

Aga Khan Development Network

Statement at the Sixth Ministerial Conference Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process Amritsar, 4 December 2016

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Honorable Co-Chairs
Excellencies

On behalf of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), allow me to thank our co-hosts for their excellent organization of this 6th Ministerial Conference.

Mr. Chairman, AKDN is a long-standing partner of the Government and peoples of Afghanistan and we are honoured to be a supporting organization of the HoA-IP since its inception in 2011 and more specifically to support three Confidence Building Measures (CBM): Education led by Iran; Disaster Management led by Pakistan and Kazakhstan; and Trade, Commerce and Investment Opportunities led by India.

We thank the Government of India for its gracious hospitality and for hosting this forum in Amritsar, with its message of universal brotherhood and sisterhood. Amritsar is an example of how cultural rejuvenation when combined with development can make significant improvements in the overall quality of life of its inhabitants. This approach is at the heart of AKDN's approach which sees culture and development as being inextricably linked. The *Humayun's Tomb* in Delhi and the *Bagh-e-Babur Tomb and Gardens* in Kabul are but two examples.

Mr. Chairman, our experience has shown that multiple integrated interventions aimed at improving the overall quality of life builds resilient and confident communities who ultimately become masters of their own development. And it is in this context that the confidence building measures of the HoA-IP assume significance and we thank the lead countries on the update on the progress of the activities undertaken within the CBMs at the Senior Officials Meeting.

Mr. Chairman, with your permission I would like to highlight two of AKDN's significant initiatives towards strengthening regional cooperation and promoting stability.

The first, is the University of Central Asia (UCA), a unique higher education institution established by an international treaty between Tajikistan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Kazakhstan, and His Highness the Aga Khan. I am very pleased to share that UCA's first undergraduate campus opened in September of this year in Naryn, Kyrgyz Republic with students from five countries in the region, including Afghanistan and faculty from many more. The second campus will open in 2017 in Khorog, Tajikistan. The third campus, in Tekeli, Kazakhstan is set to open in 2019.

UCA is unique because it is the Central Asia's first regional university, it is fully-residential and located in secondary towns in mountain communities where it serves as a driver of regional economic development with its contextually relevant specializations meeting a broad bandwidth of needs. For example, it has the School of Professional and Continuing Education that meets the immediate needs of young people and adults for skills development, professional and vocational

qualifications, and over the last 10 years engaged some 93,000 learners in its multiple learning centres including seven in Northern Afghanistan. It is rewarding to note that in 2016, 54% of learners in Afghanistan were women.

UCA's Institute of Public Policy and Public Administration deals with issues such as regional trade policy and practice, economic growth, and studies social cohesion. This institute will soon launch a programme in economic policy concentrated on pathways to innovation in Central Asia and Afghanistan.

UCA's Mountain Societies Research Institute builds the capacities of universities in the region on land and water resource management, climate change adaptation and resilience, natural hazards and risk mitigation. Rapid climatic changes are increasing the regularity and intensity of natural disasters, taking a heavy toll particularly on poorer communities.

In this context, it was heartening to hear the progress to date under the Disaster Management CBM including the development of early warning systems.

In keeping with AKDN's commitment to the collective strengthening of disaster mitigation efforts in the region, we collaborate closely with national disaster management agencies in Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, UN agencies and the European Commission in disaster response and risk reduction. We also partner with civil society, academic institutions, as well as private sector for the use of innovative science and technology to assess and understand the impact of sudden and slow-onset disasters.

Mr. Chairman, through the Aga Khan Agency for Habitat (AKAH), we work to ensure that poor people live in physical settings that are as safe as possible from the effects of natural disasters; that residents who live in high-risk areas are able to cope with disasters in terms of preparedness and response; and that these settings provide access to social and financial services that lead to greater opportunity and a better quality of life.

In conclusion Mr. Chairman, I would like to express AKDN's deep appreciation for the opportunity to contribute to this Heart of Asia Ministerial Conference and to promote Afghanistan's development within its regional context. We look forward to participating in the Disaster Management Regional Technical Group meeting in Astana on 9 December and to align our efforts with the Almaty Centre for Disaster Risk Reduction as well.

Thank you