



Check Against Delivery

Statement By

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President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Mr President,

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Over the 62 years of its existence, this assembly has witnessed many moments of historical reckoning. It was one such moment, five years ago, when Afghanistan returned to this assembly as a country emerging out of a long, dark era of war, violence and terror. As I stood before this assembly in September 2002, the challenges of restoring security to the lives of the Afghan people, and rebuilding Afghanistan into a stable and democratic country, seemed all but insuperable. The fate of a nation swayed between the promise of a safer, more prosperous future on the one hand, and the enormity of the tasks at hand on the other.

Today, the journey of Afghanistan's stability and reconstruction is resolutely apace. The Afghan people continue to make the best of the new opportunities: our economy is surging ahead; the legitimacy of our newly founded institutions is gradually taking roots; our society is brimming with freedom and activity.

For too long, Afghanistan bore an unenviable rank on most human development indicators. This situation is no longer acceptable and is changing rapidly. Today, more Afghans enjoy access to health and education than ever before in our history. We have cut child mortality rate, one of the highest in the world only two years ago, by 25.7 percent. As a result, over 85,000 more children remain alive today.

For the first time in forty years, Afghanistan is set once again to become self sufficient in cereal production.

Already, the fruits of relative stability and increased prosperity in Afghanistan are spilling over our borders to the wider region. Having enjoyed unprecedented growth in our regional trade over the past six years, we are now moving to consolidate Afghanistan's role in the economic integration of the region. Earlier this year, we assumed membership of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). The significance of this step lies in the potential for Afghanistan to connect South Asia to Central Asia and the Middle East in commerce and interaction. Last month, President Rakhmanov of Tajikistan and I were joined by the US Secretary of Commerce to inaugurate a transit bridge, financed by the United States, that connects Afghanistan with Tajikistan and beyond. An evocation of the celebrated Silk Road, this bridge, alongside many other infrastructure projects we have completed, is set to play a significant role in further economic integration of the region.

Make no mistake, ladies and gentlemen; despite our achievements, a safer and brighter future for Afghanistan still lies beyond many momentous challenges. Poverty and underdevelopment, climatic hardships and, above all, the menaces of terrorism and narcotics; these are challenges of global proportion in which Afghanistan continues to partake its share as a member of this global village.

Mr President,

To the extent that terrorism remains a threat, world citizens will never be safe. Six years after Afghanistan's liberation from the grip of international terrorists, we are

still grappling with this threat on daily basis. Terrorists continue to kill innocent Afghans as well as those who have come from the outside world to help. The past two years have witnessed a significant increase in terrorist attacks, carried out with new and brutal tactics such as beheadings, kidnappings and the burning of schools and clinics.

May I emphasize, ladies and gentlemen, that we were the prime victim of terrorism and that terrorism was never, nor is it today, a homegrown phenomenon in Afghanistan. Therefore, this threat can only be overcome if addressed appropriately across its regional and international dimensions. We monitor with deep concern the continued presence of terrorist infrastructure in our region, and condemn, in equally strong terms, the atrocities that terrorists are committing in places beyond our borders. Consistent with our expressed belief in the past, we remain convinced that tolerating the presence of sanctuaries and terrorist infrastructure will only broaden the scope of terrorism.

Recognising that constructive regional cooperation is vital to a successful counter-terrorism strategy, we proposed the holding of Joint Peace Jirgas between Pakistan and Afghanistan, and we are pleased for the support that this initiative has received from our friends in the international community. The first Joint Peace Jirga, convened in Kabul last month, was a promising step in harnessing the unequivocal support of civil societies in both countries in our common fight against terrorism and extremism. We expect that the outcome of the Jirga will translate into concrete action.

As a measure to ensure long-term stability, we will continue to focus on reconciliation as a measure to detach Afghan citizens with grievances, from the

minority of die-hard foreign terrorists and extremists. At the same time, the war against those who continue to pose a threat to the security of our people, will continue unabated. In this context, I call for a redoubling of efforts aimed at enabling the Afghan national security institutions, both the Army and the Police, to take a leading role in protecting our country. Sustained international assistance to enhance the combat capability of our security forces is an issue that must be prioritized. I commend the United States of America for significantly increasing its contributions to the development of Afghan security forces, and encourage other nations to share in this important priority.

I also note, with deep concern, the particularly heinous act of terrorists using local populations as human shield, resulting in the loss of civilian lives. While condemning such deliberate targeting of civilians in the strongest possible terms, I emphasise the need for maximum caution on part of the international forces operating in Afghanistan, as well as increased coordination with Afghan authorities, in order to avoid civilian casualties.

Mr President,

Narcotics is another global peril which, like terrorism, seriously undermines the stability and wellbeing of our societies. In Afghanistan, this scourge is the legacy of the decades of misfortunes that befell our country – from the widespread despair induced by war and oppression, to drought and climatic hardships. We are working with our international partners to tackle this menace. We will prioritise the provision of alternative livelihoods to farmers, and expedite implementation of other strategies, including poppy eradication and interdiction of traffickers. However, addressing the world's drug challenge must involve focus on the far

greater dimensions of drug trade that lie outside Afghanistan, such as fighting the international drug mafia, ensuring stricter border control and reduction of demand in foreign markets.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Climate change has rightly been recognized as a serious challenge facing the entire world. No country, developed or developing, is immune from its impact.

Yesterday's high-level event on this important topic was an essential step forward in strengthening the resolve of the international community to address this global threat with unity. We fully support the recommendations of the Chairman's Summary, presented at the conclusion of yesterday's gathering, and look forward to the up-coming Bali Conference in December.

We also watch the situation in the Middle East with deep concern. In particular, remain concerned about the situation in Palestine, and call for the full realization of the rights of the Palestinian People, including the right to an independent State, living side by side with its neighbours in peace and co-existence. The adoption of the Iraqi Compact, sponsored by the United Nations and the international community, was an achievement which marks Iraq's new partnership with the international community to consolidate peace and promote social and economic development. We wish our brothers and sisters in Iraq every success in achieving their aspiration of a peaceful and prosperous Iraq.

Mr. President

Allow me to thank our partners in the international community, the United States, UK, Japan, Member States of NATO, European Union, and our brothers and sisters in the Islamic world for supporting Afghanistan during these challenging years of our history. We appreciate the role that the United Nations and the Secretary General is playing in coordinating the international community's role in the development process in Afghanistan. I am particularly thankful to the Secretary General Ban Ki Moon for his initiative, two days ago, of calling a high level international meeting on Afghanistan where our partners once again reaffirmed their commitment to Afghanistan's rebuilding.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Six years ago, in an unprecedented convergence of interests, the international community united behind Afghanistan, facing up to the inescapable reality that the world's security had come to depend on stability and progress in Afghanistan. Today, many of the nations represented here can rightly take pride in what we have achieved together. I thank you all for your commitment, and for the steadfast support you have provided to Afghanistan over the past six years. Without your support, the progress we have made in Afghanistan would be simply unthinkable.

Thank you.