Ladies and gentlemen,

There is broad international agreement that the United Nations has a critical role in the peace process. The UN is the indispensable framework for the political process and the guarantor of Afghanistan's internal agreements.

Mr Brahimi, Mr Vendrell, I wish you both good luck as you will skillfully guide the talks. And I wish all of us a result that will prove to be the first step in the five-point plan you set out in the UN Security Council. We stand ready to give the Secretary General of the United Nations and you any assistance you may require.

Not only the people of Afghanistan have high expectations of the talks here on Petersberg. A peaceful, stable Afghanistan is at the core of peace and stability in the whole region. A necessary condition for such a development, however, is that all other countries stop pursuing competing national interests at the expense of the Afghan people.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The immediate concern of the international community is to get humanitarian aid to the suffering population. One result from this conference should therefore be a political signal for quickly solving the security problems that are still holding up the distribution of supplies in many parts of Afghanistan. Only if they are solved, the massive humanitarian project now underway will have a chance to see the people, above all the children, through the harsh winter. The German Government has invited the *Afghanistan Support Group* to another meeting in Berlin on 5 December to take decisions on further humanitarian aid.

The commitment of the international community will not stop in the spring. We want the people of Afghanistan to know that they will not be left on their own when the conflict with the Al-Qaida terrorists and the Taliban regime comes to an end. A first conference on the reconstruction of Afghanistan took place in Washington last week. It was attended by many Western and Islamic states and organizations and has established first important guidelines. A donors' conference has already been scheduled for Tokyo in January.

The European Union is ready to make a considerable long-term contribution towards Afghanistan's economic and social recovery. Germany has already set aside about 80 million Euro for this purpose. We will concentrate, above all, on restoring education and administrative infrastructure and on empowering women and girls to make a contribution to civil society. Among other things, we want to support the traditional Amani High

School in Kabul, which was founded in 1924 and where German teachers taught well into the early 80's. We will also seek to support a similar secondary education for girls.

Ladies and gentlemen,

German-Afghan relations have a long-standing and positive tradition. Germany today offers a second home to nearly 90,000 Afghans – more than any other country in Europe. In Afghanistan itself, evidence of the close cooperation with Germany, especially in the sixties and seventies, is still visible. By bringing about a transition to stable government in Afghanistan let us also open a new chapter in our bilateral partnership.

Distinguished guests from Afghanistan, now you have to shoulder your responsibility to pave the way for a peaceful political future for your nation, a way which reflects your society's diversity and traditions and which will be acceptable to all Afghans. It is up to you, the representatives of the Afghan people, to seize this historic moment. Germany, the European Union and the international community led by the United Nations stand ready to help – now and in the long term.

I wish you every success in your talks and above all wisdom and the will to compromise for the good of the people of Afghanistan.