

Doha Dialogue Talks - Day 1 - May 17, 2008 - Hizbullah Refuses to Disarm

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Qatari talks: Hizbullah refuses to disarm

Reuters - Hizbullah representatives have refused to discuss the possibility of laying down their arms as part of the negotiations being held between them and the Lebanese government in Qatar.

Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabr al-Thani proposed in response that the matter be taken off the table under the political crisis between the two sides is resolved. (Reuters)

 Lebanese Leaders : From Lebanon To Qatar - May 16, 2008
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 Hizbullah Arms Dominate First Round of Lebanese Dialogue

Bickering Lebanese politicians postponed the thorny issue of Hizbullah's weapons on Saturday at talks in Qatar aimed at ending a feud that drove their country to the brink of a new civil war.

Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassem bin Jabr al-Thani "offered to come up with a proposal on the Hizbullah weaponry issue and present it to the two parties," a Lebanese delegate told AFP.

"The two sides have agreed to that," he added following the first session of Arab-mediated talks by 14 leaders or representatives of the government and the Hizbullah-led opposition, backed by Syria and Iran.

Host Qatar offered to come up with a compromise after leaders of the March 14 parliamentary bloc insisted on listing Hizbullah's arms on the agenda of the dialogue, said the delegate, requesting anonymity.

After 65 people were killed in nearly a week of fighting, the two sides agreed on Thursday to a national dialogue aimed at breaking an impasse over electing a new president and forming a unity government.

The Qatari hosts will be working against the backdrop of two United Nations Security Council resolutions calling for the disarmament of all militias in Lebanon.

Hizbullah was the only group that did not have to hand over its guns to the government following the 1989 Saudi-brokered Taef agreement to end the 1975-1990 civil war, because it was fighting the Israeli occupation of south Lebanon.

However, Israel pulled its troops out of Lebanon in 2000.

Resolution 1559, adopted in 2004 called, among other things, for the "disbanding and disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias."

Resolution 1701, which brought an end to the 2006 war between Israel and Hizbullah, called for there to be "no weapons or authority in Lebanon other than that of the Lebanese state."

Despite disagreement over the arms question, the delegates did agree to form a committee of three members from each side to address the issue of a new electoral law for parliamentary polls due next year, the delegate said.

No time has been fixed for the next session, said a source in the Arab League, which is sponsoring the crisis talks, but bilateral meetings were expected to be held on the sidelines of the gathering.

In addition to the electoral law, the leaders are expected to discuss a proposed unity government.

Parliament has failed to convene to elect a successor, exacerbating a crisis that began in late 2006 when six pro-Syrian

ministers quit the cabinet of Prime Minister Fouad Saniora.

On June 10, it is due for the 20th time to meet to elect a president.

The talks officially started on Friday evening with a brief opening session chaired by Qatar's emir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani.

Mediation continued overnight with the emir shuttling between rival parties, according to the Lebanese pro-government newspaper An-Nahar.

Hizbullah leader Hassan Nasrallah is not attending, reportedly because of security concerns, and is represented by Hizbullah MP Mohammed Raad.

Also attending on behalf of the opposition are parliament speaker Nabih Berri and Christian leader Michel Aoun.

The dialogue is linked to a six-point plan agreed following Arab League mediation led by the Qatari premier.

Under the deal the rivals undertook "to shore up the authority of the Lebanese state throughout the country," to refrain from using weapons to further political aims and to remove militants from the streets.(AFP-Naharnet)

Beirut, 17 May 08, 07:03

<http://www.naharnet.com/domino/tn/NewsDesk.nsf/Lebanon/>

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Doha Talks to Tackle 3 Issues: New Government, Elections Law, Hizbullah Arms

The daily An Nahar on Saturday said the Qatari emir shuttled between the rival Lebanese leaders overnight, stressing that discussions should focus on three topics: a government of national unity, an electoral law and the use of Hizbullah arms domestically.

It said both the majority and the opposition agreed to come out after the first round of talks on Saturday with the formation of sub-committees.

One of the committees under Qatar's prime minister would group four leaders – two from the opposition and two from the majority – with the task of examining the techniques of an elections law and amendments proposed by former cabinet minister Fouad Boutros.

On the formation of a government of national unity, an Arab ministerial committee will subsequently sponsor talks in Beirut.

Future TV channel, meanwhile, quoted government sources as saying that Prime Minister Fouad Saniora is to propose during the Doha talks a cabinet formula based on 13+10+7.

Regarding the issue of Hizbullah arms, it will certainly be tackled in Doha, according to An Nahar, provided that it would be further discussed in the framework of a "defense policy" after implementation of the Arab initiative.

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<http://www.naharnet.com/domino/tn/NewsDesk.nsf/getstory?openform&9282D5879878C053C225744C00355C5D>