

Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process: Enhanced Cooperation for Countering Security Threats and Promoting Connectivity in the Heart of Asia Region

Islamabad, Pakistan, 09 December 2015

The Islamabad Declaration

1. We, the Foreign Ministers and high-level representatives of the participating and supporting countries, as well as high-level representatives of supporting regional and international organizations, held the Fifth Ministerial Conference of the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process (HOA-IP) in Islamabad, Pakistan, on 09 December 2015. The Conference was co-chaired by H.E. Mr. Sartaj Aziz, Adviser to the Prime Minister on Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, and H.E. Mr. Salahuddin Rabbani, Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.
2. We express our gratitude to H.E. Mr. Mohammad Ashraf Ghani, President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and H.E. Mr. Muhammad Nawaz Sharif, Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, for attending the opening ceremony of the Fifth Ministerial Conference.
3. Recalling the four Ministerial Conferences in Istanbul (2011), Kabul (2012), Almaty (2013) and Beijing (2014), which have been significant milestones that marked the conception, birth and initial steps of HOA-IP, we reaffirm our commitment to the principles, objectives, and outcomes of these Conferences that have defined the parameters for the working of HOA-IP aimed at promoting regional peace and prosperity.
4. We believe that the pace of continuity demonstrated by the HOA-IP in the past few years would continue in the future, and the endeavors made under its auspices will manifest themselves in the achievement of goals of lasting peace, security, prosperity and growth of the region.
5. We reaffirm our countries' respect for each other's sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and political independence, as enshrined in the United Nations (UN) Charter to which we strongly adhere and reiterate the obligations of states to refrain in their international relations from the threat, or use of force, against the territorial integrity, or political independence of any State, or in any manner inconsistent with the purposes of the

United Nations Charter. Recognizing the centrality of the United Nations in international affairs, we reiterate our support to the United Nations in coordinating international civilian efforts to contribute to peace, security and development of Afghanistan, as established by UN Resolution 2210 (2015).

6. We adhere to the principles of non-intervention in the internal affairs of other States and commit to promote a multifaceted approach of regional integration based on trust, equality and dialogue.
7. We realize the importance of the HOA-IP as an important regional initiative and platform aimed at a stable, peaceful, prosperous and developed Afghanistan that continues to complement other existing regional mechanisms and processes.
8. We recognize that the situation in Afghanistan, owing to its central location at the crossroads in Asia and its history, plays a critical role in the dynamics of regional peace, security and economic growth. We, therefore, believe in a secure, peaceful, stable, and prosperous Afghanistan, with its strong commitment to Human Rights. This is not only in its own interest, but also vital to peace, stability and prosperity of the 'Heart of Asia' region as a whole, for which it is our collective responsibility to help and support Afghanistan in combating the challenges it faces.
9. We support the Government of Afghanistan's constructive approach towards regional engagement and its commitment to building an environment of trust and confidence throughout the region.
10. We consider the conclusion of International Security Assistance Forces' (ISAF) Mission in Afghanistan, an important step towards Afghan self-reliance and note the initiation of the non-combat post ISAF Mission focusing on training, advising and assistance to Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF), and hope it would, therefore, contribute to the early realization of peace and stability in Afghanistan and the region.
11. We commend the hospitality of Pakistan and Iran in hosting millions of Afghan refugees, for the last three decades, despite their own formidable challenges and limitations and we urge the international community to provide them with adequate support. We welcome the initiatives Afghanistan-Pakistan-UNHCR and Afghanistan-Iran-UNHCR Tripartite Commissions on Voluntary Repatriation of Afghan Refugees from Pakistan and Iran respectively. We urge the international community to provide

adequate and sustained support and assistance including within the framework of the Solutions Strategy for Afghan refugees to enable their voluntary, safe, and dignified repatriation and sustainable reintegration and resettlement in Afghanistan. We look upon the Afghan Government to take necessary measures to facilitate this process in close cooperation with host countries.

12. We recognize that the beginning of the Transformation Decade, aimed at self-reliance of Afghanistan, marks an important milestone in its history. While reaffirming commitment to Afghanistan's independence and sovereignty, we reiterate our support for Afghanistan as it ushers in the new era of regional connectivity as enunciated by H.E. President Ghani.
13. We urge the international community to stand by its commitment made during the London Conference, of continued financial support to Afghanistan's National Unity Government, through 2017. In this regard, we note with appreciation the agreement by the European Union to host the next Afghanistan Development Ministerial Conference in Brussels in 2016.
14. We renew our support for Afghanistan which is beginning to emerge as a stable democracy, is continuing to develop a resilient security force, and is visualizing a reformative economic agenda as goals for the Transformation Decade.

Countering Security Threats

15. We recognize that terrorism and violent extremism are constant and serious threats to regional and international peace, security, stability and economic growth, and that Afghanistan is one of the countries at the forefront of the war against terrorism, fighting regional and international terrorist groups and safeguarding the region against the spread of terrorism.
16. We reiterate our agreement that terrorism, extremism and separatism, and linkages among them, pose a serious challenge to many of our countries, as well as the region and beyond, which can only be addressed through our concerted efforts.

17. We believe that achieving peace and security, as well as regional integration, is a shared responsibility, in which each HOA-IP country must play its role for its own benefit, as well as for the collective benefit of the region.
18. We welcome Afghanistan's determination and efforts in steering the HOA-IP towards creating a peaceful and secure region. Since the security of the countries of the Heart of Asia region are intertwined, we believe that supporting Afghanistan's efforts in fighting terrorism is vital for safeguarding the region against terrorism.
19. We resolve to eradicate the menace of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. While recognizing the importance of international cooperation and coordination, any measure taken by States to prevent and combat terrorism must comply fully with our obligations under international law and the United Nations Charter. We commit to put into practice specific measures and steps necessary for countering and eliminating the menace of terrorism, all terrorist organizations, in particular Al Qaida, Daesh (ISIL) and their affiliates, and any support to them and their enabling networks in the HoA-IP region.
20. We recognize that extremism facilitates, encourages and justifies acts of terrorism and violence. We undertake to introduce measures to curb the spread of violent extremism and the promotion and encouragement of violence as a means of achieving political objectives.
21. We also agree on the need, and commit to put in place, specific measures and take necessary actions to deny terrorists' access to financial and material resources, to dismantle their sanctuaries and training facilities, and to curtail their ability to recruit and train new terrorists. Measures to curb terrorists' movements should also be established without prejudice to trade and legal movement of citizens and goods.
22. We give credence to the idea of resolving conflicts through peaceful negotiations and urge full support by HOA-IP countries to the Government of Afghanistan in implementing Afghan-owned and Afghan-led peace and reconciliation initiatives, and realizing its peace objectives. We urge all Afghan Taliban groups and all other armed opposition groups to enter into peace talks with the Afghan Government.
23. We believe that terrorism, transnational criminal narcotics and weapon networks, are serious regional challenges. Tackling these, offers opportunities for regional cooperation.

We recognize that a considerable share of the terrorism financing sources consists of the revenues obtained from drugs production and its trafficking. Therefore, we resolve to begin the process of identifying and countering each of these threats at national, regional and international levels.

24. We understand that the acuteness and global scale of the illicit drug threat requires appropriate international efforts aimed at intensifying measures to fight illicit production of drugs and their precursors and their trafficking, especially in the Heart of Asia region. In this regard, we resolve to intensify existing counter narcotics activities in the region.
25. We realize that the emerging security challenges are not confined to a particular country and have the potential of expanding to the entire region, if timely measures are not taken. We, therefore, stress the need for adopting a collaborative security and counter-terrorism approach for the HOA-IP region. In this regard, we need to explore evolving a collective security approach and adopting a common counter-terrorism strategy and programme. Therefore, in accordance with our instructions to our Senior Officials in Beijing (articles 20 and 21), we task the Heart of Asia relevant Senior Officials to hold a meeting, in the first half of 2016, on security issues and counter terrorism measures.
26. We realize the need for generating financial resources, developing logistical support and establishing improved information sharing mechanisms among relevant government institutions responsible for combating terrorism, illicit drug trafficking and managing border security, as part of the comprehensive regional strategy for combating terrorism and encouraging the participants of the Counter Terrorism-Confidence Building Measure to focus on these areas.

Promoting Economic Connectivity

27. We are cognizant that the region has vast natural resources, immense human potential, and abundant opportunities for creation of capital that, in a well-connected region, could be utilized productively to achieve the goal of sustainable economic growth.

28. We welcome the number of infrastructure and energy projects aimed at strengthening regional economies through enhanced connectivity, trade, movement of goods and people.
29. We believe that it is imperative that regional economic connectivity initiatives improve the lives and welfare of people through improvement in quality of lives, employment generation, ease of access to basic amenities and equality of opportunities for all layers of society. Afghan youth and women are untapped potential resources, which would greatly contribute to the economic and cultural development of the entire region.
30. We note the goals and priority projects of Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan-VI (RECCA-VI), as indicated in its Chairman's Statement, and look to the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process, through its two economic CBMs, to support their implementation, where possible.
31. We appreciate the cooperation among regional countries on projects that have the potential of transforming Afghanistan as transit hub in the Heart of Asia region. We particularly welcome the development of North-South and East-West energy, transport and trade corridors, as well as transit hubs/routes in the region and encourage linkages to be made to these in a manner that these provide maximum regional coverage and benefit.
32. We understand that easing of customs procedures and policies, and development and broadening of transit trade framework agreements, is imperative for removing bottlenecks and impediments to facilitate smooth movement of goods and increase the economic viability of inter and intra-regional trade. In this regard, a trade friendly environment needs to be created in the region that ensures compatibility of customs regulations, facilitation of cross-border clearances and reduction in time of legal formalities.
33. We are convinced of the need to align and bring greater coherence to existing initiatives that aim to strengthen regional connectivity. We look to the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process to play a constructive role in achieving this goal.

Confidence Building Measures

34. We consider Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) to be important tools to link the Heart of Asia countries at various levels. We appreciate all lead countries' efforts in

organizing RTG meetings, for all six CBMs this year, and recall our commitment under article 25 of the Beijing Declaration which states: *“We acknowledge the important role played by the Regional Technical Groups (RTGs) in prioritizing and following the CBM activities. In this context, we ask the lead countries of each CBM to at least convene two of these meetings each year, one within 2 months of each Ministerial Conference and the second no later than 4 months prior to the following Ministerial Conference.”* In this context, we expect all the RTGs to hold their meetings as per this Article’s provision.

35. We understand that the Regional Technical Group (RTG) meetings are the vehicles to drive the CBMs forward and delineate the future course of action for CBMs. To this end, we task CBM participants to send technical specialists and decision makers to each RTG meeting. We also task the co-lead countries to announce the dates for the second RTG meeting for the year at the first RTG meeting, expected to take place within two months from today. The first RTG meeting should identify priority projects for the year, identifying prospective implementers and resource providers, such as supporting countries and organizations, and include these in a calendar for the year. Such annual calendars may include inputs from the relevant line ministries and institutions responsible for hosting events related to the CBMs.
36. We agree to intensify our efforts in ensuring that the targets set during the Ministerial Conferences are achieved prior to the next one. We express our commitment to generate positive, tangible and effective results, through the endeavors being made under various CBMs. We suggest that under each CBM a continuous series of activities is carried out in specific area, aimed at achieving tangible results, and limiting ad hoc activities to those considered of particular stand-alone value.
37. We realize that some CBM activities need financing and allocation of sufficient time as they may yield results over a longer period of time. While expectations on these projects should be realistic, update reports should regularly be provided at each Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM).
38. We appreciate those supporting countries and organizations that contribute to the implementation of the CBMs' activities and urge them to enhance participation and contribution in implementation of all CBMs, in close cooperation and coordination of their efforts with the CBM Member States.

Conclusion

39. We task our Senior Officials to hold the first SOM meeting of this process, within three months of this Conference, and engage in political dialogue in accordance with our commitments in Beijing, and also to review the plans submitted by the RTGs.
40. We express our appreciation and gratefulness to the Government of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan for hosting the Fifth Ministerial Conference of the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process in Islamabad.
41. We welcome the willingness of India to host the next Ministerial Conference of the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process as Co-chair in 2016, and decide to hold the Sixth Ministerial Conference in the last quarter of 2016.
42. This Declaration was adopted in Islamabad, Pakistan, on 09 December 2015, by the Foreign Ministers and high-level representatives of the participating countries of the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process: Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Republic of Azerbaijan, People's Republic of China, Republic of India, Islamic Republic of Iran, Republic of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Russian Federation, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Republic of Tajikistan, Republic of Turkey, Turkmenistan, the United Arab Emirates, and the United Nations.
43. This Declaration was welcomed and supported by the Foreign Ministers and high-level representatives of the supporting countries of the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process, and the high-ranking representatives of the supporting international and regional organizations: Commonwealth of Australia, Canada, Royal Kingdom of Denmark, Arab Republic of Egypt, European Union, Republic of Finland, Republic of France, Federal Republic of Germany, Republic of Iraq, Republic of Italy, Japan, Republic of Poland, Norway, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States, Agha Khan Development Network (AKDN), Asian Development Bank (ADB), Central Asian Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC), Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), Collective Security Treaty Organizations (CSTO), Economic Cooperation Organizations (ECO), North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC), Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).