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Opening Remarks by H.E. Dr. Zalmay Rassoul, Foreign Minister of
Afghanistan, at the International Afghanistan Conference in Bonn

Bonn

December 5, 2011

Your Excellency Chancellor Angela Merkel,

Your Excellency President Karzai,

Your Excellency, Foreign Minister Westerwelle,

Excellencies Foreign Ministers, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

I'm honoured to be back in Bonn. Just as for His Excellency
President Karzai, my personal journey, over the past decade began
here.

We are grateful to the Federal Republic of Germany, for hosting
this second Bonn conference, for the superb arrangements and the
extraordinary hospitality you've extended to us all in this beautiful
city.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Ten years ago, we suffered from the destruction of war and the darkness of isolation from the rest of the world.

Contrasted with the decade preceding the Taliban regime's downfall, Afghanistan today is a totally different country. We have concrete and tangible achievements fittingly outlined by His Excellency President Karzai today. They will be clear for anyone who reads our recent history; they will be visible to anyone who visits our country today.

These achievements of the past decade are our shared achievements, the fruits of our shared sacrifices in blood and in treasure, something we can all cherish and feel truly proud about.

I therefore would like to take this opportunity to thank you all, every single country and organization present here today, for your tremendous sacrifices in the cause of peace, dignity and security for the people of Afghanistan, and for standing with us in our joint fight against international terrorism and intolerant extremism.

Our relationship with the region and partnership with the international community are transforming.

On Transition, we are assuming responsibility for our own security. The second phase of Transition which His Excellency President Karzai announced last week puts the increasingly capable and better-equipped Afghan national security forces in charge of security for nearly fifty percent of the population. The gradual, conditions-based and responsible completion of transition by the end of 2014 remains the most strategic goal of our partnership with the international community since 2001. We look forward to next year's NATO summit in Chicago where, among other things, we hope to discuss plans for the long-term sustainability of our national security forces with our NATO allies.

We know that an Afghan-led peace process, and its outcome, that preserves our achievements of the past decade, rejects international terrorism and respects our Constitution remains the surest path to a dignified, inclusive and durable peace for all Afghans. This is what the Afghan government will pursue with all vigour and energy. We hope our peace efforts and its outcome will receive the full respect and support of the region, and the support of the wider world.

By launching the Istanbul Process last month at the "Istanbul Conference for Afghanistan: Security and Cooperation in the Heart of Asia", Afghanistan and twelve of our near and extended

neighbours took a significant, concrete step towards building confidence and cooperation, including in the security, political and economic spheres. As part of the Istanbul Process, we look forward to the follow-up Ministerial Conference in June 2012, which we will be hosting in Kabul.

In addition to deepening and broadening our regional relationships and cooperation, moving forward Afghanistan will define its long-term strategic partnerships with our international partners and allies, including the United States, the European Union, NATO, France, the United Kingdom, Australia and others. I want to underline once again that no harm will come to our neighbours from these partnerships. Their clear and sole purpose is for us to preserve and consolidate our gains, and to never allow Afghanistan to once again fall victim to the sort of terrorism and disorder that will harm us, the rest of the region and the wider world.

So, today we have a solid foundation for realizing a more secure, democratic and prosperous future for the Afghan people. In today's Afghanistan, we have a strong bulwark against the sort of international terrorism that could again pose harm to international peace and security.

But to preserve our gains, consolidate Afghanistan's security and stability, we will continue to rely on our friends and allies in the region and in the international community to remain by our side.

We will require the world's credible, firm commitments of support as we continue to implement Transition; seek peace; strengthen confidence, cooperation and economic integration with our region; and define long-term bilateral and multilateral partnerships between a secure, sovereign, independent and developing Afghanistan and our friends and partners.

So I would like to conclude with an appeal to all of you and to your governments to stay focused on the important work we all need to do and to continue to stand by us during Afghanistan's 2015-2024 Decade of Transformation as we navigate our path to long-term peace, stability and prosperity in friendship, partnership and cooperation with our region and the wider world.

That would be the most fitting tribute to our immense shared sacrifices over the past decade, and the most concrete manifestation of international assistance and cooperation.