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OTAN/NATO, 1110 Bruxelles ■ Telephones: 241 00 40 - 241 44 00 - 241 44 90 TELEX: 23-867

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PRELIMINARY REMARKS TO THE PRESS BY THE SECRETARY GENERAL -  
ANKARA 24TH JUNE 1980

Ladies and Gentlemen,

To begin with, may I say how happy I am to be here in Ankara for the spring meeting of the North Atlantic Council. I should also like to express my thanks to the Turkish Authorities for their warm welcome and friendly hospitality.

As is customary on the eve of a Ministerial Meeting, it is my pleasure to welcome you, on the present occasion in this admirably-equipped conference centre.

It is significant that this Ministerial Meeting is being held in Ankara immediately in the wake of international events that have increased the strategic importance of the Alliance's South-Eastern flank.

The past six months have unfortunately been marked by developments that jeopardise the basis for world stability. The Soviet forces continue to occupy Afghanistan, a Third World country which is not in the Warsaw Pact and is traditionally neutral and non-aligned. This occupation, which has been resisted by the Afghan people and has been condemned by the great majority of the international community, will be considered by Ministers, particularly in terms of its very serious implications for the strategic situation in the world. It is becoming increasingly important for the Alliance's collective defence that the current efforts to strengthen the cohesion of the South-Eastern flank should be intensified.

It is against this background that we shall begin our meeting tomorrow with a general review of the international situation and the state of the Alliance; there will then be a Restricted Session at which the participants will have a free-ranging, confidential discussion on a number of key issues of special concern to them.

As regards relations within the Alliance, you will recollect that at the Washington summit in 1978 I was given the task of keeping under close review the implementation of

a programme designed to provide economic aid to member countries that are economically less advanced. This issue will be discussed by Ministers in the light of Article 2 of the North Atlantic Treaty, with particular reference to Turkey, which benefits from financial assistance and economic co-operation through appropriate bilateral and multilateral channels.

Ministers will also consider the five-year programme proposed by the Science Committee to strengthen the scientific and technological capabilities of Greece, Portugal and Turkey by means of close co-operation with the scientific institutions of other Alliance countries - another formula that will also contribute to the economic development of these countries.

Finally, Ministers will discuss the items that traditionally appear on the agendas for these meetings, including the report on the Mediterranean and a progress report on co-operation in the field of military equipment.

That is all I wanted to say to you by way of introduction. I am now at your disposal to answer your questions before inviting you to join us in a less official setting for the Press Reception that traditionally precedes Ministerial Sessions.