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Annun to Al-Hayat: We Will Not Defeat Terrorism Without Working Together; I Warn of the Dangers of Military Strikes on the Middle East Expects Washington and Security Council to Share Evidence

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan has suggested that UN member states find a creative wording to settle the dispute on differentiating between terrorism and resistance against occupation. He urged the member states to work together and to cooperate to defeat terrorism, saying "we will never defeat it at all" in the absence of common work. In an interview with international daily **Al-Hayat** published today (page 7) and which touched on the latest developments following the attacks on New York and Washington and Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's positions, Annan kept refusing to criticize Sharon in a direct manner, and was adamant against answering any questions in that respect. His position was very cautious concerning the Israeli issue, **Al-Hayat** wrote. Annan noted that Security Council resolution 1373 did not tackle any detailed discussions concerning military activities or particular measures that would be taken to capture the "alleged" perpetrators of the attacks.

The following is the full text of the interview (unofficial translation):

AL-HAYAT: As Secretary-General of the United Nations, what do you know about the "evidence" that proves Osama Ben Laden and his Al-Qaeda organization's implication in the attacks?

SECRETARY-GENERAL: I know there are intense discussions surrounding the evidence, and that British Prime Minister (Tony Blair) unveiled some of those and that the American authorities have informed the NATO members of part of that evidence. They did not come to the Security Council or to the United Nations.

AL-HAYAT: Have you asked to be informed of the evidence, in light of the fact that part of the coalition is taking place at the United Nations?

SECRETARY-GENERAL: What is important is that the UN member states have united in an attempt to form the basis of the international struggle against terrorism. I believe that the work undertaken by the Security Council and the debate at the General Assembly are both very important. I am in contact with the authorities in Washington, and I think that they will share the information they have with the Council.

AL-HAYAT: You mean handing over evidence to the Security Council?

SECRETARY-GENERAL: This is not an exception.

AL-HAYAT: Your positions have been based on a moral standpoint as a result of the disaster that happened, and you have adopted strong positions concerning what should be done to put a decisive end to such acts. But there are some who say that the evidence is not available or not clear. Do you feel that you have come to doubt as a result of not being informed of the evidence while others were?

SECRETARY-GENERAL: Primarily, a devastating attack took place on 11 September, which stunned and terrified the world. The international community rallied together in its resolve to fight terrorism on a wide-ranging bases. But there is a particular issue in the Security Council resolution which says those responsible for the attack must be brought to justice. That resolution binds states to take concrete measures in the war against terrorism. Therefore, the bases were placed for the long term. On the immediate term, there are ongoing consultations and discussions at the Security Council which have not touched on detailed talks concerning military measures or a particular measure to capture the alleged perpetrators for the attacks. I endorsed strong positions because I strongly believe that only international cooperation will enable us to achieve real progress against terrorism. Either we all cooperate together to defeat terrorism or we will never defeat it.

AL-HAYAT: Some say there is a kind of distinction between the different poles in the international coalition, some of it on an ideological basis, because the evidence is being presented to some and hidden from others. It is being said that the Secretary-General should have been informed of the evidence before anyone else?

SECRETARY-GENERAL: I believe I have already answered this question when I said that bringing the evidence to the Security Council is not unlikely and that I am in contact with Washington.

AL-HAYAT: Are you convinced that Osama Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda are behind the attacks?

SECRETARY-GENERAL: When you ask such a question as "are you convinced" it appears to me that there is strong evidence which proves their involvement. However, I have repeatedly referred to the "alleged" perpetrators. If I were convinced and I had precise evidence I would not have used the term "alleged."

AL-HAYAT: Do you mean that others are involved?

SECRETARY-GENERAL: What I said does not mean others are involved. It means that I don't have strong evidence which would enable me to take the positions included in your question.

AL-HAYAT: Do you believe that the evidence implicating anyone should be made public, particularly in light of the atmosphere of doubt, mutual accusations and the feeling of some that this is an artificial attempt to implicate Arabs and Moslems? Do you think it would be useful to present the evidence to the public opinion and not merely to some governments?

SECRETARY-GENERAL: The interest in this issue is widespread and the coalition has a broad base. Sharing evidence has started, and with time it will be made available to a broad base.

AL-HAYAT: There is another aspect, regarding doubts and hesitation, which stems from the impression among some that the targets are mobile and not determined and that there is "mercuriality" in identifying those who are being targeted. Does that disturb you?

SECRETARY-GENERAL: What does it mean that the target is mobile and "mercurial"?

AL-HAYAT: There are some who fear that the phase which will follow the identification of Osama Ben Laden as being responsible would be unclear. Which countries would be targeted in the second phase, while looking for Al-Qaeda's heads. What defines terrorism and who? These are the questions behind the fears of the "mercuriality" of the targets.

SECRETARY-GENERAL: Security Council Resolution 1373 provides very good bases for fighting terrorism and it takes into consideration elements from the 12 treaties that the states have discussed and approved. Consequently, it provides the basis of what the states must do, from not providing safe havens to terrorists to capturing them.

AL-HAYAT: The problem is in the military operations...

SECRETARY-GENERAL: I did not hear the Americans say they will chase people all around the world. I noted a focus on Afghanistan in line with the search for those who allegedly carried out the attacks, Ben Laden and his followers, but I did not detect nor hear anything that indicates they will use military measures all around the world to track down terrorists.

AL-HAYAT: One of the problems of resolution 1373, is that it is vague in defining terrorism. Some say that it gave the Permanent Security Council member states an open mandate to define what kind of terrorism it is. This is part of the "mercurial" element?

SECRETARY-GENERAL: The Council, and its 15 members, and those representing all regions in the world, have unanimously approved the resolution, and when we talk about definition, this is on the agenda of the General Assembly. A large number of member states have put individuals on trial on charges of terrorism. As such, every state has a practical definition of what terrorism is. Even before the General Assembly defines terrorism, every state which has taken legal and practical measures against terrorism would have had a legal basis to move forward transparently, as well as measures which could be monitored by others.

AL-HAYAT: What do you think should be done concerning the definition and the clear differentiation between terrorism and the right to struggle against occupation?

SECRETARY-GENERAL: My hope is that the member states will find a creative solution for this issue to move forward during the General Assembly session. That debate must not be an obstacle to fighting terrorists who target innocent people.

AL-HAYAT: Therefore, you are suggesting that there must be a creative definition of terrorism?

SECRETARY-GENERAL: Human capability can be creative in reaching an acceptable wording. This can be achieved.

AL-HAYAT: What is this "wording"?

SECRETARY-GENERAL: I will leave it up to the UN member states.

AL-HAYAT: Talk of a mobile target indicates that what is in mind is primarily Afghanistan, then Iraq, than who knows what? Iraq was repeatedly mentioned in line with the second phase...

SECRETARY-GENERAL: I do not agree that Iraq has been repeatedly mentioned. At first it was mentioned, and there were those in Washington who hinted that the government wanted to target Al-Qaeda and Iraq. But since the first days (following the attacks) I have not heard that much focus on Iraq, and I have not heard any evidence or accusation which links Iraq to the September 11 attacks.

AL-HAYAT: The debate in the U.S. Administration concerning Iraq is normal, but there are those among its top officials who have insisted on the necessity to settle the issue with Iraq in line with this operation. Do you think this is dangerous?

SECRETARY-GENERAL: I am not aware of the discussions in Washington concerning that issue. My opinion is that it would not be wise, but very dangerous, in light of the prevailing atmosphere that such military operations take place in the Middle East. I am certain that the administration is aware of that.

AL-HAYAT: Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has threatened, saying: "Do not try to satisfy the Arabs at our expense, and do not commit the same terrible mistake which was committed by the European democracy in 1938 when it decided to sacrifice Czechoslovakia to the Nazis, in the aim of achieving an adequate temporary solution. What is your opinion?"

SECRETARY-GENERAL: The United States has strongly responded and I am certain that the response of Sharon and his government will be appropriate.

AL-HAYAT: I am asking for your opinion? You are playing a role and you have a special representative in the framework of the peace process in the Middle East?

SECRETARY-GENERAL: There is no need for me to comment more than this. I believe my comment was clear.

AL-HAYAT: Do these positions further aggravate the situation?

SECRETARY-GENERAL: My hope is that this will not mean the death of attempts to find a solution or the end of attempts to bring the parties to the negotiating table. A meeting was held between Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat, and my hope is that these statements will not be the end of the road.

AL-HAYAT: It is clear that Sharon has dropped the idea of self-restraint. Don't you read his statements from that angle?

SECRETARY-GENERAL: We are living in the real world. Some things are said and other things done. This does not mean that we are living in inertia. I am certain that the talks and other forces will lead to a change in the situation.

AL-HAYAT: Is there anything that would make you believe that Sharon's positions do not come in line with *disregarding* self-restraint?

SECRETARY-GENERAL: I believe I have answered.

AL-HAYAT: Ten years ago, during the Cold War, Israel's position indicated that it would adopt a policy of self-restraint to preserve the tissue of the coalition. It is clear now that Sharon is not in that line. Does that worry you?

SECRETARY-GENERAL: I am certain that intensive talks are taking place behind the scenes and away from the media. We must analyze this and look into it with others, in order to reach a conclusion on their contents and to decide what we can do all together.

AL-HAYAT: You have criticized the provocative acts and positions of both the Israeli and the Palestinian sides. Is it time for you and the international community to move on from merely backing the transitional recommendations of the Mitchell Committee towards negotiations, and to say: It is time to set a conclusion to the negotiations and their concept instead of continuing with a transitional process and transitional recommendations which have not been very fruitful?

SECRETARY-GENERAL: Nobody has looked at the transitional process as being an end and a conclusion in itself. The objective of the Mitchell recommendations related to the process represented the path towards the table, to have the sides return to it to discuss a settlement on the basis of UN resolutions and the principle of land for peace. That is why, it is important to look at the Mitchell recommendations as transitional measures to return to the negotiating table. It is clear that the level of enmity and tension between the two sides makes it difficult for them to return to the negotiating table on their own. They need international help, and there is a lot of discussion among key members of the international community on how to provide that assistance. At the right time, this could include certain proposals from the international community to facilitate contacts between the two sides

Afghanistan

AL-HAYAT: You have reappointed Ambassador Lakhdar Brahimi as your special envoy in charge of Afghanistan. He has recently said, before being reappointed, that

Afghanistan was left with no friends at its borders and that the Taliban in the past was not alone responsible for the failure of peace initiatives, but that there were others, including the US administration. Now, in line with the fragility of the coalition, or its consolidation, what is it that worries you, particularly in Pakistan? You have affirmed your concern over the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. You have called for assistance, but what proposals do you have in mind and does your envoy have to avoid falling in the errors of the past, and to protect the coalition, knowing that the positions of Iran, the Gulf states, Egypt and Pakistan have their own particularities?

SECRETARY-GENERAL: If we are to succeed in Afghanistan at both the short-term and the long-term level, and in line with a solution to the political struggle and the in-fighting in Afghanistan, we will need all neighboring states to work together in a constructive and cooperative manner, instead of in a competitive style, where one group of states would back one side and another group would back another side.

I hope what happened since 11 September has awakened the countries of the region and its leaders to the truth that Afghanistan is not the problem of the Afghans and their disaster alone, but that today it has become a regional problem. If they want peace and stability in their region, and in their countries, they must work together, with Brahimi, with me and with other states and sides to appease the situation. If that conviction were deep indeed, there would be hope in Brahimi's work and what we are striving to achieve.
