



THE WHITE HOUSE

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH

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President Discusses Humanitarian Aid to Afghanistan with UN Secretary General

Remarks by the President and U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan

The Roosevelt Room

10:51 A.M. EST

THE PRESIDENT: It's my honor to welcome back to the White House our friend, Secretary General Kofi Annan. Today we've had a valuable discussion about how to make sure that the good intentions of America and others around the world are met. And those intentions have to do with feeding people who starve in Afghanistan.

Prior to September the 11th there was a lot of hunger in that country, primarily because it was run by a government that didn't really care about the human condition. After September the 11th, obviously the war has aggravated the situation, and as I declared to the American people, our good government and our great nation is going to do something about it.

And around the table today are people who are responsible to making sure, as best as they possibly can, food is delivered, and medicine is delivered, and clothing is delivered to innocent, hurting people of Afghanistan.

And the Secretary General has been so great on this issue, and he's assembled a wonderful team who are here to brief the Secretary of State and myself about the efforts.

The degree of difficulty is high. There's no question we've got a large task ahead of ourselves. We've got ample money, and the United States government has been a major contributor of that money. We've got the food. The fundamental question is, in an environment that is not very secure, how do we get the food to the people. And that's what we're working on. And I'm convinced that we can do a very good job of meeting that objective.

So, Mr. General, thanks for coming. It's an honor to have you back. I appreciate you bringing your team with you.

SECRETARY GENERAL ANNAN: Thank you very much, Mr. President, for the discussions this morning with my team.

The Afghan people have suffered for quite a long time through a series of wars, and recently, drought. And we've been trying to get food to them. And as the President said, it's not always been easy. Even sometimes when we have the food in the country, we cannot always get it to the needy.

We are now, with the help of the U.S. and other donors, able to get in as much food as we think we will need. But because of the insecurity, we have difficulties reaching the needy and the people, and we are working on that. And I hope the situation will clarify in the not-too-distant future to allow us to reach all those in need.

I think it is important for the public to know the numbers we are dealing with, and here I'm talking about refugees -- Afghan refugees in the neighboring countries, particularly Pakistan and Iran, and the internally displaced people. We are talking about 6 million needy people -- between 6 million to 7.5 million.

We are going to do our best, with the support that we are getting. And I think, on the political front, if I may say a word, we are meeting the Afghan parties in Bonn. Mr. Brahimi is discussing with them as we sit here. And so far, they're off to a good start. The parties seem to want a broad-based government, and I hope they will be able to settle this -- the establishment of the government before they leave Bonn.

The willingness of the U.S. and other donor countries and the international community is clear, to work with them in rebuilding their society. But we need a partner, and the partner has to be an effective Afghan government that is cohesive, that is stable, that will work with the donor community to ensure that the resources that are being applied to rehabilitation and reconstruction is used effectively.

The challenge is theirs. They have an historic opportunity to put the past behind them and form a broad-based government that will be loyal to the Afghan people, and respect its international obligations. And if they do that, from all the commitments that I have heard from the President and other leaders, the resources will be there over the period in a sustained manner to help rebuild Afghanistan.

So I urge them to seize the moment for the sake of their people and for the sake of their country.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Mr. General.

END 10:54 A.M. EST