

## Barry Salaam, Speaker of the Afghan Civil Society Delegation

Honorable Heads of States, Ministers, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentleman:

At no time in our history, has my country received so much attention from the world. Once forgotten in the clutches of terrorism and tyranny, Afghanistan became the centre of global attention 10 years ago.

Since then, we have joined hands with the international community to remove terrorist bases from our country and topple a regime that had taken a nation hostage.

We started a new chapter in our history. We chose democracy. And we made significant achievements.

But – Ladies and Gentleman – *because* what we have today has been achieved with our blood, and your blood, with shared sacrifices - we cannot afford slip backwards towards those dark days of terrorism and tyranny.

And so to ensure our success, we need more time and resources to build on our achievements, to learn from lost opportunities, and to find our way as a strong independent nation.

We know Afghans need to take charge of their own affairs and we are in favor of the transition process.

But we also need a process of support and sustainability.

We urge long-term strategies, rather than short-term solutions.

We ask that you take into account realities on the ground.

Right now insurgents believe they have time on their side. And that's what they tell the Afghan people, they intimidate, torment and terrorize them. They taunt them with the idea that soon internationals will be gone.

Only by removing insurgents' hopes of success through violence, can we deter their attacks.

State-sponsors of violent extremism in the region will only give up their destructive policies if there is long-term international engagement in Afghanistan.

So in addition to giving Afghan forces the lead, we need to show that if there is a

call for help, the international community will answer.

International presence will encourage investment and economic growth. It will also help the reintegration of insurgents who see no future in violence.

In this regard, we welcome Afghanistan's strategic partnership with United States and other nations of the world.

We also welcome peace and reconciliation – but not one that jeopardizes the fundamental and civil rights of Afghan citizens – specifically the rights of women.

If we look back to the decades of conflict in my country, fomenting divisions along ideological, ethnic and religious grounds and suppressing equality and civil rights allowed wars to last for generations.

We have chosen democracy because it is the only solution to reunite us as a nation. Our new constitution reflects our religious and social heritage, and puts Afghanistan firmly on the democratic path. Therefore, we cannot change our constitution and we cannot compromise on our democratic rights.

Afghanistan is still learning to make human and constitutional rights a regular part of life.

We still see terrible violations on a regular basis.

Citizens are forced to pay bribes in public sector to receive state-run services.

Women and girls who have been raped or abused never see their culprits on trial.

Court cases are won by the person with the most money.

Women are still used by their relatives to settle family conflicts.

So, the biggest wish of the Afghan people right now is a government that rules by law and not by the power of individuals.

Afghans long for an accountable government and an effective system that can provide for their basic needs.

If just half of the money used in the military campaigns in the past decade had been invested in good governance and service delivery, we would be in a better position today.

Smart, sustainable appropriate investments in Afghanistan's civilian sector, is the key to stabilization and rooting out the social causes of insurgency and terrorism.

Afghanistan does not want to rely on foreign aid forever. So what we really need

is investment in infrastructure and agriculture, as well as guidance to develop our potential to become economically sustainable and self-sufficient.

We – the civil society – are ready to help with every aspect of reform and change. We already have much expertise in the skills that will help Afghanistan to thrive.

We are ready to support our Afghan government and play our complementary role.

We ask your help to create a process of support and sustainability that will help us continue to be a strong, productive and positive force for change in Afghanistan.