



REMARKS BY

THE AMBASSADOR OF AFGHANISTAN TO INDIA

H.E. DR. SHaida M. ABDALI

AT

FIRST HEART OF ASIA PROCESS MEETING ON

“ADDRESSING CHALLENGES AND ACHIEVING PROSPERITY”

NOVEMBER 10, 2016

INDIAN COUNCIL OF WORLD AFFAIRS (ICWA)

NEW DELHI



Madam Secretary Sujatha Mehta,

Excellencies,

Distinguished representatives of the HoA, Rep. of supporting countries,

Members of the Afghan Delegation,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed a great pleasure to speak in the inaugural session of the HoA process conference titled “Addressing Challenges and Achieving Prosperity”. Let me thank ICWA and the government of India for organizing it, aimed at preparing for the upcoming HoA summit in Amritsar on 3rd Dec, 2016. I think we all agree that the upcoming HoA conference, hosted by India is very timely, and I have no doubt that the conference will produce a better roadmap on how to facilitate constructive regional and international cooperation to address the current challenges and achieve prosperity in the heart of Asia region.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

To address Challenges and Achieve prosperity, Afghanistan continues to offer the whole region a strategic opportunity for sincere and results-oriented cooperation. To break with the past and the current, it is as simple as this - we must discard zero-sum postures and adopt win-win strategies to secure Afghanistan against the same threats



that undermine the security of every nation in South Asia and Central Asia, and the countries that neighbor these resourceful regions in Asia.

We are not short of ideas, policies, strategies, or mechanisms of cooperation for acting on what is imperative and necessary for ensuring long-term regional stability and global security. As we appreciate the role of HoA in the stabilization of Afghanistan and the region; but, it is high time for bold, results-oriented regional leadership and ownership of addressing what are essentially our own region's challenges.

The security challenges, about which members of the HoA and other supporting countries remain gravely concerned, are a creation of this region. We all know this and cannot deny what is a commonsense fact. So, we must put an end to pursuit of hedging strategies when it comes to the problem of Afghanistan, which is in effect a regional problem.

To go a little back, in November 2011, the countries of "Heart of Asia" met to discuss the Istanbul Process on "Regional Security and Cooperation for a Secure and Stable Afghanistan." The regional consensus that emerged in the Istanbul Process reaffirmed for immediate implementation the commitments of our six neighbors in the 2002 Kabul Declaration of Good Neighborly Relations, under which they had agreed to non-interference in the Afghan affairs. The "Heart of Asia" governments,



including the countries present today, agreed that the implementation of non-interference in Afghanistan requires “resolutely combating and eliminating terrorism; dismantling terrorist sanctuaries and safe havens; and acknowledging that terrorism is a threat to international peace and security.”

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The regional Istanbul Process and its implementing mechanism of Confidence Building Measures (CBM), including the Counter-Terrorism CBM and Counter-Narcotics CBM, remain underutilized. So do the implementing mechanisms of the SAARC and the SCO, as two other major regional organizations with clear security and law enforcement cooperation mandates, to address the twin problems of terrorism and extremism that undermine stability in Afghanistan and the whole region. So, it is appropriate to conclude that a lack of political will to act on *operationalization* of these otherwise robust mechanisms of regional security cooperation remains the main obstacle to stabilization of Afghanistan.

To change the status quo, which is detrimental to the collective security of the whole region, adopting a well-defined Regional Counter Terrorism Strategy, as agreed in the last HoA meeting in Islamabad, through which to secure the country for stabilizing our region of interdependent economies, is a necessity; it is no longer an option. The



draft Regional Counter Terrorism Strategy has been shared with CMBs implementing countries. We expect the draft to be adopted in the upcoming HoA summit in Amritsar. In effect, it is the call of every nation in the “Heart of Asia” where our increasingly youthful populations demand sustainable, social and economic facilities and opportunities, which can hardly be provided without a stable Afghanistan at the center of the “Heart of Asia.”

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The benefit of implementing the Istanbul Process CBMs under a well-defined Regional Counter Terrorism Strategy will be manifold for everyone, based on a win-win mentality. India is leading in the promotion of win-win policies, which not only benefit Afghanistan and India but the whole region. Under their CBM of Commerce, Trade and Investment, India has held a number of economic conferences geared towards promotion of cross-border business and investment.

Together, we recently worked with Iran to sign the trilateral trade and transit agreement on Chabahar to further connect landlocked Afghanistan with the rest of the region, thereby connecting South Asia with Central Asia and beyond. We have actively promoted TAPI, CASA-1000 and TAT (Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan Transit trade, as three major projects of regional connectivity. The



implementation of these projects and other major projects to be identified by the countries of “Heart of Asia” will go a long way in further integrating our region.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

India and Afghanistan as well as other members of HoA share a common concern about insecurity that emanates from safe sanctuaries in our neighborhood. Unless we work together and with others through a robust mechanism of regional security cooperation, we will be unable to realize our shared economic interests and address our common challenges. The extraction and export of our mineral resources, and utilizing our strategic location as the cross road, need an enabling secure environment for realization. And creating such a safe environment in Afghanistan and throughout the region is within our collective means.

Terrorism and extremism are the biggest threats to our peace and prosperity. The NUG of Afghanistan took unprecedented steps to address the question of terrorism and improve our relations with Pakistan, which also affect the ordinary people of Pakistan. We have exchanged with Pakistan several delegations, to secure Pakistan’s sincere cooperation in ending war and violence through a results-oriented political process, based on Afghanistan’s peace conditions. We appreciated the initial gestures of goodwill of the Pakistani government under the quadrilateral mechanism on facilitating the peace process, but we are yet to see the tangible steps to be taken towards the peace process. We are grateful to India, China, Russia and others in the



region for their numerous civilian and military contributions to Afghanistan over the past 15 years towards peace building and reconstruction.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to conclude by stating that the people and government of Afghanistan desire nothing but peace, harmony, and co-existence at home and throughout the “Heart of Asia” region. At this critical juncture, our government and the people look forward to working with all regional and international stakeholders to address the challenges and achieve prosperity. Succeeding in this endeavor is going to benefit us all, as I discussed in detail, while failing Afghanistan is what we all bitterly experienced in the 1990s.

I wish all the best with the conference and look forward to a productive outcome in the run up to our HoA conference in Amritsar!

Thank you.