

Berlin Meeting On Afghanistan Ends With Commitment To Step Up Rebuilding - Newsagencies

=====

"An international meeting on Afghanistan closed Wednesday with delegates reaffirming their commitment to step up rebuilding efforts, the Afghan government and the UN mission in the country said.

The two-day meeting of the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board (JCMB), which brings together representatives from Afghanistan and the international community, addressed Afghan hopes for 'accelerated Afghanization' of its army and police, a joint statement said. Delegates 'committed ... to more aggressive and determined rebuilding,' it said. It did not offer details of any concrete proposals. ... The EU has stressed its interest in helping Afghanistan combat corruption and build up its security forces, and is drawing up plans for a police training mission. ... Both the US and EU have proposed new aid packages for Afghanistan over the past week. ..." [The Associated Press/Factiva]

"International donors on Wednesday [further] ended [the conference] with a pledge to hand over more control to the war-scarred country in managing its own affairs. The meeting of 23 countries agreed to new initiatives proposed by Afghanistan. ... The promise to increase Afghan 'ownership' appears to be a concession to pleas from the country to be allowed to play a greater role in spending billions of dollars of aid money. Afghan Foreign Minister Rangeen Dadfar Spanta told the conference on Tuesday that his government 'continues to be bypassed by donor countries. 'Trusting Afghan institutions will be an important step towards breaking this cycle,' he said. German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier argued that 'considerable progress' had been made in Afghanistan, but admitted there were 'shortfalls' in the reconstruction. He said it was essential to reform the Afghan security services and said he hoped that training of the police force, already undertaken by German experts, would soon be 'Europeanized.' ... The conference's closing statement meanwhile gave no commitment about channeling more aid through the Afghan government. ..." [Deutsche Welle (Germany)/Factiva]

Meanwhile, "... Benita Ferrero-Waldner, EU foreign affairs commissioner, told the FT that donors continued to duplicate aid efforts and work. Amin Farhang, Afghan trade minister, said: 'Many donors are wasteful and do not co-ordinate with us,' in spite of the JCMB's efforts. Donors have pledged about \$20 billion for civil reconstruction between 2002 and 2010 but only a small portion of this has been spent by Kabul, with the rest handled by individual donors and aid agencies. The effort has also been hampered by a shortage of funds, with the US unveiling an extra two-year, \$10.6 billion aid package in a move described by EU diplomats as a US change of course. ..." [The Financial Times (UK)]

AFP reports that "... The UN representative to Afghanistan, Tom Koenigs, said the international community must move forward. 'As 2007 starts we have a window of opportunity to regain momentum. We have to turn the tide and to seize every opportunity in the coming months for more growth, for more effective governance.' While the conference ended on an upbeat note,

international monitoring group Human Rights Watch painted a depressing picture of life in Afghanistan. It said on Tuesday that little progress had been made in the past year in providing Afghans with basic security, food and health care. ..." [Agence France Presse/Factiva]

The Globe and Mail writes that "... David Sproule, Canada's ambassador to Afghanistan who attended the meeting ... said just seven of the 12 benchmarks set for 2006 had been completed. 'I see this as quite predictable,' Sproule told an Ottawa news conference yesterday by telephone. 'The time frames attached for the achievement of those goals were done a year ago and, in some cases, it's not a matter of the benchmark [not being] achieved but rather we need more time to do it.' The benchmarks that were not met, he said, include the establishment of a comprehensive plan for land mines, the development of a plan for Afghanistan's natural resources, a review of the administrative boundaries within the country, the crafting of new laws governing businesses and the final ratification of the UN convention against corruption by the national assembly. ..." [The Globe and Mail (Canada)/Factiva]

Meanwhile, UZReport notes that "... In the 12 months since the Afghanistan Compact was adopted, despite resurgent violence and record opium production, the JCMB has been able to oversee quiet but steady progress towards many vital goals, including creation of a national appointments mechanism, technical and administrative support to the new National Assembly, and reformed oversight procedures for strengthened government transparency. Progress has also been made on creating sustainable water resource strategies and plans for irrigation and drinking water, new business organization laws, and an Action Plan on Peace, Justice and Reconciliation." [UzReport.com (Uzbekistan)/Factiva]