



Press Briefing

PRESS CONFERENCE BY JALAL TALABANI, MEMBER OF IRAQI GOVERNING COUNCIL

Jalal Talabani, member of the Iraqi Governing Council, briefed correspondents at a Headquarters press conference this afternoon on a range of issues, including the formation of an interim Iraqi Government to take over from the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) at the end of June.

A correspondent recalled that Mr. Brahimi had laid out a plan for an interim government that would include a prime minister, president and two vice-presidents. He had also stated a clear preference that they be people without political ambitions. She asked how that sat with members of the Governing Council.

Mr. Talabani, who in response to another question said he was not willing to be a vice-president, replied that while Mr. Brahimi had not finalized his proposals, he believed that there must be consultations with all Iraqis, and that a strong, representative government was needed.

It was his understanding, he said, that Mr. Brahimi would discuss how to form the new government with the Iraqi Governing Council, but would not impose anything on the Iraqis. The new government should be representative, and the main duty for the Iraqi parties was to prepare for elections. He added that he would support an expansion of the Governing Council to act as an interim government until elections were held.

As to whether the interim government should be able to dictate how many American forces should be in the country, he said that it should not, as that was, according to the Transitional Administrative Law, the responsibility of the elected government. If the American forces left now, there would be chaos and civil war, he warned. The United States had stated that it was ready to withdraw its forces on the day when the freely elected government asked them.

The interim government, he said, should have full sovereignty and have control over security, but not be able to pass laws, as that would be the duty of the national assembly to be elected by the Iraqis.

The Transitional Law, he noted in response to another question, was not the permanent law of Iraq, but was only for the transitional period. The new constitution, once it was adopted by the Iraqi people, would become the main law of the country.

Asked if the Governing Council had ever responded to requests from the United Nations seeking documentation on the allegations of corruption in the “oil-for-food” programme, he noted that it was individuals who committed those acts not the United Nations. The documents would be handed over, if necessary.

On whether the pictures of American soldiers mistreating Iraqi prisoners would damage the United States cause in the eyes of the Iraqi public, he said what the United States did for the Iraqi people, in liberating them from the worst kind of dictatorship, was a “historic achievement”. He did not think that some “mistakes” by American soldiers would change the importance of that achievement for the Iraqi people. “Compared to what the Iraqi people had suffered in the past, that was not so important.”

Regarding the situation in Fallujah, he said the issue had been solved through negotiations. “Fallujah was delivered to the people of Fallujah.” A wide representative group had negotiated with the Coalition Provisional Authority and decided to secure the area by themselves.

As to rumours that a former Republican Guard general was chosen to lead the Iraqi police force in Fallujah, Mr. Talabani stated emphatically that that was not true. One of the Iraqi officers in Fallujah was chosen to lead the Iraqi police forces there. There were many good officers in the Iraqi army. They were not all pro-Saddam. De-Baathification would continue in the military and police forces. Also, it was not true that Baathists would be part of the new government. He hoped the ceasefire in Fallujah would be maintained until the holding of free elections.