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**Speech by Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs
Sergey Lavrov at the
High-Level International Conference on
Afghanistan in Bonn, December 5, 2011**

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At the outset, I would like to express my appreciation to Afghanistan and Germany for organizing this conference. Its representative lineup of participants attests to the fact that the problem of Afghan settlement has long since passed into the category of world problems and continues to be the focus of attention of the international community.

Russia is one of the countries with the greatest interest in its solution. This hotbed of tension is at the borders of its CIS, CSTO and SCO allies, and the flow of heroin from Afghanistan is doing great harm to the health of Russians.

Today's forum is an anniversary forum in two respects: exactly ten years have passed since the first Bonn Conference on Afghanistan, and a bit more since the beginning of Operation Enduring Freedom, which started on October 7, 2001. This is a good reason to take stock.

Over the past decade, the Afghan people have been able to achieve much. We are sincerely delighted with these successes. However, the dynamics of the situation in general, unfortunately, does not inspire optimism. Instability covers essentially the entire territory of the IRA, where high profile terrorist attacks and killings of Afghan officials and civilians continue, along with a high rate of loss of life among the coalition and Afghan troops. We are particularly concerned about the deterioration of the situation in the northern provinces of Afghanistan, from where terrorist activity spills over into the territory of our Central Asian partners. In the Central Asian states anti-terrorism measures are undertaken via bilateral channels and in the framework of the CSTO and the SCO, but it is necessary that the ISAF in

cooperation with the Afghan authorities should take more decisive action to curb this threat within the country. It is important that in the planning and conduct of counterterrorism operations the sovereignty of other states should not be violated. The increasing number of civilian casualties is likewise unacceptable.

The drawdown of foreign troops in Afghanistan should be compensated by increased combat capability of Afghan forces, with emphasis not only on quantitative but also on qualitative indicators, including equipping them with modern weapons and carefully selecting personnel to enable them to independently confront terrorism and narco-crime. ISAF was introduced in Afghanistan under the mandate of the United Nations Security Council and must withdraw from there after reporting to this body on their fulfillment of the tasks set. In this regard, we consider counterproductive the ideas of replacing the ISAF with other forms of foreign military presence in Afghanistan and neighboring countries.

It is well known that in Afghan conditions terrorism has become closely interwoven with narco-crime. Drugs are a serious threat to Afghanistan itself, Russia, the other countries in the region and international peace and security. The threat of drugs should be comprehensively rebuffed by the international community in all its components. In this context, we attach importance to the Third Conference of the Paris Pact on Drug Trafficking Routes from Afghanistan, scheduled for February 16 next year in Vienna. I hope that all countries concerned will be able to participate at the ministerial level.

Over the past decade, Russia has contributed significantly to the international community's efforts to help Afghanistan. We have written off more than 11 billion dollars of the Afghan state debt. We assist with the formation of the Afghan army and police by donation of weapons and ammunition, by the training of Afghan personnel in a number of specialized Russian universities and training centers, by the supply of helicopters and by participation in the RNC helicopter project. We provide transit through our territory for cargoes needed by ISAF. We have been regularly providing humanitarian aid – over the past ten years it has been more than 40 thousand tons of wheat flour and other goods, including various equipment, totaling nearly \$50 million. Right now 3 thousand tons of wheat flour is being supplied to Afghanistan, and funds have been allocated for a grant of 40 heavy-duty trucks to the IRA.

We support the Afghan government policy of national reconciliation and the reintegration into Afghan society of those who renounce violence, accept the Constitution of the IRA and break links with Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups. An important personal role in this process was played by the tragically assassinated Afghan High Peace Council Chairman Burhanuddin

Rabbani. Together with the Afghan Government and the people we mourn over this loss.

Obviously the situation in Afghanistan cannot be remedied by the use of force alone. There is a need to uplift the country's economy. As demonstrated by the recent Istanbul Conference, the world is becoming increasingly aware of the important auxiliary role that Afghanistan's neighbors play in the process of the economic and social reconstruction of the country. It is necessary to comprehensively develop and improve cooperation within the existing structures in the region: SCO, ECO, SAARC, CSTO and the "Dushanbe Quartet" (Russia, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Tajikistan). We regard the SCO, in whose work Afghanistan and all of its neighbors participate, as a priority venue for the coordination of regional contribution to international efforts for resolving the conflict in Afghanistan.

Russia is ready to participate in projects such as CASA-1000 and the TAPI gas pipeline, in which, in case of interest by the participants, we are ready to make large investments.

We welcome non-regional states joining in efforts to uplift the Afghan economy, including using the funds resulting from the winding down of foreign military presence in the IRA.

One of the key factors in creating an atmosphere of good neighborliness and cooperation in the region would be to restore the neutral status of Afghanistan after completion of international stabilization efforts. We expect that this idea will find support among the Afghans themselves. The Russian and US presidents have already spoken for it in their joint statement, and it has received support in the SCO.

We reaffirm our solidarity with the Afghan people and our support to President Hamid Karzai and his team.

We are convinced that concerted efforts by the international community and the Afghan government will lead to reviving a peaceful, sovereign and prosperous Afghanistan free from terrorism and drugs.

Thank you for your attention.

December 5, 2011