



Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

Country Statement

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Mr Chairperson, Distinguished Participants, Ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to have the opportunity to address the 69th Session of Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific today in Bangkok.

Let me extend my cordial gratitude to the ESCAP Management and the Government of Thailand for hosting and organizing this important and timely event, which aims - among other deliverables - to propose frameworks for protecting the region against lasting effects of shocks in forms of natural disasters and external economic crisis.

Ladies and Gentlemen!

Last Friday, in beautiful city of Almaty, Afghanistan and its key regional and international partners had their third Ministerial Conference on Regional Security and Prosperity of Heart of Asia. 14 Heart of Asia member states, 16 Supporting Countries and 12 international organizations have shared their common goal for implementation of Heart of Asia regional agenda in form of Confidence Building Measures or (CBMs).

In this vein, the implementation plan for the six CBMs, covering a broad range of issues from disaster management, to countering terrorism and narcotics to trade and infrastructure and education, have been successfully developed and endorsed by our senior officials and are presented today for our adoption. During the development phase of these plans our technical focal points from a wide range of the relevant line-ministries and agencies got together ten times in eight different Heart of Asia capitals to develop regional plans for addressing each of these issues. Some of these plans are already complemented by specific activity plans for the current year and time-lined activities for the future.

Started in November 2011 in Istanbul, the introduced six priority CBMs are indeed one of the very concrete components of this process in our region with the highest potential for bringing us closer together to resolve our common challenges, such as terrorism and drugs, and for providing us with an opportunity to capitalize on our existing economic prospects.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

As an over-arching, strategic goal for our regional cooperation projects, a broad-based effort to develop Regional Economic Growth and Resource Corridors can help connect – through Afghanistan – the people of Central, South, and South-West Asia and their key economic activities, including agriculture, light manufacturing, and mineral extraction, with essential trade, transit, and energy enablers. And in doing so, the technical innovation and capital of the private sector will be unleashed, supplanting over time both foreign aid and public sector capital investments. By generating significant returns to growth, jobs, and revenue, Regional Economic Growth and Resource Corridors have the potential to serve as “game changers” and to create a new dynamic for peace and socioeconomic progress across the region.

Unlocking the full potential of Afghanistan’s primary vehicles for economic expansion, employment, and public revenue are the keys to durable stability and financial sustainability across the country. Investment in Aynak and Hajigak mines require investment in a rail system to efficiently move copper and iron ore to rail links in Central Asia and the ports of South Asia. Exports of Afghanistan’s world class marble, gemstones, grapes, raisins, almonds, saffron, and pomegranates can only grow through a more favorable regional and global investment. Small and medium-size enterprise owners – for example, involved in the production of rugs, wool, cashmere, and handicrafts – repeatedly stress the importance of reliable energy resources, alongside the rule of law, as essential to their competitiveness. And with adequate transportation and energy infrastructure, Afghanistan’s central location at the crossroads of Asia means it is poised to serve as a regional trade and transport hub, generating considerable public revenue through transit fees.

Our national priority projects present a focused and realistic regional economic cooperation framework to promote strategic infrastructure projects and policy priorities aimed at establishing Afghanistan as a regional trade and transit hub for the benefit of its people and the wider region. It will bring a new level of intensity and skill to provide business leaders – both from Afghanistan, the region and the international community – with the risk guarantees and other incentives to invest in the country’s major export-oriented growth engines.

And it will rally and coordinate existing regional bodies and initiatives, including the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation program, the Economic Cooperation Organization, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, that stand to benefit from increased market access for their members and the realization of the vision of a more stable and prosperous region through a stable and prosperous Afghanistan.

Despite the high levels of return on investments and our efforts and measures to create enabling environment for investment, one of the major factors, which has a significant impact on the level of investor interest in Afghanistan is concern over security. While it is true that there are certain areas in Afghanistan where the security situation is not ideal, we should remember that these areas represent a small part of the country. The government of

Afghanistan is endeavoring to ensure the security and safety of the population, infrastructure and investments in all other parts of the country while striving to restore complete security to all provinces in this process.

As the transition to Afghan leadership is underway, I would also like to draw your attention to one important aspect of an inter-linked relationship between economic growth and security.

I believe greater investments results in increased economic national activities in any country including - but not limited to - additional revenues, job creation, income generation opportunities which in turn leads to increased prosperity and service delivery. It is widely recognized, and we have noticed throughout history, that greater wealth creation and prosperity has a direct impact on improving security in a country and within its region. So it is important to note that investors who choose to invest in Afghanistan will not only be rewarded with significant returns on their investments, but they will also play a vital role in the restoration of peace and security within the region.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

On behalf of the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, I appreciate the theme for 69th Session of Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific "Opportunities to build resilience to natural disasters and major economic crises". We understand there is strong bond between development and disasters. Catastrophes can ruin years of development within seconds. Integrating DRR into major economic strategies is the utmost need for our region.

As said, one of the priority Confidence Building Measures of the Heart of Asia process is the Natural Disaster Management. This CBM is led by the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and Republic of Kazakhstan, with the aim for regional preparedness for natural disasters and risks. Other designated regional technical focal points and representatives of supporter countries for this CBM include Afghanistan, Turkey, China, India, Kyrgyzstan, Norway, Sweden and Poland as well as representatives from UNOCHA, WFP, the World Bank and the European Union.

Afghanistan and the surrounding region is a mountainous country with undulating topography and continental weather which makes it prone to a number of natural disasters like earthquakes, landslides, avalanches, sandstorms, floods, drought and extreme weather. In addition to these, human induced disasters such as mines, explosions, and conflict have further aggravated the vulnerability in the country. Statistics in the last few years is alarming and shows increased in the frequency of disasters, which resulted to heavy human, physical and economical shocks.

Now as we are moving from the conceptualization to the implementation stage of the Istanbul Process, especially with regards to the prioritized CBMs including the natural disaster management, it is incumbent on us all to continue to join our efforts for mobilizing our

resources in the most effective and efficient ways, complemented with contributions by the supporting countries of this process, and to think of specific ways for the implementation phase. Afghanistan recognizes UNESCAP role in championing the cause of the countries with special needs and can play critical role in making the least developed countries resilient to disasters, therefore, UNESCAP role in supporting of the Natural Disaster Management CBM is key for the region and Afghanistan.

Located at the Heart of Asia, we realize that the land-locked Afghanistan has the most to gain from successful regional cooperation and integration; but we also know that for the countries around Afghanistan, the most effective way for long-term, shared peace, prosperity and development is through regional cooperation.

I thank you Mr. Chairman.