



**Address by
His Excellency Mohammed Yunis Qanooni
Minister of Education
Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan**

at the Conference
“Education: An Investment for the Future”

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In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

On behalf of my people, my Government, my delegation and myself, allow me to express my gratitude to the Government of Uzbekistan and especially His Excellency the Minister of Education for the excellent arrangements made for the conference and for the warm hospitality. I would like to congratulate the European Community Security and Cooperation Organisation for their efforts in convening this conference in this beautiful city of Tashkent.

I am pleased to participate in this important conference on "Education: An Investment for the Future". I look forward to the effective steps that this conference would enable us to take for the future development of our countries, through dialogue and the exchange of information and experiences.

Afghanistan shares deep cultural bonds with the brotherly people of Uzbekistan. We share a wealth of social and economic ties that have helped us to live in peace and harmony for centuries through the many challenges of nation building our two countries have endured.

Education is indeed, the most important investment for the future. It lays the moral and ethical basis for human society. It builds our human resources and opens up the opportunities for gainful employment and income generation for all. It is the cornerstone of our economies and the avenue for sustainable development, peace and progress. The dividends from educational investment would benefit not only the present generation of students but all future generations as well, making it the best and most sustainable return on any investment.

Education plays the most important role in bringing nations together. This is especially true for Central Asian countries which share deep historical and cultural ties with each other. Education would play a critical role in fostering strong and sustainable social and economic develop in our countries after one and a half decades of crises and

conflict. These countries would certainly recognize the vital importance of education in implementing national strategies for economic and political development.

Investment in education in Central Asian countries is the highest priority in order to reconstruct and rebuild our societies. Education is the avenue to gain access to the latest technology and scientific knowledge, which is critical in order to effectively participate in today's globalizing world.

Investing in education is also the most effective instrument to fight terrorism, fundamentalism, drugs and narcotics, human rights abuse, ignorance and poverty, which are the biggest challenges facing our region and the world community. Let us come together to invest in education to strengthen regional cooperation and to eliminate the threats facing our countries.

Of course we cannot face these challenges by ourselves alone. We would need the help of the international community and especially our European friends, to continue their existing cooperation and increase their assistance in the future.

The education system of Afghanistan has suffered greatly over the last 3 decades of war and conflict. One of the areas that have suffered the greatest damage is education infrastructure. The educational system is in disrepair and 85% of educational infrastructure establishments have been destroyed.

During the six years of the ignorant and cruel regime of Taliban, the education system had suffered the most damage. Under a targeted campaign of enmity against knowledge and culture they closed all schools for girls and changed all boys' schools to religious Taliban schools and military camps. In short, Afghanistan was taken back to the middle ages.

Three years ago we inherited such a country. But we firmly decided to rehabilitate our educational system on the ruins of war and revive the cultural and historical magnificence of Afghanistan once again.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Three years ago, the rehabilitation of the educational system in Afghanistan was no more than a dream or a distant hope. Today I can proudly say that with the return of 4.2 million children (boys and girls) back to school, we have changed this dream in to concrete reality.

Toady 1.2 million girls and 3 million boys have returned to Afghanistan's schools. This represents the highest school enrollment in the history of education in Afghanistan. Having achieved this, the main question now is what kind of education have we considered for the future generations? What is our educational and institutional philosophy?

In a very short time, we have considered a modern education system for the future of Afghanistan and we have embarked on a programme to achieve this goal. We firmly believe a modern education system will free itself from of ideological inspirations and political dictation.

It would be free of gender discrimination, and opens the way to democracy, the formation of a just civil society and national development, especially economic and cultural development, and provide education for all.

Modern education fights against terrorism, extremism and narcotics. It eliminates the basis of fundamentalism, ignorance and illiteracy. In modern education, there will no more Talib or terrorists. Girls will not be deprived of the blessing of education. We began laying the infrastructure for a modern education of Afghanistan only two years ago, when the situation was below zero. While we faced many problems and challenges over the last two years, with the cooperation and active participation of the people of Afghanistan and the assistance of our friends around the world, including the friendly people of Japan, we have achieved considerable success. As a result we were able to returned 47% of eligible children (girls and boys) back to school and covered about 31% of educational needs.

We replaced the old education curriculum with a new educational curriculum framework based on modern education thought. This new curriculum has been established and approved under the guidance and supervision of local and international specialists in the field. We trained more than fifty thousand teachers in various long and short-term courses. We started the reform program successfully and we are following it through. However, the process of rebuilding education is still in the initial stages, and we face the following challenges:

1. Retaining 4.2 million children in schools
2. Enrollment of 1.5 million additional children in schools
3. Provide accelerated learning for children who are out of school
4. Increasing learning spaces for all children
5. Elimination of illiteracy and teacher development

In order to successfully overcome these challenges we have set the following priorities for education;

1. Schools reconstruction
2. Provision of educational materials for schools
3. Teachers' training
4. Capacity development
5. Curriculum reform

A large number of our students lack proper educational and learning spaces. They don't have classrooms, chairs and tables. They are suffering deeply from shortage of textbooks and lack of laboratories.

We still have a 25% shortage of teachers and most of the existing teachers have been deprived of higher education and professional skills. We have just presently included computer training in the curriculum for high schools, but we have not yet succeeded in getting computers and other equipment for our high schools. Most of the education staff needs training and skills development in administration and management. And at the same time, we are deeply appreciative of and welcome with open arms, the valuable assistance provided by external experts and specialists.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

We give special importance and value to education. Education is the only corridor for crossing from backwardness to welfare, and achieve lasting prosperity and progress. Afghans are interested in having a comfortable and developed society. Without a healthy education it would be difficult to achieve this difficult task.

We want an Afghanistan where its people are educated and have comfortable and prosperous lives. We want an Afghanistan where every child enjoys the rights and opportunities to obtain a minimum of nine years of free and compulsory basic education of good quality. In order to fulfill the needs and achieve the above targets and to have access to modern education, we are setting up a 12 year educational plan. On the basis of this 12 year plan, Afghanistan's new education system will be designed according to international standards or at least would be compatible with educational standards in neighboring countries. This can be achieved only with the use of the successful experiences and technologies of developed countries. We envisage that 12 years later, the enrollment ratio of school age children would be increased from 47% to 85%, and girl's attendance at school would be increased from 35% to 90%. The ratio of illiteracy would be decreased from 70% to 20% -15%.

Meeting the education challenge requires significant resources. In 2003 the Government projected an investment requirement of USD 200 million of which only 17 per cent was available. This year the total requirement has increased to USD 407 million, of which around 27 per cent is available at present. This still leaves a resource gap of 73 per cent. We are hopeful that donor commitments would increase over the remaining period of the current fiscal year. It is encouraging that more donors are willing to commit additional resources as indicated in the initial pledges made at the recent Donor Conference in Berlin.

Allow me to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to our partners for their valuable support, and I would like to request the continuation of their cooperation and assistance over the future.

In conclusion I would like to thank the Honorable Minister of Education of Uzbekistan and the European Community Security and Cooperation Organisation for convening this important meeting and once again convey our heartfelt thanks for the warm and generous hospitality extended to my delegation and myself.

Thank you for your attention

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