

Afghan ex-president says Taliban favour peace talks

Thu 22 May 2008, 14:52 GMT

By Sayed Salahuddin

[-] Text [+]

KABUL (Reuters) - The Taliban have shown a desire for a political dialogue and serious efforts should be made to establish talks and end the insurgency, a former Afghan president said on Thursday.

Burhanuddin Rabbani, a bearded 65-year-old who now leads the opposition in parliament, said he had established contact with the Taliban several months ago and had received a letter in recent days containing "some encouraging messages" from the Taliban addressed to the alliance of parties he leads.



Rabbani said the militants expressed a desire for a political solution to the conflict in which more than 12,000 people have been killed since 2006 alone.

He did not say who in the Taliban had sent the messages.

U.S. and Afghan forces toppled the Taliban in 2001 after the hard-line Islamist movement refused to hand over al Qaeda leaders behind the September 11 attacks on the United States.

Since then, the Taliban have repeatedly rejected olive branches offered by

President Hamid Karzai, who has led the country since the removal of the hard-line Islamist movement.

In their messages, the Taliban said they would accept all international conventions, would not oppose education for girls and would oppose Afghanistan being used as a base to threaten any other country, Rabbani said.

The Taliban also wanted friendly ties and cooperation with Muslim and non-Muslim countries, he added.

"We see some very good points (in the messages). To put an end to the crisis in the country, talks with armed opposition should be sought. We should pay a price for restoring security. Serious talks should take place and deliberate measures should be taken," Rabbani said.

Apart from the Taliban, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, another guerrilla leader wanted by the United States, commands a separate but allied force against the government and the 60,000 foreign troops led by NATO and the U.S. military in Afghanistan.

None of the armed opposition groups could be immediately contacted for comment.

Rabbani was the leader of a mujahideen faction that fought the Soviet occupation in the 1980s. He became president in the 1990s when mujahideen groups fought each other for control of government in a war which triggered the Taliban's rise to power.

The Taliban ousted Rabbani's government in 1996. Rabbani later led the opposition alliance against the Taliban and his supporters helped U.S.-led forces overthrow the Taliban in 2001.

The insurgency has seriously hampered reconstruction in Afghanistan after three decades of war, a conflict which Western officials have said cannot now be won militarily.

Last month, Taliban gunmen with the help of some in the security forces tried to assassinate Karzai at a parade in Kabul.

(Editing by Giles Elgood)

© Reuters 2008. All Rights Reserved. | [Learn more about Reuters](#)

With an
Ecobank Savings Account

It's easy to protect
your future.



Apply online now >
or visit your nearest branch

ECOBANK ...The Pan African Bank
www.ecobank.com

