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 FBIS 029

LEBANON: BIRRI SUBMITS NEW PROPOSALS ON HOSTAGE CRISIS

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(TEXT) AT A NEWS CONFERENCE TODAY, MINISTER NABIH BIRRI ANNOUNCED THAT ONE OF THE HOSTAGES WILL BE RELEASED. HE ALSO PUT FORWARD NEW PROPOSALS FOR RESOLVING THE ISSUE OF THE HIJACKED PLANE. THE MOST PROMINENT PROPOSAL IS THAT THE HOSTAGES COULD BE PLACED IN A FOREIGN EMBASSY IN WEST BEIRUT, SUCH AS THE FRENCH OR SWISS EMBASSY, PROVIDED THAT THE GOVERNMENT OF THAT EMBASSY WOULD PLEDGE THAT THESE HOSTAGES WOULD NOT BE RELEASED BEFORE THE ATLIT PRISONERS ARE RELEASED.

MINISTER BIRRI SAID THAT IF THE UNITED STATES DOES NOT ACCEPT THIS OFFER, WE PROPOSE THAT THE HOSTAGES BE MOVED TO A FRATERNAL OR FRIENDLY STATE, SUCH AS SYRIA, PROVIDED THAT PRESIDENT HAFIZ AL-ASAD WILL PLEDGE THAT THE HOSTAGES WILL NOT LEAVE DAMASCUS BEFORE THE ATLIT PRISONERS ARE RELEASED.

MINISTER BIRRI EXPLAINED THAT IF WASHINGTON DOES NOT ACCEPT DAMASCUS, THERE IS TEHRAN.

MINISTER BIRRI ASKED THE U.S. AUTHORITIES TO KEEP THEIR SHIPS 12 MILES AWAY FROM THE COAST. HE ADDED THAT THE U.S. PRESIDENT SHOULD PLEDGE THAT THERE WILL BE NO AGGRESSION AGAINST INNOCENT PEOPLE EVEN AFTER THE ISSUE IS SETTLED.

AT HIS NEWS CONFERENCE THIS AFTERNOON, MINISTER BIRRI SAID THAT HE RECEIVED TWO CALLS YESTERDAY. A PERSON ALSO VISITED HIM TODAY. BIRRI SAID THAT HE PUTS KIDNAPPED FRENCH JOURNALIST KAUFMANN AND FRENCH RESEARCHER MICHEL SEURAT AT THE DISPOSAL OF THE HIJACKERS. IN OTHER WORDS, THEY WILL BE RELEASED WITH THE AMERICAN HOSTAGES ON THE SAME PLANE IF THE ATLIT PRISONERS ARE RELEASED.

MINISTER BIRRI DESCRIBED U.S. THREATS TO CLOSE BEIRUT AIRPORT AS NOT SERIOUS. HE EXPRESSED THE BELIEF THAT THE REAL REASON FOR ISSUING THESE THREATS IS THE APPROACHING DATE OF U.S. INDEPENDENCE DAY ON 4 JULY. HE SAID THESE THREATS HAVE CREATED THE REAL JUSTIFICATION FOR THE HIJACKERS ACTION.

HE ADDED: WE DO NOT FEAR TERRORISM OR THREATS. WE ARE NOT IN GRENADA. WE ARE READY TO DEFEND OUR TERRITORIES. WE POINT OUT THAT THIS MATTER CAN ONLY BE SOLVED WITH REASON.

MINISTER BIRRI DECLARED THAT HE ASKED THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS (IRC) TO VISIT ALL THE HOSTAGES YESTERDAY. THE IRC DID IN FACT VISIT THE HOSTAGES AND SUBMITTED A VERBAL REPORT THIS MORNING, SAYING THAT JIMMY PALMER IS ILL. THEREFORE, WE DECIDED TO RELEASE HIM. HE WILL LEAVE FOR LARNACA IN 30 MINUTES. WE ARE ALSO STUDYING THE HEALTH CONDITION OF (LAGROS MAYER), AND WE WILL RELEASE HIM VERY SOON.

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