

Statement by H.E. Hekmat Khalil Karzai
Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs
Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
at the 22nd Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council
Belgrade, December 3-4, 2015

Mr. Chairman,

Mr. Secretary General,

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to join you all at this 22nd Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council. And I would like to thank our Serbian friends for the gracious and warm hospitality they have extended to my delegation, as well as for their excellent chairmanship of the OSCE this year.

I also wish to thank the Secretary General and his able staff for their assistance with organizing this meeting. And I also wish to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to all distinguished delegations for continuing to support Afghanistan.

Mr. Chairman,

This year, we are gathering at a very crucial time. As we celebrate the 40th anniversary of the OSCE, the role of this organization is becoming more evident in addressing the transnational threats, including terrorism, organized crime and narcotics, which continue to pose challenges to the security and stability of the participating States and Partners for Co-operation. 40 years after the establishment of the OSCE, its vision and goals as a forward-looking organization remain very relevant in today's security environment. The organization has proved to be an effective forum for dialogue and co-operation in addressing the most pressing security issues that have an impact on the OSCE region and beyond.

We believe that the OSCE has the potential to grow and expand in the future. As a Partner for Co-operation, Afghanistan reiterates its firm commitment to the principles, norms and values of the OSCE, as we look forward to a sustainable partnership with the organization.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished participants,

14 years ago, Afghanistan and the international community embarked on a common journey aimed at bringing security and stability in Afghanistan, the region and the wider world. This common journey has been marked by considerable efforts and sacrifices that have resulted in many positive changes in the country, which can be exemplified by:

- Establishment of the democratic institutions;
- An expanding education system that allows more than 10 million boys and girls to attend school and over 150,000 others to pursue higher education across the country;
- Increased access to health care services;
- A vibrant civil society, including free media; and
- Increased access for women to justice, economic and political opportunities as well as well-trained national security forces.

These achievements would have been impossible without the support and sacrifices of our international partners, for which we are grateful.

2014 and 2015 have been two years of high significance for us in Afghanistan, marking a milestone transition in this journey. Despite many challenges, two important security and political transitions were made possible.

Our National Security Forces were able to take over the security responsibility from the international forces in a phased manner. On December 31, last year, all combat operations were handed over to the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). Our international partners continue to support ANSF under the Resolute Support Mission, in the form of training, advice and assistance. In this regard, I would like to express my gratitude to all those international friends,

who have contributed, for many years, to the NATO/ISAF mission and those contributing to the Resolute Support Mission.

The political transition marked an important milestone in Afghanistan's journey that began in the post-2001 period. Despite many security threats, the Afghan people, both men and women, lined up in the polling stations last year to cast their votes. This demonstrated their unshakeable commitment to democracy, peace and stability. In spite of all the shortcomings and irregularities, we were able to peacefully complete the first ever-democratic transfer of power in the country's history that resulted in the formation of the National Unity Government of Afghanistan.

With these two transitions behind us, we have now taken steady steps towards the broader process of transitioning into a self-reliant country. Last year this time, we presented to our international partners in London our reform agenda entitled "Realizing Self-Reliance: Commitments to Reforms and Renewed Partnership."

This outlines our plans for, "improving security, political stability, economic and fiscal stabilization, advancing good governance, including electoral reform and strengthening democratic institutions, promoting the rule of law, and respect for human rights, particularly in relation to women and girls, fighting corruption and the illicit economy including narcotics, and paving the way for enhanced private sector investments and sustainable social, environmental and economic development."

During the Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) held in September this year in Kabul, the Afghan government and our international partners reaffirmed their commitment to working together towards the implementation of this reform agenda. We are also preparing for two important conferences next year, first in Warsaw to discuss security and an enhanced enduring partnership between Afghanistan and the International Community and the Brussels Conference to discuss development co-operation in order to ensure continuity in the co-operation in the coming years.

Mr. Chairman and Colleagues,

Terrorism continues to pose serious challenges to the stability and development of our societies. The recent terrorist attacks in France, Turkey, Lebanon and Mali remind us of the fact that terrorists recognize no borders, nationality or religion. For many years, Afghanistan has been the prime victim of this menace and continues to pay the highest price and sacrifice, and suffer the most in fighting this scourge.

These terrorist attacks as well as the events in Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Libya are linked with each other. Afghanistan is the battle-front and we are fighting terrorism and extremism, on behalf of everyone in the international community. We believe that addressing such a growing network of terrorist groups across the globe requires co-ordinated, collective and sustained efforts at all levels. We have long raised the importance of such efforts that need to be

mainly directed towards dismantling the safe havens of terrorists where they are financed and equipped in our region.

It is also important to note that the links between terrorism, narcotics and various forms of organized crime are growing across the globe. Terrorists continue to benefit from drug production and trafficking to finance their activities. The Government of Afghanistan is committed to continuing its counter narcotics efforts. We have developed our new National Drug Action Plan based on a balanced, comprehensive, co-ordinated, and sustainable approach to combating illegal drug production, trade, and usage. The new action plan integrates key elements of counter narcotics efforts including alternative development, eradication, interdiction, and drug treatment and prevention into broader efforts to further good governance, economic development, security and stability.

Given the regional and global drivers of drug production and trafficking—including its financial aspect—addressing this menace requires an integrated and balanced efforts by all of us based on the principle of shared responsibility.

Migration has become another serious challenge we are all facing, and the Government of Afghanistan understands your challenges and concerns in managing this exodus. We have taken a number of concrete measures in Afghanistan including the establishment of a National Refugees and Repatriation Commission by the cabinet that is personally chaired by President Ghani. We are also working to improve the capacity of our Consulates in different parts of the world to provide better consular services. Recently, President Ghani himself launched the Jobs for Peace project to create jobs that have been lost, following the drawdown of the NATO forces. We hope this project would help slow down the emigration of our youth. However, the success of these projects would require a reasonable level of resources to be provided by the international community.

Mr. Chairman,

Regional co-operation remains key in addressing regional challenges and threats as well as in utilizing the opportunities for stabilization and development at both national and regional levels. Afghanistan has been pursuing a well-developed regional co-operation agenda mainly under two important Afghanistan-focused regional co-operation frameworks: RECCA and the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process. The Istanbul Process, launched in 2011, has provided a forum for dialogue and co-operation to address our common challenges through a set of confidence building measures. I believe that the Istanbul Process can greatly benefit from the longstanding experience of the OSCE in the area of regional confidence building and I am glad to see that the organization has been part of many activities under the Istanbul Process. We are also pursuing our greater regional economic co-operation agenda through RECCA aimed at reviving the historical role of Afghanistan as a regional land-bridge facilitating, the flow of people, goods and investments across the region and beyond.

Mr. Chairman,

We highly value our present partnership with the OSCE. Since 2003, this partnership has been continuously expanded and Afghanistan has greatly benefited from its engagement with the organization including from the projects approved in two ministerial decisions made in 2007 and 2011 respectively. These projects cover all three dimensions of security and include areas such as border security and management, training for law enforcement, customs and counter narcotics officers, cross border trade facilitation, economic development, electoral support and good governance, water management, anti-trafficking and freedom of media.

Let me commend here the work of the OSCE Academy in Bishkek, the Border Management Staff College in Dushanbe, the Advanced Training Institute in Domodedovo as well as the OSCE Centre in Bishkek and the OSCE Office in Tajikistan in implementing most of these projects. I would also like to express our appreciation to all those participating States and Partners for Co-operation that have provided financial support to the implementation of these projects. I also wish to thank the OSCE for deploying its election support teams to Afghanistan over the past ten years including for the 2014 election. My Government will make good use of the recommendations made in this regard. I am pleased to inform you that our Electoral Reforms Commission has been working hard over the past few months and has recently submitted its first set of recommendations to the government.

As we are embarking on the Decade of Transformation, and in the light of the specific needs associated with this important period, we look forward to further deepening and strengthening our partnership with the organization.

In conclusion, while we appreciate once again the special attention placed on Afghanistan by the Serbian Chairmanship during this year, we hope that engagement with Afghanistan will remain a priority on the OSCE's agenda under the incoming German chairmanship. In this context, we are ready to work closely with the organization to explore additional areas of co-operation with the OSCE.

Thank you