

PRESS CONFERENCE:

Dr. Tahseen Sheikhly, civilian spokesman for Operation Fardh al-Qanoon

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PARTICIPANTS:

DR TAHSEEN SHEIKHLY

REPORTERS:

STEVE FARRELL FROM THE NEW YORK TIMES

REPORTERS 1-11

***REP1 = REPORTER 1**

***INT = INTERPRETER**

DR. SHEIKHLY: Speaking in Arabic

INT: Of course, before we start the press conference I would like to say that you're all dear friends and thanks to your prayer and thoughts we were able to surpass this crisis. I'm also part of the media, and you know the media is targeted as well. Today we're not talk about what happened. Today we'll talk about what's going on the Iraqi field and the Iraqi government headed by Prime Minister Maliki aims at providing security to the Iraqi people, especially after we have seen that there were some armed groups who are trying to control some places in Iraq as a power that is opposed to the government. And this is not acceptable at any case. And the government is determined to fight those armed groups as long as those groups are threatening the security of the people in any part of the country. If those armed groups did not surrender and put down their weapon, so the battle will be continuous with them. The Iraqi government pays great attention to the human [U/I] and the situation that the [U/I] now trying to prevent those essential services and they are been as you know trying to threaten the people. That's why the Prime Minister Maliki gave instructions to set the mechanisms and the appropriate mechanisms to alleviate the suffering of the people in those areas that the armed groups are trying to control and trying to hinder the essential services. So

that's why we, or it has been allowed to the movement of the ambulances from in and out of Sadr City and Shulah neighborhood in Baghdad. After those ambulances are actually being searched in certain areas through surgeon machines. And this is not only, those ambulances are not only to remove the wounded but also to move the some patients to the hospital. As well as the movement, this will also help in the movement of the doctors because those criminals are trying to control those areas. So we allowed the movement of the doctors after the doctor proves his identity by the personal identification card and the. In addition to that, Prime Minister Maliki ordered that there will be food, that food will be also distributed in Sadr City and Shulah. And there had, we had three thousand tons of flour was sent and also there were also some food rations, and he also gave instructions to send the food rations to all the Iraqi citizens. Also, the oil and the gas is, as you know, part of the essential services that we're required to provide to the citizens. The vehicles of the Baghdad Aminat and those who give that give services were allowed to move in those neighborhoods in addition to the maintenance vehicles of electricity that, as you know, provide good help for the electricity or the power production because as you know the criminals tried to target those power production places through their weapons in the recent days. All those vehicles can move and can get in and out from certain places.

And there are some certain procedures through searching the persons and the drivers and the vehicles before getting into those areas. The important thing that I'd like to say and a message through this press conference, as a government, we view the media as the fourth authority and opinion for the people and conveys the truth to the people. The building of the Iraqi government demands that everyone should stand together so that there will be an authority in the government, and we cannot allow to any other opposing authority outside the constitution and outside the law to interfere in the building of the Iraqi government. Those, the presence of those criminal groups that have some heavy weapons, like mortar rounds and heavy weapon, different kinds of weapons. So what, imagine what they could do in such a community. What's the reason behind those weapons? Why do they obtain such weapons if they claim to defend themselves? So I think the small arms are a reasonable thing, but such heavy weapons shows that there's an intention to target the Iraqi citizen in the first place. that's why we will not allow at any case that there will be no authority outside the law. And this is our main...and after five years from toppling the regime, the former regime, we can notice the strength of the government and also the commitment of the government with the democracy that allows all the procedures and the peaceful methods to criticize, talk, and oppose for any kind of,

or show any kind of expression that is allowed according to the constitution. But it should not hurt the Iraqi citizen. This is one of the main point, and we are determined that the humanitarian and the essential services will be provided because this is the job of the government. Thank you. And I think I'll take your questions now.

REP1: Asking question in Arabic.

INT: Yesterday there was a meeting for the senior leaders about handing over the weapons. And yesterday one of the areas were targeted in Sadr City and in other places as well, like al-[U/I] neighborhood. How would you view this meeting? And are there any hidden agreement among the politicians.

DR. SHEIKHLY: Speaking in Arabic.

INT: No, there aren't no hidden agreements, and everything is transparent. The meeting of the national security for the [U/I] Council said that all the political blocks participating in the political block included were attended that meeting. And all the blocks agreed on there could, there would, there could be some preservation about certain points. But all the parts believed that the political process should head in this direction and that the government should impose or enforce the law everywhere because only the Iraqi constitution and Iraqi government should prevail.

REP2: Asking question in Arabic.

INT: You have mentioned that as an Iraqi government we view media as

the fourth authority that conveys the truth to the people. And the media, as you know, should name the groups. And you call those groups as armed groups or outlaws. And many, several politicians and even you specified the Sadr trend and talked about negotiations and talks with the Sadr trend. So are those groups [U/I] or Sadr trend, or should we just call them armed groups?

DR. SHEIKHLY: Speaking in Arabic.

INT: When we say armed groups, we're not specifying a certain trend. Those armed groups belong to different trends and different and try to hide itself under certain political trends and not only one. That's why the government ever since the beginning said we are not targeting a certain trend and not a certain political party. We're targeting those who are trying to hurt the country. Even if the party is, there could be some bad people in some political parties that try to hurt the economy of the country, like Basra in particular. Let's ask this question. There are certain political trends and blocks inside the Basra, but there are some different armed groups and criminal ones have such heavy weapon. And the media have showed that. Those kinds of weapons that belong to certain blocks and the detentions did not only target a, did not target a certain political block but different ones because those aim at harming the Iraqi economy. Because you know Basra is a important economical or economic province. In this province they try to be like the mafia

and gangs. But the government when deals with those people, the government should call them as groups and armed groups because they do not belong to a certain trend. They belong to different trends. Those are criminals and they should be dealt with accordingly. That's why when you talk about groups, we talk about, they don't represent a specific ideology or a trend, a political trend.

REP3: Asking question in Arabic.

INT: You have talked about the armed groups and specifically those who kidnapped you first. Because there were negotiations to release you, and those...

DR. SHEIKHLY: Speaking in Arabic.

INT: I didn't know of any negotiations. No, nothing happened. There was no ransom.

REP3: Asking question in Arabic.

INT: Talking about this issue and, the other thing is the ambulances that get into Sadr city and the other areas, how could you trust the security forces that handed over, or some of them who handed over their weapons, so how could you trust those security forces in Sadr City and Shulah after they handed over, or some of them handed over the weapons? Do you think that the American officer or the American party will monitor those security services and their performance?

DR. SHEIKHLY: Speaking in Arabic.

INT: The problem is an Iraqi one. Those who are being killed and those who are being kidnapped are Iraqis, those who are kidnapped are Iraqis. The problem is inside the country and inside the people of the country because some of the people of the country have some certain agendas to harm the country and also to destabilize it. Of course, there has been some negligence and bad performance by the security services. But there is a law. I think Prime Minister Maliki talked about this. And he said we will activate the criminal, the military penalty law. Anyone who relinquishes his job will be punished. We don't talk about it as a mood. In every battle you can see that those who, some people fight and some don't. Even in the major countries and major armies you can see that some even relinquish and they don't go to war. Dealing with this have to do with law. The presence of the Multi-National Forces with cooperation with our troops, yes we do need that because we are partners in fighting terrorism. And what's going on now is parallel to terrorism. We have to fight together so that we can build a good country. We may have a good power, but with the partners this power could be really appropriate to deal with such situations.

REP3: Asking question in Arabic.

INT: To be honest, who actually kidnapped you? Who kidnapped Dr. Tahseen Sheikhly?

DR. SHEIKHLY: Speaking in Arabic.

INT: I will talk about this for you in private. And I promise you, and you're my friend, but I'll make a special interview with you so that we can talk about this. And I promised you.

REP4: Asking question in Arabic.

INT: Question from Biladi TV. We have seen that Operation Fardh al-Qanoon achieved a great success in Baghdad and the other provinces. But in southern provinces witness some tensions like in Karbala, Najaf, Diwaniyah. Some the political monitors and observers that there are some external agendas and as you said interfered to destabilize the situation in Iraq. Do you think, or don't you think that those agendas should be observed or monitored?

DR. SHEIKHLY: Speaking in Arabic.

INT: Of course. The important thing's to protect the Iraqi citizen. And Operation Fardh al-Qanoon is a success, actually, as you know. Even the enemies of Iraq know that. I don't think those RPGs or those mines or car bombs or those mortar rounds came from ours. There is someone who's financing those armed groups with such weapons and always tries to finance them and also targets the economic status in the country. Of course, this is being taken into consideration. In the southern provinces there's a security plan. There's a plan in Baghdad. There's a plan in Mosul. And the Iraqi government views all the provinces at the same level because we're

working on establishing the rule of law not only in place in Iraq but in all the places in Iraq, from the north and south.

REP5: Asking question in Arabic.

INT: The director of the operations in MOD said the security forces managed to capture certain criminals who, and they were from Arab nationalities, especially Egyptians.

DR. SHEIKHLY: Speaking in Arabic.

INT: Yes that's true.

REP5: Asking question in Arabic.

INT: So the Iraqi government attended the Arab summit and demanded the Arab Summit to, or the Arab countries to support it.

DR. SHEIKHLY: Speaking in Arabic.

INT: It's not the Arab countries. When I find a mine that was built or manufactured in Iran, does that mean that the Iranian government or the Iranian president send it? There could be some sides in a certain Arabic or another regional country that don't want to stabilize the country here or stabilize Iraq. Of course that doesn't mean that the governments of those countries, they could be part of it or not. But mostly, and as you know, due to the meetings, those countries show that they do care about Iraq. But what we see on realities that there is strategic equipment and financing for criminal groups who try to destabilize the country and those weapons were manufactured in certain Arabic and regional countries.

REP6: Asking question in Arabic.

INT: There's a catastrophe, a humanitarian catastrophe in the Sadr City and Shulah, and there are no water, electricity. How would you deal with this? Especially I was in Sadr City yesterday and the people complaining about the essential services.

DR. SHEIKHLY: Speaking in Arabic.

INT: Believe me, this is what happened. Prime Minister Maliki and his in a meeting, he met with the health director of the Rasafa and there was some instructions to provide all the possible essential services to the Iraqi citizens, even those provinces that complain of some services and like there was some blood also bottles sent from Salah Ad Din province. And Iraqi soldiers also donated also certain services to help the people in Sadr City. We are planning to, or what happened in Basra for instance. And the money that has been allocated to rebuild Basra. All this indicates that all the Iraqis or the Iraqi provinces do care to rebuild this province. We're looking to peace to stabilize the situation. We're not looking to only secure the area. I can't establish peace, and there's a group or a man who has a mortar round or a rocket hidden in his own house, or an RPG. This cannot provide peace, cannot provide security to the people. That's why in order to provide essential services to those people we have to eliminate those groups, and the same time we have to pay attention to the humanitarian situation. That's why there were some

procedures to alleviate the suffering of the Iraqi people.

REP6: Asking question in Arabic.

INT: First...

DR. SHEIKHLY: Speaking in Arabic.

INT: We are also part of the Iraqi people. And those who target the Iraqi people, and even if it's a, you know, no one likes anybody to be kidnapped. And as you know as media you have been targeted several times. And so this means that we do not accept any kind of kidnapping behavior in the country. If someone is kidnapped and he's threatened, so this is not an acceptable thing for the country. That's why I'm sitting here in a press conference.

REP7: Asking question in Arabic.

INT: We have talked a while ago about those who have neglected their duties. And this actually caused confusion among the Iraqi army, and you know that the Iraqi soldier and the Iraqi police officers are being, and certain, and a lot of money's being dispersed on those soldiers. And what happened now and what we have seen on the TV that certain soldiers who neglected their duties formed, as we can say, a problem for us, because as you know, he should have some adherence and allegiance to the country. So those people or those soldiers should be prosecuted twice. And who's responsible for or in charge for prosecuting them? This is the first question. The second question, you've talked about, or you said that 2008 will be

a year of reconstruction. And due to what happened those days and who do you think is responsible? And who do you think is behind this crisis that happened to the country? And in your opinion, when do you think the armed groups will put down their weapons? Are you negotiating with them? In your opinion. And do you think they could put down their weapon by force?

DR. SHEIKHLY: Speaking in Arabic.

INT: Let me answer those three questions briefly. Those who neglected their duties, and as I've said a while ago, in every battle you can see that those who fight and those who neglect their duties. And this could be due to certain, or several reasons because you know our forces were built in a very fast way and include all the sects in the country and all Iraqis. And some of those groups wanted to deviate the work that is the government, or they say that the government is not targeting the criminals but they're targeting the, or a certain trend. And we have said that we don't target anyone. But despite that, there has been a fuss about this. And hopefully all this is over. Some people of course refuse to be, to a certain trend to be targeted. Or probably he has some negligence. Our procedures is limited. We have a law, and we deal with this according to the law. There is a law that punishes all those who neglect their duties. If you take a salary and if you work for the government, then you have duties and you have rights. So you have to, if you don't perform your duties in

a good way, so the law will be activated against those people. We can't execute them by putting a bullet in his head just like the former regime did. We activate the law, because without activating the law, we will be outlaws. That's why we need to activate the law. This is one point. Regarding reconstruction. Reconstruction cannot happen without establishing security and peace. Basra suffered a lot, and there are some gangs and criminal gangs, corrupted criminal gangs that are trying to threaten the Iraqi economy. That's why we were supposed to provide security and peace in Basra so that we can start reconstruction. And when we talk about reconstruction, as we can see those allocations that have been given to Basra for reconstruction, that's why it should be a peaceful way for the country.

REP7: Asking question in Arabic.

INT: We would like to know the timetable. And when does it end? And will they prosecuted, those criminals who carried out weapon against the Iraqi government and the Iraqi citizen? Will they be prosecuted.

DR. SHEIKHLY: Speaking in Arabic.

INT: Be sure, we will not stop unless we remove all the weapon from those criminal gangs. And we will not stop unless the security is improved and established. This is the duty of the government. We need to protect our citizens. And we cannot protect our citizens

under such a threat. Such a threat formed certain powers, and they could control certain areas. You could see them control such an area and allocate some lands according to their own moods. So you should eliminate those groups and you should fight them in any way. And this is the job of the government. It's the job of the government that there's only one law in this country, and we have to activate the law. That's why we need to refuse those criminal, presence of those criminal gangs. And this is not only the duty of the government but the duty of the Iraqi citizens because all the Iraqi citizens are cooperating with us. And you know the Iraqi citizens ask us to eliminate those criminal groups because they say we want to live in peace. And you know those people prevented the children from going to school, prevented the people from going to work, and they wanted to enforce some certain ideology and agendas. So what, don't you think that those people are those citizens are our own responsibility? That's why we need to rebuild or build Iraq in a firm way and fight those agendas.

FARRELL:

Steven Farrell from the New York Times. First of all, it's been nearly a week now Basra's been over. How many soldiers or police have you actually suspended, removed from duty, or prosecuted? The Prime Minister was clear that this would happen. You must know who these people are by now. How many have you taken action against? Secondly, you mentioned earlier on that other

countries, Arab countries, have provided, strategic weapons had come from other Arab countries, whether or not the countries' government knew about it. Can you say which sort of weapons, how many, and from which countries? And just finally on yourself, how and why were you kidnapped, if you're not going to say who? And how and why were you released?

DR. SHEIKHLY: Speaking in Arabic.

INT: I was kidnapped because I was Dr. Tahseen Sheikhly. The number of the soldiers, you can go ask the military spokesman about this in Operation Fardh al-Qanoon. I'm sorry, I cannot give you the figure, an exact number, because I'm not responsible for this. But I can talk generally about this and say, or, when I said that there are some weapons manufactured in Arabic country, I didn't say an Arabic country, but I said a regional or an Arabic country. And most of the weapons that come from countries that are well known, and we didn't want, because the major general Mohammed al-Askari in a press conference said, and he showed some IEDs. And he said that those are manufactured in Iran. So an important thing is that those weapons come from countries and come from sides that are actually or basically trying to destabilize the situation in the country and also hurt the Iraqi citizen.

REP8: Asking question in Arabic.

INT: Don't you think there is a heavy weapon in Iraq and an

indication...don't you think that this is an indication that the border of the Iraqi with other countries is not safe? Because the former regime, the borders were much better controlled. Prime Minister Maliki said that militias, or Shiite militias, are worse than al-Qaida, and any kind of explosion that happens is blamed for al-Qaida. But why now are you targeting the militias, or the Shiite militias.

DR. SHEIKHLY: Speaking in Arabic.

INT: We can't compare, regarding to the borders, we can't compare now with before. We are now building a government, and after the institutes and the former institutes were disbanded. And you know that building the new institutes demands some time and effort so that we can, but you know the responsibility of any country is a joint one. It's based on the intentions that of the neighboring countries. Not a single country can protect its own borders. In all the world it's a joint thing between countries that carry some good intention. Unfortunately, yes there are some a lot of weapons, and there's a flow of weapon across the border. But we cannot, but we can control the borders, and you know those borders are long. And it's not an easy job. And we have borders with different countries, and with countries that have different intentions towards Iraq. And Prime Minister Maliki did not say the militias, or the Shiite militias in particular, but he said the militias, and he, and that includes all those who carry out weapon against the government. The militias

now, actually, are a crisis. And the crisis is now an Iraqi one. At one day we targeted al-Qaida, and, but now as we can see, that those who kill are Iraqis and those who kidnap are Iraqis and those who are being killed and kidnapped are Iraqis. So we cannot ignore this. We have to name those people. And the aim is not to specify or giving the name or the nationality of those groups. The militias could be under the, or following a certain trend and religion and then follow another trend, nationality, or religion. We do not want to specify the certain name, but we need to deal with it as Iraqis so that we can, we could talk about a national unity identity in all the work that we perform in Iraq.

REP9: Asking question in Arabic.

INT: All the Iraqis and the [U/I] newspapers and Dr. Ahmed Chalabi was worried about the crisis that we've witnessed and we hope everyday that this crisis will be over. We are now approaching April 9, and everyone knows this date, which is the date of toppling the regime and also the liberation of Iraq and Iraqis. My question is does the Iraqi government, or did it achieve any national sovereignty on its soil, especially after, as you know, the Multi-National Forces still patrol in the Iraqi streets? And did the Iraqi government achieve anything that the Iraqi citizen aspire?

DR. SHEIKHLY: Speaking in Arabic.

INT: Of course this anniversary is for the Iraqis, that is the toppling of

the former dictator. And did the Iraqis achieve what they aspire, and what has been achieved of them? I could give you some certain points that could tell you, or could give you what have been achieved for the past five years. Of course, there's, it's not a big thing that probably, but it's an important that has been achieved. Now, after five years, let's say from 2004 and until 2008, now we have a government that at a certain time could make a decision to fight an Iraqi person. We couldn't do that in 2004. There is a constitution now. There is democracy. And freedom of expression. You can see a sit-in here and there. Of course, as long as it's not threatening the security, it's a good thing because democracy was activated. There are elections, and you have the right to elect the politician that you desire. This is one of the achievements. Probably the real achievement is not still done, like being like Beirut or Dubai. But the good thing is that you have been established in the right path. We've followed the right path. In the past there was some disputes and political disputes, but now we have a political process and there is a process of building of the country. We also have to thank the Multi-National Forces that liberated Iraq and also worked with us to establish a democratic country. Now you can, and this is about sovereignty, the Iraqi government can tell the Multi-National Forces you can leave from our soil by the end of 2008. This couldn't have been done or said in

2004. And I think this is what have been achieved briefly.

REP10: Asking question in Arabic.

INT: [U/I] Newspaper. My question could be different because everything has been asked. It's about the priest that have been, or has been assassinated yesterday. There's a source saying that he has been assassinated by an armed man driving a motorcycle. And also in al-Mansur district a month ago, or less than a month ago, a liquor store also, three citizens, people who work at that liquor store were assassinated in the same time, or in the same method. And the second question, I think that there is a marginalization for the role of the journalist. And I think that there should be a connection between the media institute and the ministry that gives the news.

DR. SHEIKHLY: Speaking in Arabic.

INT: Well, when I take journalists with me, and as you know, I pick them up and I drive the car and they, I take them with me so that I could protect them. Our view to media is the following. Any country that does not activate or does not respect the media or does not respect the media institute will not be a democratic country. There cannot be a good country without a good or free media that convey the news in a good way because the government cannot see the government unless the, or the citizen cannot see the government unless through the media. And when I was kidnapped, I was just watching TV. I had nothing to do. So I asked to follow up all the

media channels and I used to, and I felt that all those that I knew who those who want excitement and all those, and those who just wanted to serve the country. And this is the good thing. And you can see the difference between the interests of the media institutes that were exposed because the crisis is an Iraqi one, and not a Iraqi with an Iraqi, or with another foreigner side. And Prime Minister Maliki on Friday was talking about media as well. And he felt sorry that there was some media reports or institutes that targeted the country because Iraq has a lot of media institutes. And this, this is an indication that the media is important in our country. As for the other question, this is our crisis. How can we accept that a priest who practices according to the constitution the freedom of worship in a democratic country and then you can see that an armed man comes and just kills him or anyone who practices any kind of job? So there's a right for people. No one can or has the authority to kill someone. And this is a crisis without activating the law. And we need to clean this, the community and the society from such criminals. And I hope everyone should cooperate to reach this stage. I cannot give the criminal some reports or news so that it will show him like he's a hero. And those are abnormal people, and you could see that unfortunately there are some media institutes that describe them as heroes. And this will be the last question.

REP11:

Asking question in Arabic.

INT: You've mentioned that you talk about the services and the question I have now is naming things. You asked the government to negotiate or talk with the Sadr trend. And when the talks took place, and when the dialogue took place, officially or not, there was not meet with the Islamic [U/I] or any other organization. It was with the Sadr trend. And some say that those are not only outlaws, those are groups who suffer from unemployment and no essential services provided to them. And even if you name the count, or the cities, or actually the cities that lack essential services. So the question is, what did the government do and what did the government provide to those citizens so that they will not carry weapon and ask for their rights.

DR. SHEIKHLY: Speaking in Arabic.

INT: The, I will talk about the message probably after the press conference. And I will, I've talked about the Time magazine and the correspondent for the Times magazine about this. And the other question I do agree with you. I do agree with you that those groups that we're talking about, they are Iraqis and they are suffering from the shortage of the services. And because the government did not took care of them and they have been marginalized and they do need care. That's why they could be deceived at any time. Yes, the Iraqi government at a certain point was not able to provide everything to all the people despite all the bad services that we

inherited from the former regime and also the destruction of the infrastructure. At a certain point, we were not able to provide services, but now we are able to build the infrastructure so that we can provide services to the people so that we can do what they aspire to, or provide what they aspire to. So that...actually, the economy problem causes, what causes such crisis. Criminals do pursue some people and deceive them. And when you concentrate and when you look into those areas and when you look into and when you say that there should be reconstruction in those areas, it's true. I've been in one of those days for five days, for 115 hours. And there was only two-hour outages, outages for two hour in the power production. So I was, I found that strange. So I told them that, and I'd like to say the government now is trying to do something, but unfortunately those areas need some great effort, and they need some development. They need some building of the community there. I've seen that there is a problem in the community in those places. The government with all its efforts need to solve such disputes and problems among the communities in Iraq. That's why I approve that such areas are the most that need reconstruction because the terrorism is trying, or those who have agendas trying to establish themselves in those areas. Thank you very much. And I'd like to thank everyone from the bottom of my heart for your prayers and your thoughts and your phone calls and

for everything that you've mentioned today.