

Iraq's National Reconciliation and Dialogue Project

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Baghdad, Iraq
June 25, 2006

I'd like to make a brief statement, after which I will be happy to answer your questions.

Now that Iraq has a democratically elected permanent government in place, the time has come for unity and reconciliation, for Iraqis to mend their nation's wounds. The National Reconciliation and Dialogue Project unveiled today before the Iraqi Council of Representatives by Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki is a positive step in this vital effort. I congratulate him and other Iraqi leaders for this initiative, and assure them of U.S. support. We will work together to help Iraq stand on its own feet as soon as possible.

This reconciliation project is part of an active agenda put forward by Prime Minister Maliki's government. Previous steps in this agenda have included the Baghdad Security Plan, the Summer Electricity Plan, and the Detainee Release Program. I understand from the Prime Minister that future initiatives in this active agenda will include a comprehensive economic program and an international compact for Iraq's reconstruction.

Iraqis have worked together on this reconciliation initiative, which has the support of all of Iraq's major communities. I urge the Iraqi leaders to move expeditiously in implementing this project. The leaders of Iraq's various communities should truly be leaders to their people, and begin to take responsibility for bringing sectarian violence to an end. I urge the insurgents to lay down their arms and join the democratic process initiated by their fellow Iraqis. I urge the Council of Representatives to move on the reconsideration of the de-Ba'athification Commission.

Certain actors, including some of Iraq's neighbors, have sought to foment division in Iraq by supporting extremists. The National Reconciliation and Dialogue Project is a refutation of these policies. I call on all these countries to reconsider their unhelpful policies.

As Prime Minister Maliki has noted, national reconciliation does not mean that all Iraqis must agree on how best to resolve the myriad challenges they face as they seek to build a stable and secure Iraq. However, these disagreements must be expressed through dialogue rather than through violence. The time has come for Iraqis to resolve their disputes through the political process and the rule of law rather than at the point of a gun.

Thank you, and May God bless the people of Iraq.