

**The Heart of Asia - Istanbul Process**  
**7<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference**  
**1<sup>st</sup> December, 2017**

**Baku Declaration**

**“Security & Economic Connectivity Towards A Strengthened Heart of Asia Region”**

1. We, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and high-level representatives of the participating and supporting countries, joined by high level representatives of the international and regional organizations, have met in Baku, the Republic of Azerbaijan, on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2017 at our Seventh Ministerial Conference of the Heart of Asia - Istanbul Process (HoA-IP). The Conference was co-chaired by H.E. Mr. Elmar Mammadyarov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan and H.E. Mr. Salahuddin Rabbani, Minister of Foreign Affairs 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. Ilham Heydar oglu Aliyev, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan for inaugurating the Seventh Ministerial Conference.
3. We recall the six Ministerial Conferences in Istanbul (2011), Kabul (2012), Almaty (2013), Beijing (2014), Islamabad (2015) and Amritsar (2016) and we reaffirm our commitment to the principles, objectives, and outcomes enshrined in the Declarations of these Conferences that have defined the ideals for the working of the HoA-IP and its overarching goal of promoting peace and prosperity in the Heart of Asia region.
4. We reaffirm that the HoA-IP is a unique and important platform for enhancing dialogue and building trust among regional countries. The HoA-IP promotes regional political, security and economic cooperation with the goal of building peace, stability and prosperity in Afghanistan and the entire region.

5. We stress the need to advance regional cooperation as an effective and necessary means to address common challenges and to promote security, stability and socio-economic development in the Heart of Asia region. To this common end, we renew our commitment to strengthening enhanced cooperation among participating countries in a sincere and effective manner.
6. We reaffirm our commitment to the United Nations Charter and its enshrined principles of sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity, inviolability of internationally recognized borders, sovereign equality of nations and non-intervention in the internal affairs of other states as well as universally recognized principles and norms of international law. Furthermore, we reaffirm our commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We reiterate the importance of increased political dialogue and consultation between the countries comprising the Heart of Asia for a stable, peaceful and prosperous region.
7. We reiterate the obligation to refrain from the threat or use of force against the political independence, territorial integrity, or sovereignty of any state. We reaffirm our commitment to develop friendly relations among HoA countries based on good neighborly relations, peaceful co-existence, and non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries.
8. We reaffirm our appreciation and express strong and unequivocal support for the ongoing constructive efforts and commitments of the Government of Afghanistan to promote regional connectivity and the development of infrastructure links as well as building an environment of increased trust.
9. We recognize the need to strengthen trust and cooperation in the region in order to meaningfully promote the stability and prosperity of Afghanistan and its surrounding region. We agree to actively participate in a process of continuous and effective dialogue between Afghanistan and its near and extended neighbours concerning all issues of common interest and importance for Afghanistan and the region as a whole.

## **Fight Against Terrorism**

10. We recognize terrorism, violent extremism conducive to terrorism, extremism, radicalization, separatism and sectarianism, and linkages among them, as the gravest challenges to the peace, security and economic development of Afghanistan, the Heart of Asia region and the international state system in general.
11. We reaffirm that terrorism cannot and should not be associated with any religion, nationality, civilization or ethnic group.
12. The fight against terrorism is a major priority for all Heart of Asia countries and we reiterate our resolve to work together to prevent and suppress terrorist acts through increased regional solidarity and cooperation, in accordance with the UN Charter and obligations under international law, including international human rights law, international refugee law as applicable and international humanitarian law, as well as through the full implementation of the relevant international conventions, the UN Security Council Resolutions and the UN Global Counter Terrorism Strategy. We express our readiness to work with the newly-established United Nations Office on Counter Terrorism to prevent, suppress and eradicate terrorism in the Heart of Asia region, in accordance with the UNGA Resolution 21/79.
13. We strongly call for concerted regional and international cooperation to ensure elimination of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, including dismantling of terrorist sanctuaries and safe havens, preventing and interdicting the movement of terrorists and terrorist groups, including foreign terrorist fighters, across the countries of the Heart of Asia region, as well as disrupting all financial, tactical, logistical or any other support for terrorism without any distinction. In this regard, we call upon all states to take action against these terrorist entities in accordance with their respective national counter-terrorism policies, their international obligations and the UN Global Counter Terrorism Strategy.
14. We reaffirm our recognition made in Islamabad in the 5<sup>th</sup> HoA-IP Ministerial Conference that violent extremism conducive to terrorism facilitates, encourages, incites and justifies acts of terrorism and violence and we are committed to take all relevant measures and cooperate to prevent and counter terrorism. We recognize the

necessity of taking serious measures to address radicalization and recruitment of youth by terrorist networks and their supporters. We realize that the radicalization of elements of the population, especially youth, can only be prevented by effective de-radicalization and counter-radicalization strategies involving all the Heart of Asia countries. We commit to learning from and applying lessons learned in de-radicalization and counter-radicalization by individual Heart of Asia countries.

15. In recognition of the Heart of Asia as a regional platform for addressing regional threats, we believe that a concerted and coherent regional approach is required to combat the menace of terrorism, extremism and violence. We welcome the first expert meeting on the draft of the regional counter-terrorism strategy held on the 20<sup>th</sup> of September on the margin of the 72<sup>nd</sup> session of the UNGA, following the decisions taken by the HoA-IP Ministerial Conferences in Islamabad and Amritsar. We agree to continue the expert meetings to discuss the key elements of the proposed draft framework of the strategy and present the recommendations to the Senior Officials Meeting of the HoA-IP.
16. We remain gravely concerned by the high level of violence in Afghanistan and the Heart of Asia region by the Taliban and all terrorist groups including those referenced in the previous HoA Declarations of 2015 and 2016. Having a symbiotic relationship with organized crime, these terrorist groups continue to pose grave threats to the security and stability of our nations, violating the sovereignty and security of our countries with impacts on the political and geo-political situation in our region. We further call on the Counter Terrorism CBM's Regional Technical Group to finalize an agreed consolidated list of terrorist groups that threaten the peace and security of Afghanistan and the Heart of Asia region and to elaborate ways and methodologies for fighting them through a joint effort. While Afghanistan continues to fight at the forefront of the war against these terrorist groups, the HoA-IP participating countries support the efforts of the government of Afghanistan towards peace and reconciliation with the Afghan Taliban and its fight against terrorist groups.
17. We condemn in the strongest terms the terrorist attacks throughout this year in Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, Russia and elsewhere in the region which took the lives

of hundreds of innocent people, including the 11<sup>th</sup> January Kandahar, the 31<sup>st</sup> May Kabul and the 7<sup>th</sup> November Jalalabad attacks against the diplomatic community, causing hundreds of injuries and the destruction of public and private properties.

18. We commend the Afghan National Defense Security Forces (ANDSF) in fighting terrorist groups including Daesh/ISIL in Afghanistan and for their brave role in ensuring peace and security in that country. We welcome the agreements between the International Community and the Government of Afghanistan that provide for continued financial and military-technical support and assistance to the ANDSF until 2020, as well as the training, advice and assistance provided to them by the post-ISAF Mission to achieve long-term, sustainable security and stability in Afghanistan. We also pay tribute to the sacrifices made by the ANDSF and international forces.

### **Narcotics & Organized Crime**

19. We are concerned about this year's drastic increase in illicit cultivation and production of opium in Afghanistan, the volume of drug trafficking, drug trade, trafficking of precursors and the rising demand for illicit narcotics in the HoA region and beyond. This poses a threat to the socio-economic development, security and stability not only in Afghanistan, but also in the surrounding region and the world as a whole. Further eradication of opium cultivation, alternative livelihoods, law enforcement, prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and public information efforts are required as part of a comprehensive and integrated strategy to address this common challenge, based on the principle of common and shared responsibility, and consistent with the international drug Conventions.
20. We take note of the Regional Conference held on 9-10 October 2017 in Kabul to discuss the problem of counter narcotics and make efforts to draft a counter narcotics regional strategy. We also welcome the High-level International Conference on 'Promoting Afghanistan's Alternative Development Initiatives Amongst Regional and International Partners' which was held on 16-17 November 2017 by UNODC in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan. We support alternative development measures that should

be promoted within the framework of comprehensive strategies for crop control, preventing drug trade and precursors trafficking, including eradication and law enforcement. We believe it is essential to implement a comprehensive approach in addressing the drug problem in Afghanistan, the Heart of Asia region and globally. We stress the urgent need to respond to the serious challenges posed by the nexus between revenue from illicit narcotics and financial support for terrorist entities in Afghanistan, the Heart of Asia region, and globally. We emphasize the need to accelerate efforts on implementation of the Political Declaration and Plan of Action of 2009, the Ministerial Statement of 2014 by the Commission on Narcotic Drugs and the outcome document of the Thirtieth Special Session of the UN General Assembly on the World Drug Problem (UNGASS) entitled 'Our Joint Commitment to Effectively Addressing Encountering the World Drug Problem' held in April 2016.

### **Refugees & Returnees**

21. We commend countries in the region and beyond for their hospitality and all kinds of support in hosting millions of Afghan refugees for around four decades. We acknowledge in particular the role of neighboring Iran and Pakistan in hosting Afghan refugees for such a long time and call for creating conducive conditions in Afghanistan for voluntary, safe and dignified return of the refugees to their homeland. In respecting the well being and human rights of the refugees, we urge the international community to provide support and targeted assistance for their dignified repatriation and their sustainable resettlement in Afghanistan, with emphasis on youth, education and livelihoods. The international community should also continue to assist the host communities in taking care of the essential needs of Afghan refugees living in these countries.
22. We take note of the Afghanistan-Pakistan-UNHCR and Afghanistan-Iran-UNHCR Tripartite Commissions on Voluntary Repatriation of Afghan Refugees from Iran and Pakistan as vital steps in the Solutions Strategy and support the Final Statement of the 'UNHCR Executive Committee High Level Segment' refocusing the international community's attention on the Afghan refugee situation in this critical

period. We urge donors to continue to donate to the UNHCR to support the repatriation grant – which has been halved – for voluntary repatriation to its previous levels.

### **Role of International Community**

23. We appreciate the commitment of the International Community for supporting the government and people of Afghanistan and stress the crucial need for continuation of such support for achieving a peaceful, stable and prosperous Afghanistan. We appreciate the continuation of such assistance for Afghanistan. We commend and recognize the importance of the development assistance commitments made by over 100 countries and international organizations during the Brussels Conference last year based on mutual accountability.
24. We call on the International Community to further strengthen international and regional cooperation towards sustained efforts for a secure, stable and prosperous Afghanistan, based increasingly on infrastructure connectivity within the Heart of Asia region and enhanced economic ties.
25. We appreciate the continued efforts by the OIC and Afghanistan to convene the International Ulema Conference on peace and security in Afghanistan with inclusive representation of the Islamic countries and are convinced that a positive outcome will contribute to lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan. We also appreciate the proposal in the 3/44 POL Resolution of the 44<sup>th</sup> Council of Foreign Ministers of the OIC for the establishment of an Islamic University in Kabul, Afghanistan, and welcome OIC Secretary General's delegation composed of the IDB, ISF and other interested potential donor states to Kabul for consultations with the Afghan officials to explore the legal, practical and financial aspects of the project. The establishment of this University could contribute toward the promotion of education, de-radicalization and peace building in Afghanistan.
26. We recognize the significance of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) and its subsequent resolutions on the role of women in conflict prevention, peace negotiations and post-conflict processes in the Heart of Asia region.

## **Regional Organizations**

27. We recognize the important role of the regional organizations covering different combinations of the Heart of Asia countries. In particular, we highlight the role of Organization for Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (UNSPECA), and the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC), in the context of cooperation towards enhanced security and economic development in the region.
28. We welcome Afghanistan's active participation in the regional organizations it is currently a member of, including SAARC, ECO, CICA, ACD, UNSPECA and CAREC. We also welcome the full membership granted by SCO to Pakistan and India, and further recognize Afghanistan and Iran's official requests to become full members of that organization. In this regard, we note the successful holding of the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group meeting in Moscow on 11 October 2017.
29. We welcome the recommendation of the HoA-IP 2016 Annual Report regarding the need to strengthen the relations of HoA-IP with other regional organizations, as well as conducting a study and exploring some areas of cooperation for developing a better framework of cooperation and present their suggestions to the SOM meetings of the HoA-IP.

## **Peace and Reconciliation Efforts**

30. We appreciate the government of Afghanistan's efforts to reach a peaceful political settlement to conflict through pursuing peace talks with those parties and groups who are willing to join the peace process. We welcome the peace agreement with



Hizb-e-Islami Gulbuddin Hekmatyar reached in September 2016 and currently being implemented. We expect that the implementation of the agreement will lead to the reduction of violence in Afghanistan, and establish a precedent for future peace talks with all other armed groups.

31. We recognize that a politically negotiated settlement remains important for durable peace in Afghanistan. We reiterate our support to the Government of Afghanistan in its efforts to advance an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process. In this regard, we welcome the steps taken by the Heart of Asia Countries since the sixth Amritsar HoA-IP Ministerial Conference, including the Kabul Process Conference, the Moscow format meetings, the work of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) and other regional initiatives that aim to bring peace and stability to Afghanistan through an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned process.
32. We urge the Afghan Taliban to enter into peace talks with the Government of Afghanistan. While recognizing the importance of the contributions of neighboring countries and regional partners in this process, we urge all those countries in the region and beyond who have leverage and influence over the Taliban to use their leverage and influence to bring the Taliban to the negotiation table under the leadership of Afghanistan for the purpose of finding a peaceful and permanent political solution to the conflict in Afghanistan.

### **Regional Economic Cooperation**

33. We acknowledge the crucial role of Afghanistan as a natural land-bridge in promoting regional connectivity and economic integration in the Heart of Asia region, and we reiterate our strong support for Afghanistan's efforts to use its geographic location to enhance wider regional economic cooperation. We further stress that economic development will contribute to achieving lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan and the region, and enhance regional economic integration. In this regard, we welcome the practical implementation of TAPI and CASA 1000, the ongoing discussions on TAP 500-KV, the progress made with respect to the Five Nations Railway including the completion of the 3rd phase and the ongoing steps

towards the construction of the fourth phase of Khaf -Herat- railway segment as well as the ongoing work on Mazar Sharif-Herat Railway; the completion of the first stage of the Asian International Railway Corridor between Imamnazar (Turkmenistan) and Aqina (Afghanistan), the initial stages of TAT linking Turkmenistan, Afghanistan and Tajikistan projects as well as the completion of Mazar-e-Sharif-Hairatan Railroad and Surkhon – Pule Khumri electricity line. We welcome the inauguration of the air cargo corridor between Afghanistan and India and the MoU on Jointly Building the Silk Road Economic and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Maritime Silk Road between the Government of the People’s Republic of China and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, as well as the launch of the construction of Serhetabat – Torghondi Railway.

34. We are encouraged by the continued commitment of regional countries to establish significant North-South and East-West corridors within the Heart of Asia Region with a focus on the development of infrastructure connecting Afghanistan and the region to seaports. We also note the significant ongoing steps taken by Afghanistan, Iran and India and the operationalization of their transport and transit agreement based on sea access through Chabahar. We recognize the crucial significance of ensuring multiple sea and land access required by Afghanistan to markets in the region and beyond. In this context, we welcome the signing of the Lapis Lazuli Route Agreement and support its timely implementation, as well as the ongoing activities under the Belt and Road Initiative as it relates to Afghanistan. Once implemented, these corridors will provide additional and dependable access for Afghanistan and the wider region to regional and global markets.
35. We acknowledge the necessity to maximize the speed of movement of goods across the region, and in this context we agree to collaborate more closely in removing the non-tariff barriers to trade and transit, establishing and implementing bilateral and multilateral regional transit-trade framework agreements. In this regard, we stress the urgent need to integrate, through the land route, South Asia and Central Asia through the expansion of existing bilateral trade and transit agreements both northwards and southwards.

36. We recognize the importance of the role of small and medium size enterprises (SMEs) in the economic growth and income generation in the HoA region. We commit to undertake measures to strengthen the growth of SMEs, including women entrepreneurship, and enable their expansion across borders into other countries of the region. We stress the importance of market access for SMEs in particular for women entrepreneurs.
37. We recognize the important role of RECCA as a regional platform for promoting economic cooperation in Afghanistan and the region. In this regard, we welcome the successful conclusion of the 7th Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA VII) held on 14-15 November 2017 in Ashgabat, and the valuable role of Turkmenistan in hosting this Conference. We reiterate our support to the implementation of the decisions on priority regional projects in key areas of energy, transport networks, trade and transit facilitation, communications, B2B and labor support as reflected in the RECCA VII's Declaration.

### **Confidence Building Measures**

38. Reiterating our collective support to promote the implementation of the six CBMs identified in the HoA-IP, we note with satisfaction that a number of activities under various CMBs were carried out since we last met in Amritsar in December 2016.
39. We welcome Afghanistan's initiative to appoint technical focal points for CBMs from sectoral line ministries, which will help mainstream CBMs and increase their effective implementation.
40. Expressing appreciation for convening of the Regional Technical Group (RTGs) meetings and implementation of the activities organized in the framework of the CBMs by Iran in March, Turkmenistan in April, China in May, India in August, and Azerbaijan and Turkey in November. We request the lead countries of CBMs to hold their RTG meetings regularly as decided in Beijing (2014) and in Islamabad (2015) HoA-IP Ministerial Declarations. We also call upon participating and supporting countries to collaborate closely to implement prioritized activities under the CBMs of which they are members. We particularly urge the lead countries to ensure the

implementation of prioritized activities of each CBM with the assistance of supporting countries and organizations.

41. We appreciate the valuable support of the international community to the HoA-IP. In this context, we look forward to continued contributions of the supporting countries and organizations to realize the implementation of activities prioritized under each CBM.
42. We welcome the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process 2016 Annual Report. We encourage participating countries and supporters to consider the recommendations it proposes for more effective implementation of the CBMs. We also endorse the recommendation of the 2016 Annual Report regarding the inclusion of culture in the Education CBM, and agree that from now it will be called the 'Culture and Education CBM'.
43. Realizing the significant role of agriculture in the economic development of Afghanistan and the Heart of Asia region, we task the co-chairs to work on developing an Agriculture CBM plan to be discussed and agreed upon by the Senior Officials Meeting to be held in the first half of 2018.

## **Conclusion**

44. We task our Senior Officials to hold the first 2018 Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) of this process, within three months of this Conference, and engage in substantive discussions on various important subjects in accordance with our commitments in Beijing, Islamabad, Amritsar and Baku, and also to review the plans submitted by the RTGs.
45. We express our sincere appreciation to the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan for hosting the Seventh Ministerial Conference of the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process in Baku. We welcome the willingness of the Republic of Turkey to host the Ministerial Conference in 2018 and the Republic of Tajikistan in 2019.
46. We welcome the presence of Uzbekistan, Republic of Latvia, UNODC, UNRCCA, UNDP, Turkic Council and International Turkic Culture and Heritage Foundation as

guests in this Conference and appreciate their participation and interest in the Heart of Asia Istanbul Process.

47. This Declaration was adopted in Baku, Azerbaijan on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2017 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. 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, the United States, Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), Asian Development Bank (ADB), Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).