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Afghanistan asks Pakistan to free Taliban prisoners for peace

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Afghanistan has requested to neighboring Pakistan to free dozens of senior Taliban prisoners to help start the peace talks between the Taliban and Kabul.

The Afghan Foreign Ministry issued the statement on Saturday in response to remarks by the Pakistani Foreign Ministry on Tuesday, which welcomed the opening of a Taliban office in the Qatari capital of Doha, saying Islamabad stood "ready to continue to facilitate the (peace) process to achieve lasting peace".

"(If) Pakistan has the sincere determination to support the Afghan peace process ... then the most useful and urgent step would be to release those Afghan Taliban leaders who have been arrested by Pakistani authorities," the statement said.

"The release of these prominent Taliban leaders would provide the High Peace Council of Afghanistan with the opportunity to start peace talks with them," it added, referring to an Afghan body established by President Hamid Karzai in 2010.

On Tuesday, the Taliban opened its office in Doha. But the opening ceremony caused a row between the Afghan government and the United States because Taliban envoys raised the Taliban flag and signs reading the "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan", the term the Taliban used during their 1996-2001 rule.

On Thursday, US Secretary of State John Kerry called Afghan President Hamid Karzai in a bid to defuse tension with Afghanistan.

Karzai says the opening of the office in Qatar contradicted earlier US security guarantees given to his government.

The Afghan president said that his government will not join any US negotiations with the Taliban unless the talks are led by the Afghans.

On Wednesday, Afghan lawmakers also voiced their strong opposition to the opening of the controversial office in Doha.

The legislators also criticized Washington's decision to hold talks with the militant group in Doha.

The MPs demanded that peace talks be held in Afghanistan and not in Qatar.

The United States and its allies invaded Afghanistan in 2001 as part of Washington's so-called war on terror. The offensive removed the Taliban from power, but after almost 12 years, insecurity remains across the country.