

**Statement by HE Ms. Ghizaal Haress, Ombudsperson, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan 2020
Albanian OSCE Chairmanship Conference:**

Good governance and the fight against corruption in the digital era.

Vienna, 6-7 July 2020

Honorable Ministers, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to join you today, *although only virtually*, at this High-level conference on good governance and the fight against corruption in the digital era.

I would like to begin by commending the initiative of the Albanian Chairmanship to convene this High-Level Conference and for putting anti-corruption at the top of the OSCE's agenda.

Particularly through its field operations, the OSCE is well-positioned to contribute to both national and regional efforts towards anti-corruption in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan has suffered and has paid huge cost to corruption over the past years. Corruption has equally damaged Afghanistan's reputation internationally and has weakened citizen's trust and confidence in the government and its institutions.

I would like to begin by emphasizing the commitment of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to combat corruption. Our achievements of the past three years uphold our assertion.

Three years ago, recognizing corruption as an existential threat to Afghanistan's survival and development, we adopted the National Anti-Corruption Strategy that required fundamental reforms in an environment of entrenched and systemic corruption. Today, we can assure you that we have significantly contained corruption, by implementing both legislative and structural reforms.

I would like to put forward a few of the latest effective measures for anti-corruption reforms in Afghanistan.

When President Ghani took office in 2014, the Afghan security forces were marred by ghost soldiers and police. Today, the integrated Afghan Personnel and Pay System accounts for every member of the security forces and enables electronic payments of salaries.

Corruption has been subdued in our public procurement at national level that also complies with Open Contracting Data Standards.

Tens of thousands of civil servants have been recruited using automated processes thanks to IT technology that keep at bay patronage-based appointments.

Digital technology has been at the core of our anti-corruption reforms and will remain so in the next five years. We will improve the use of Case Management System in processing of cases in criminal and civil justice systems. We will expand the establishment of one-stop shops for service delivery combined with citizen report cards.

Excellencies,

Government of Afghanistan had committed to establish strong anti-corruption bodies. While our legal system does not allow for anti-corruption institutions with prosecutorial powers, we have created separate corruption prevention and law-enforcement bodies.

A specialized Office of Deputy Attorney General conducts the prosecution of corruption cases. As a result, 1200 cases have been investigated. But, we still need to improve our asset recovery efforts and implement the recently adopted asset recovery legislation.

The Anti-Corruption Justice Center was established in 2016 to investigate, prosecute and convict serious crimes of corruption often committed by high public officials. ACJC has investigated over 1000 cases and convicted over 266 individuals including 72 deputy ministers, generals, members of Parliament and other high public officials.

Our anti-corruption law obligates us to create an independent Anti-Corruption Commission focused on prevention of corruption under article 6 of United Nation Convention against Corruption. The selection process of commissioners is well underway.

It is worth mentioning that the preventive functions under UNCAC are currently fulfilled by other bodies.

Our Office of Asset Registration and Verification has registered the assets of 22,000 public officials last year and will verify over 5000 assets by the end of the year. The Special Anti-Corruption Secretariat oversees the implementation of all anti-corruption efforts and reports to the High Council for Rule of Law and Governance that is chaired by the President.

We pride ourselves on having the best access to information legislation. The recently established Access to Information Commission works to translate our legal instruments into action. This will take some time, as it requires a change of culture in our bureaucracies.

Finally, my office, the Ombudsperson Office was established last year to address corruption complaints against high-ranking officials. Our whistleblower protection law encourages reporting of corruption cases. The Afghan government has pledged that no complaint will remain unaddressed and I am committed to fulfill that promise.

Afghanistan appreciates the close relationship and partnership with the OSCE focused primarily on border management and border security, while later projects gradually expanded to cover aspects of customs control, combating drug trafficking, as well as education, gender-sensitive capacity building, and support for election processes and anti-corruption.

Fighting corruption is an absolute necessity, as it is a major challenge and impediment towards meaningful rule of law; as it is fundamental for lasting peace in Afghanistan.

The Afghan government, is committed to bring further reforms to improve the lives of the Afghan citizens who face the plight of corruption everyday. The Afghan government is dedicated to eradicate corruption to reinforce its commitment to development, peace and

security agendas. We would like to translate our commitment to fight corruption into concrete actions in order to have a more responsive, accountable and transparent system of governance.

I am sure, what we get out of this event will enable us to continue building on OSCE's future commitments in combatting corruption in Afghanistan.

Thank you.