

BONN CONFERENCE – 5 December 2011

Mr. Chairman

I wish to thank Germany and Afghanistan for their invitation to this Conference, and would like to show our appreciation for the excellent organisation.

Malta considers this Conference, the latest in a series which commenced in Bonn in 2001 as a timely occasion to reaffirm the international community's engagement and support for Afghanistan. This is an opportunity for key stake holders to establish a road map leading to 2014, and to define a vision for Afghanistan beyond this date, in terms of security, political and economic transition, sustainable governance and rule of law. We particularly welcome the fact that the Conference endorses the priorities at hand, such as Afghan-led reconciliation, transition to Afghan security leadership, and economic development, also in cooperation with neighbouring states.

As an EU member, Malta attaches great importance to the EU's involvement and role in Afghanistan and fully supports the comprehensive nature of its approach. In this framework, we particularly welcome the EU Police Mission in Afghanistan (EUPOL AFGHANISTAN) which commenced in mid-June 2007. This mission's role is indeed valid in that it aims at contributing to the establishment of sustainable and effective civilian policing arrangements under Afghan ownership and in accordance with international standards. Very importantly, the Mission has also introduced the concept of "community policing" to give the uniformed civilian police a model for building a trusting relationship with society at grass root level.

Mr. Chairman,

It is warranted that at this delicate moment the international community continues to reaffirm its strong commitment to Afghanistan's development, especially during the transition process. In this scenario, it has become all the more important to address the reinforcement of Afghan governmental structures, not merely at national, but also at provincial and local levels. Institutional capacity-building is a crucial element towards the strengthening of effective governance, which must however be supported by the requisite democratic structures.

We welcome the fact that at the Istanbul Conference last month, Afghanistan reiterated its commitment to respect the territorial integrity of its neighbours. We positively note that Afghanistan has also reconfirmed its will to combat terrorism in all its forms, strengthen its economy, addressing corruption, fight radicalism and drug trafficking, and respect human rights particular the rights of women and minorities. From a wider perspective we also commend Afghanistan's commitment to work together with its friends and partners for enhanced regional co-operation.

The international community must also ensure that appropriate emphasis on the provinces in terms of the allocation of resources. Aid must reach people in the more remote villages too. Present figures indicate that around two thirds of Afghanistan's population lives in rural areas, most of them below poverty line. Further investments are required to improve local employment and increase the population's income. This, in turn will also lead to greater food security in the region. Responding to the needs of rural dwellers is not only an economic goal, but also a critical political objective in parallel to the promotion of good governance. The provision of technical assistance to improve the standards of Afghan produce for export constitutes a fundamental step towards boosting trade and strengthening agricultural development.

The issue of an effective counter-narcotics strategy remains of vital importance as it has ramifications on many sectors and foments other illicit activities.

Mr. Chairman,

Afghanistan is today at a important juncture. It still faces significant security, economic and development challenges, which are interconnected. These challenges must be addressed by building upon the already constructive support of Afghanistan's regional and international partners. The efforts to meet these challenges are most effective when they are Afghan-owned and driven and supported by all partners and pursued in a transparent and constructive manner. At this point, it is worth highlighting the determination of the Afghan people who turned out to vote during the 2009 and 2010 elections in far from ideal circumstances.

I have no doubt that today's discussions will generate further momentum to the process the international community has embarked upon in defining a sustainable vision for Afghanistan based on a successful security, political, and socio-economic transition. I trust all of us agree, Mr Chairman, that the people of Afghanistan deserve no less.

Thank you.