

The Bonn Conference on Afghanistan

*Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Dear colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,*

The impressive gathering of nations at this Conference testifies to the commitment of the international community to fulfilling a shared vision of peace, progress and ultimately prosperity in Afghanistan.

Some fear that the buzzword on the lips of diplomats and the military, "transition," is little more than a public relations tactic to cover a polite rush to the exit. We are here to prove them wrong.

The transition is on the right track. Afghan Government is increasingly capable of exercising its leadership across the inter-linked domains of security, development and governance. This holistic approach is crucial, because development without security is not possible, and security without development is only temporary.

The success regarding the transition of security responsibilities to the Afghan security forces has been particularly encouraging. We are confident that with ongoing assistance and support provided through the enduring partnership it will not be long before the Afghan security institutions will be able to fully take on the responsibility of maintaining security throughout the country in a sustainable manner.

In addition to that, Afghan Government's ability for good governance is getting stronger, national development and economic progress is steady despite the global economic turbulences, and the rule of law is improved.

Our strategies, programs and platforms still require permanent fine-tuning according to the needs of the ordinary citizens. Government in sync with local priorities, consensus building on issues of critical importance as well as vibrant and inclusive socioeconomic system are the "basic infrastructure" of the transition. Gains made in these areas must be strengthened further in a joint effort.

It is now important for us to help the Afghan people sustain these gains and meet future challenges with the same level of resolve and courage as before. These challenges remain formidable and include particularly a continuing volatile security situation, drug trafficking, weaknesses in governance, and poverty.

International contribution to the stability of Afghanistan can be measured: its presence enabled development of key infrastructure, particularly of transportation routes, without which economic growth wouldn't be possible. Since appearance of international community in Afghanistan, safeguarded by ISAF forces, Afghan GDP has continually increased.

Also, we can witness massive improvements in social sector. For example, ten years ago, fewer than a million students enrolled in Afghan schools, all of them boys. Today, schools have been attended by more than 7 million pupils, nearly 40 percent of them girls. Today, high-speed Internet access is accessible to the academic communities in Afghanistan. This social development will ultimately ensure that other positive changes become irreversible.

In order to help make security gains in Afghanistan durable, there must be further improvements in governance. Extending and deepening the rule of law is one of the highest priorities for the Afghan population and government.

As transition proceeds and Afghan leadership strengthens across the country, reconciliation will become increasingly viable. In turn, successful implementation of this process will reduce the overall level of hostility, making transition more sustainable.

National reconciliation and reintegration, as well as regional cooperation and support, are essential elements in making Afghanistan politically stable and secure in the long run. Only a comprehensive political solution can create optimal conditions for the exercise of good governance, the rule of law and economic and social development.

In every society reconciliation is, by and large, a home-grown, domestically driven process. It cannot be imported from the outside. Afghanistan is no exception. Turning the adversaries of today into partners of tomorrow - for a better tomorrow - is a significant challenge. It's up to Afghans on how they envision its implementation.

In conclusion,

The conference is a clear signal to Afghanistan and the whole region that we are, and will be, committed to Afghanistan in years to come. We will not leave behind a security vacuum in the region.

Building on existing strong ties with Afghan Government, 2014 will mark the beginning of a new phase of our partnership. 2014 will not be 1989. The international community will not walk away from Afghanistan. We will not repeat the mistakes of the past.

Thank you.

Key words: transition, enduring international support, government in sync with local priorities, Afghan leadership, reconciliation