

**Statement by the delegation of the Republic of Azerbaijan
at the Sixth Ministerial Conference of Heart of Asia – Istanbul Process,
delivered by Mr. Qaya Mammadov,
Head of the International Security Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
*Amritsar, India, 4 December 2016***

Dear Co-Chairs,

First of all, let me convey sincere greetings by His Excellency Mr. Elmar Mammadyarov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, who regrets not being able to be amongst you today due to unavoidable prior commitments. He instructed me to deliver this statement.

We thank the Government of the Republic of India and the Government of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan for their successful co-chairmanship over the past one year. We also thank India for the generous hospitality as the host of this conference.

We commend the efforts of the National Unity Government of Afghanistan towards implementing political, economic and social reforms and addressing complex security challenges facing the country.

Azerbaijan remains committed to supporting the stabilization, peaceful reconstruction and development of Afghanistan through bilateral efforts as well as active participation within multilateral platforms.

We regard the Heart of Asia - Istanbul Process as a valuable mechanism of dialogue and cooperation towards attaining peace, reconciliation, security and economic development of Afghanistan. Herewith, I am pleased to convey the offer of the Republic of Azerbaijan to co-chair this important process in 2017. We would be honored to host the next ministerial conference of the Heart of Asia - Istanbul Process in Azerbaijan.

The support for Afghanistan's economic development in the transformation decade of 2015-2025 is crucial for sustaining the positive results of stabilization efforts in the country achieved over the past decade.

Azerbaijan is engaged in cooperation with Afghanistan with a view to integrating this country into the regional economy and reviving trade with its neighbors and beyond through increased regional connectivity. As the co-lead country together with Turkmenistan in the Regional Infrastructure CBM of the Istanbul process, Azerbaijan will continue working with Afghanistan and other partners in this field.

The ongoing regional connectivity projects initiated by Azerbaijan, including, Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railroad, the new Baku International Sea Trade Port, logistics center on the shores of the Caspian Sea, linking up railway networks of Azerbaijan and Iran represent qualitatively new achievement in developing trans-regional infrastructure with multi-modal capabilities along the East-West and North-South axes. These projects will facilitate Afghanistan's

access to global markets and provide connectivity in the region, capable of handling cargo and containers in a much shorter, faster, efficient and cost-effective way.

Well-being and prosperity of Afghanistan, economic growth and regional cooperation are interlinked and dependent on the overall security environment in the region. In this regard, it is critical to pay close attention to the security challenges that the country continues to face, in particular those emanating from violent extremism, terrorism, separatism and drug trafficking.

As the co-lead-country together with the Russian Federation in the Counter-Narcotics CBM of the Istanbul process, Azerbaijan works with Afghanistan and other partners in addressing illicit drug trafficking, which is indeed a grave threat to the region.

Through bilateral channels, Azerbaijan shares its experience with Afghanistan, and provides training assistance in good governance, military, law-enforcement and mine action fields.

We also contribute to the post-ISAF “Resolute Support Mission” by providing troops, multimodal transit, training and financial assistance. Azerbaijan has already made substantial donations to the Afghanistan National Army Trust Fund and pledged to continue to support to this Fund.

Before concluding, we would like to stress that helping Afghanistan is not only a matter of human solidarity. It is also about unlocking the huge potential of this country in terms of regional economic cooperation for the benefit of the entire region. We are confident that with its suitable geographic location, determination of its people and tireless efforts of its Government, Afghanistan will soon be transformed into a crucial player of regional trade and connectivity in the heart of Asia.

In conclusion, we would like to reiterate our support for Afghanistan’s sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence and wish the Government of National Unity every success in its efforts towards achieving a unified, peaceful and prosperous future for the brotherly and friendly people of Afghanistan.

Thank you.