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Blair's full statement

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LONDON, England --This is UK Prime Minister Tony Blair's House of Commons statement in full:

"Mr Speaker, since September 11 intensive efforts have taken place here and elsewhere to investigate these attacks and determine who is responsible. Our findings have been shared and co-ordinated with those of our allies and they are clear. They are first, that it was Osama bin Laden and the Al-Qaeda, the terrorist network which he heads, that planned and carried out the atrocities on September 11.

"Secondly, that Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda were able to commit these atrocities because of their close alliance with the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, which allows them to operate with impunity in pursuing their terrorist activity.

"Mr Speaker, I will later today put in the library of the House of Commons a document detailing the basis for our conclusions. The document covers the history of Osama bin Laden, his relations with the Taliban, what we know of the acts of terror he has committed and some of what we know in respect of September 11.

"I enter a major caveat, however. Much of the evidence we have is intelligence and highly sensitive. It is not possible without compromising people or security to release precise details and fresh information is daily coming in. But I hope the House will find it at least useful as an interim assessment. The Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the Liberal Democrats have seen the full basis of the document on Privy Council terms.

"For myself and all other Government ministers who have studied the full information we have absolutely no doubt that bin Laden and his network were responsible for attacks on September 11. That was also the unanimous view of the NATO members who were taken through the full facts on the October 2.

"Much more of the evidence in respect of earlier atrocities can be released in greater detail since it is already subject to court proceedings. This, in itself, is powerful. Indeed, there is nothing hidden about bin Laden's agenda. He openly espouses the language of terror, has described terrorising Americans as "the religious and logical obligation" and in February 1998 signed a fatwa stating that "the killing of Americans and its civilian and military allies is a religious duty."

"As our document shows he has been responsible for a number of terrorist outrages over the past decade. The attack in 1993 on U.S. military personnel serving in Somalia, 18 of whom were killed, in 1998 the bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania -- 224 people were killed and over 4,500 injured -- attempted bombings in Jordan and Los Angeles at the turn of the Millennium, thankfully thwarted, the attack on the USS Cole nearly a year ago, which left 17 crew members killed and 40 injured.

"The attacks on September 11 bear all the hallmarks of a Bin Laden operation: meticulous long term planning, a desire to inflict mass casualties, a total disregard for civilian lives, including Muslims, multiple simultaneous attacks, and the use of suicide attackers. I can now confirm that of the 19 hijackers identified from the passenger lists of the four planes hijacked in America on September 11, at least three of these hijackers have already been positively identified as known associates of bin Laden, with a track record in his camps and organisation. The others are being investigated still. Of the three, one has also been identified as playing key roles in both the east Africa embassy attacks and the USS Cole attack.

"Since the attacks we have obtained the following intelligence. Shortly before the September 11 bin Laden told associates that he had a major operation against America under preparation, a range of people were warned to return back to Afghanistan because of action on or around September 11, and, most importantly, one of bin Laden's closest lieutenants has said clearly that he helped with the planning of the September 11 attacks and admitted the involvement of the al Qaida organisation.

"There is other intelligence, we cannot disclose, of an even more direct nature indicating guilt.

Taliban links

"The closeness of bin Laden's relationship with the Taliban is also plain. He provides them with troops, arms and money

to fight the Northern Alliance, is closely involved with their military training, planning and operations, he is represented in their military command structure. Forces under the control of bin Laden have fought alongside the Taliban in the civil war in Afghanistan. For its part, the Taliban regime has provided bin Laden with a safe haven within which to operate and allowed him to establish terrorist training camps. They jointly exploit the Afghan drugs trade. In return for active al Qaida support, the Taliban allow al Qaida to operate freely including the planning, training and preparing for terrorist activities. In addition, they provide security for the stockpiles of drugs.

"Mr Speaker, in the face of this evidence our objectives are clear. We must bring bin Laden and other al Qaida leaders to justice and eliminate the terrorist threat they pose and we must ensure that Afghanistan ceases to harbour and sustain international terrorism. If the Taliban regime will not comply with that objective we must bring about change in that regime to ensure that Afghanistan's links with international terrorism are broken.

"Since the House last met, we have been working ceaselessly on the diplomatic, humanitarian and military fronts.

"I can confirm that we have had initial discussions with the United States about a range of military capabilities with which Britain can help and have already responded positively to this. We will consider carefully any further requests and keep the House informed as appropriate, about such requests. For obvious reasons I cannot disclose the exact nature of our discussions. But I am fully satisfied they are consistent with our shared objectives.

"I believe the humanitarian coalition to help the people of Afghanistan to be as vital as any military action itself. Afghanistan was in the grip of a humanitarian crisis even before the events of September 11. Four years of drought, on top of over two decades of conflict, have forced millions of people to leave the country; and have left millions more dependent on international humanitarian aid.

Aid effort

"Last week the United Nations launched an appeal for \$584 million (◆340million) to meet the needs of vulnerable people in and around Afghanistan. The appeal covers the next six months. The international community has already pledged sufficient funds to meet the most immediate needs. The British government has contributed ◆25 million (\$37 million), nearly all of which has already been allocated to U.N. and other agencies. We have also made available a further ◆11m (\$16 million) for support for the poorest communities in Pakistan, especially those most directly affected by the influx of refugees. I know President Bush will shortly announce details of a major U.S. programme of aid.

"I have been in detailed consultation with the U.N. Secretary General, Kofi Annan, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, Ruud Lubbers, and other leaders. Kofi Annan has now appointed Lakhdar Brahimi to be his high level coordinator for the humanitarian effort in and around Afghanistan. We will give Mr Brahimi all the support we can, to help ensure that the U.N. and the whole of the international community comes together to meet the humanitarian challenge.

"Action is already in hand to cope with additional outflows of refugees. UNHCR is working with the governments of the region to identify sites for additional refugee camps. The first UNHCR flight of relief supplies, including tents donated by the British government, arrived in Iran yesterday. A second flight will depart at the end of this week, carrying more tents, plastic sheeting and tarpaulins, so that we can provide essential shelter for refugees. We are also stepping up the effort to get food into Afghanistan, before the winter snows begin. A UNICEF convoy carrying blankets and other supplies left Peshawar for Kabul on Tuesday. A World Food Programme convoy carrying over 200 tonnes of wheat arrived in Kabul on Monday. Further convoys have left for Afghanistan from Pakistan and Turkmenistan.

"Mr Speaker, we will do what ever we can to minimise the suffering of the Afghan people as a result of the conflict; and we commit ourselves now to work with them afterwards inside and outside Afghanistan to ensure a better, more peaceful future, free from the repression and dictatorship that is their present existence.

International diplomacy

"On the diplomatic front, over the past three weeks the Foreign Secretary (Jack Straw) and I have been in intensive contact with foreign leaders from every part of the world. In addition, the Foreign Secretary has visited the Middle East and Iran. I have visited Berlin, Paris and Washington for consultations with Chancellor Schroeder, President Chirac and President Bush respectively. Later today I will travel to Moscow to meet President Putin.

"What we have encountered is an unprecedented level of solidarity and commitment to work together against terrorism. This is a commitment that spans all continents, cultures and religions, reinforced by attacks like the one on the Jammu and Kashmir assembly in Srinagar, which killed over 30 innocent people.

"We have already made good progress in taking forward an international agenda. Last week the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 1373. This makes it mandatory for all states to prevent and suppress terrorist financing and requires the denial of safe haven to those who finance, plan, support or commit terrorist acts. The European Union too has taken firm action. Transport, interior, finance and foreign ministers have all met to concert an ambitious and effective European response: enhancing police cooperation; speeding up extradition; putting an end to the funding of

terrorism; and strengthening air security.

"We are, of course, also looking closely at our national legislation. In the next few weeks, the Home Secretary (David Blunket) intends to introduce a package of legislation to supplement existing legal powers in a number of areas. It will be a carefully appraised set of measures: tough, but balanced and proportionate to the risk we face. It will cover the funding of terrorism. It will increase our ability to exclude and remove those whom we suspect of terrorism and who are seeking to abuse our asylum procedures. It will widen the law on incitement to include religious hatred. We will bring forward a bill to modernise our extradition law.

"This will not be a knee-jerk reaction. But I emphasise we do need to strengthen our laws so that, even if necessary, only in a small number of cases, we have the means to protect our citizens' liberty and our national security. We have also ensured, insofar as is possible, that every reasonable measure of internal security is being undertaken. We have in place a series of contingency plans, governing all forms of terrorism. These plans are continually reviewed and tested regularly and at all levels. In addition, we continue to monitor carefully developments in the British and international economy. Certain sectors here and around the world have inevitably been seriously affected, though I repeat the fundamentals of all the major economies, including our own, remain strong. The reduction of risk from terrorist mass action is important also to economic confidence as September 11 shows. So there is every incentive in this respect also, to close down the Bin Laden network.

"Mr Speaker, three weeks on from the most appalling act of terrorism the world has ever witnessed, the coalition is strong. Military plans are robust. The humanitarian plans are falling into place. And the evidence against bin Laden and his network is overwhelming. The Afghan people are not our enemy. For they have our sympathy and they will have our support.

"Our enemy is Osama bin Laden and the Al Qaida network, who were responsible for the events of September 11. The Taliban regime must yield them up or become our enemy also.

"We will not act for revenge. We will act because we need to for the protection of our people and our way of life, including confidence in our economy. The threat bin Laden and his terrorism represents must be eliminated. We act for justice. We act with world opinion behind us. And we have an absolute determination to see justice done, and this evil of mass international terrorism confronted and defeated."

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