

**Istanbul Process: Stability and Prosperity in the 'Heart of Asia' through  
Building Confidence and Shared Regional Interests**

**'HEART OF ASIA' MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE - ALMATY**

**26 April 2013**

**CONFERENCE DECLARATION**

**Preamble**

1. The third 'Heart of Asia' Ministerial Conference in the framework of the Istanbul Process, which was launched on 2 November 2011 in Istanbul, Turkey, took place on 26 April 2013 in Almaty, Kazakhstan. The President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, H.E. Mr Nursultan Nazarbayev, inaugurated the Conference, which was co-chaired by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, H.E. Dr. Zalmay Rassoul, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, H.E. Mr Erlan Idrissov.
2. The Conference was attended by 14 ministerial and high-level delegations from the 'Heart of Asia' countries, 16 ministerial and high-level delegations from supporting countries of the Istanbul Process, as well as 12 high-level delegations from international and regional organizations.
3. We, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and high-ranking representatives of the 'Heart of Asia' countries, joined by supporting states and regional and international organizations, meeting at this time of great importance for Afghanistan and the region, believe that the Istanbul Process is an important regional platform of dialogue and interaction for consolidating the efforts of the countries of the region aimed at promoting security, confidence and result-oriented cooperation. We reiterate our adherence to the principles and commitments, contained in the outcome documents of the Istanbul Conference (2 November 2011) and the Kabul Ministerial (14 June 2012), including the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states, and the central and impartial role of the United Nations. We consider those principles and commitments as the foundation for continued and broadening co-operation in

the framework of the Istanbul Process. We express our gratitude to the Government of Turkey for initiating the Istanbul Process by hosting its launching conference, as well as the Government of Afghanistan for leading the process since its initiation and hosting its first follow up at ministerial level.

4. We recognize and appreciate that the Istanbul Process completed its first step as we adopt the Implementation Plans of the Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) endorsed at the senior officials meetings of Baku, Kabul and Almaty, attached as annexes to this Declaration. We also commit that, building on the steps taken so far, we will take the Istanbul Process to the next level: the delivery of concrete results through implementation of CBMs and the consolidation of common interests through political consultations and dialogue.

## **Political Cooperation**

### Principles of cooperation

5. Recalling the understandings and agreements reached in the previous two Ministerial Conferences, we reaffirm our commitment to building greater confidence, trust and cooperation within the region. We believe regional cooperation must be based on basic principles and norms of international law including respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of states, and the principles enshrined in the founding documents of the Istanbul Process adopted in Istanbul (on 2 November 2011) and in Kabul (on 14 June 2012).

### Convergence of regional interests

6. Our security is indivisible. We believe the region plays a vital role in ensuring a stable, peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan, while long-term stability and prosperity in the region require peace and stability in Afghanistan. The international community as well as the region have a shared responsibility and common interest to work together for the sake of Afghanistan and the region as a whole. Meanwhile, we believe that the

support of non-regional countries and international and regional organizations involved in the Istanbul Process is essential to the success of this shared effort. We welcome efforts of the international community to promote a stable, independent, prosperous and democratic Afghanistan as also stated in the Astana Commemorative Declaration of the OSCE Summit 2010.

7. Our shared interests are best served by cooperation, rather than competition, in the 'Heart of Asia'. We will therefore use the Istanbul Process to build a common platform of shared regional interests, as well as a secure and prosperous 'Heart of Asia' region where Afghanistan has a crucial role as a land-bridge, connecting South Asia, Central Asia, Eurasia, and the Middle East.

#### Security and the fight against terrorism

8. The first priority and area of common concern is security. Contemporary security challenges and threats have a global character and impact and the only possible way to effectively counter them is for states to work together according to agreed principles and mechanisms of cooperation. In this context, as representatives of a region that is most affected by common security challenges, we are determined to work together through the Istanbul Process to respond to our common security challenges and threats.

9. Recalling our shared understandings from the previous 'Heart of Asia' Ministerial Conferences, 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. We strongly condemn the use of violence, including suicide bombings and the targeting of public spaces, because the vast majority of victims of terrorist and extremist violence in the region are innocent civilians, including women and children. In this context, we call on regional and non-regional countries to step up their counter terrorism efforts at the national and multilateral levels, particularly with a focus on dismantling of terrorist and organized crimes sanctuaries and safe

havens, and disrupting the financing, training and equipping of terrorist activities, and the illicit cross-border movement of lethal and explosive substances.

10. As a matter of priority, we are committed to develop and foster national and/or collective measures to monitor and prevent the illicit cross-border movement of arms, munitions, and lethal and explosive substances and precursors which are used by terrorist networks with terrible consequences for civilian populations.

#### Narcotics and organized crime

11. We also reaffirm our commitment to strengthen cooperation with Afghanistan, as well as other regional and international partners, to counter the threat to peace, security and stability in the region and globally posed by the illicit production, trade, trafficking and consumption of narcotics drugs, in accordance with the principle of common and shared responsibility. We also recognize the sacrifices made by the 'Heart of Asia' countries in the fight against the trafficking of narcotics and their precursors.

12. We recognize that both terrorism and the narcotics challenges are linked to other forms of organized crime, including the illegal trade of arms and munitions, the existence of cross-border smuggling networks, human trafficking and smuggling of natural resources, illegal money transfer and laundering and organized corruption. Therefore, in the interest of a more secure region, and to help our common fight against terrorism and the narcotics trade, we affirm our strong determination to prevent the activities of organized crime networks in the region through enhanced bilateral and multilateral cooperation.

#### Refugees

13. The situation of refugees, which is primarily a humanitarian and development issue, poses a serious challenge to the socio-economic conditions of some 'Heart of Asia' countries. In this context, we fully support the creation of conditions conducive to the voluntary and safe return of refugees in a dignified and orderly manner and their sustainable

reintegration. Recognizing, in particular, the enormous pressures and sacrifices that Islamic Republic of Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran have had to endure to host millions of Afghan refugees for the past three decades, we call for continued international support to refugee-hosting countries.

#### Lack of infrastructure

14. The absence of infrastructure and established systems to underpin interaction, exchange and economic activity between and among regional countries poses a strategic impediment to the vision of connectivity in the region that the Istanbul Process promotes. To mitigate this problem, we reiterate our call for greater confidence building among countries of the region, and accelerated implementation of measures that would facilitate travel and harmonize trade and transit procedures, as well as other forms of legitimate interaction among countries. In particular, the timely implementation of large-scale infrastructure projects to facilitate trade and transit in energy and goods must be prioritized.

#### The situation in Afghanistan

15. With regard to the situation in Afghanistan, we welcome the significant progress the country has made over the past 11 years, thanks to the work of the Afghan people and government, and the support of the international community. The foundations of market economy have been put in place, national institutions and armed forces with monopoly of legitimate use of force have been established, civil society has flourished, and the rights of the people of Afghanistan have been entrenched in the constitution. At the same time, we are concerned about the serious challenges still facing Afghanistan, and demonstrate our solidarity through our ongoing commitment to assist Afghanistan in its process of transition.

16. We recognize that 2013 is a pivotal year during which Afghanistan must make decisive progress on some of its major national priorities, including the completion of transition of security responsibility at the end of 2014 from ISAF to the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). We take note of the

termination of the NATO/ISAF mission, and the transformation of that role to one of assisting the ANSF, by the end of 2014. We pay tribute to the sacrifices that have been made by the Afghan people as well as the nations that have served in Afghanistan and supported the efforts to strengthen the effectiveness of the ANSF. A stable, democratic and prosperous Afghanistan is not only a realization of the true aspirations of its people, but also an important asset to the future of the region as a whole. Peace, reconciliation and reintegration of the Taliban and other militant groups through an Afghan owned inclusive peace process that is based on principles of renunciation of violence, cutting ties with all terrorist groups, preservation of Afghanistan's democratic achievements and respect for the Afghan constitution, including its provision for human rights of men and women, and the successful conduct of the 2014 presidential elections will be important elements in achieving these aspirations.

17. While Afghans continue to take full charge of their affairs, as Afghanistan's neighbors and regional partners, we reaffirm our shared commitment to fully respect Afghanistan's sovereignty, unity, territorial integrity and independence, and to collectively reject any forms of interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan by any state or non-state actors. We further commit to collaborate with Afghanistan as it fights terrorism and extremism, continues to deny safe haven to these scourges, eliminates illicit drugs, and builds a self-reliant economy.

18. Afghanistan, for its part, reiterates its commitment to prioritize, as part of its vision for the future, peaceful and mutually rewarding cooperation with its regional partners, and becoming an asset for the future of a secure and economically interconnected and integrated region. Afghanistan further commits that it does not allow any threat from its territory to be directed against any other country and expects its neighbors to do the same.

19. We welcome Afghanistan's commitment to enhance its economic role at the regional level, including its potential to serve as a crossroads of trade and transit of goods, services, energy and people. In this context, we support the completion of infrastructure projects which connect Afghanistan with its

neighbors and the surrounding region, including energy transit projects, transport projects, new railway and road networks, and border and customs cooperation and harmonization programs. As Afghanistan's economy normalizes and prospers, we also see significant opportunities for investment, notably in the areas of mining and natural resources, agriculture, and the services industry among others. The utilization of these opportunities will not only make Afghanistan's stability irreversible, but will also contribute to regional prosperity in general.

## **Role of Regional Organizations**

### The principle of adding value

20. We reiterate our understanding that the Istanbul Process does not substitute already existing formats for regional cooperation but rather seeks to add value by cooperating with them and complementing and bringing coherence to their work when necessary. The Istanbul Process can also contribute to enhancing cooperation through identifying and supporting existing initiatives of regional organizations, particularly those with relevance to Afghanistan.

21. We welcome the strong commitment by all regional organizations to provide synergy with relevant international and regional organizations and fora in the process of implementation of our common goals. In this context, organizations such as the CAREC, CICA, CIS, CSTO, ECO, EEU, OIC, OSCE, RECCA, SAARC, SCO, UNSPECA, can play a valuable role.

## **Confidence Building Measures (CBMs)**

22. We reaffirm our strong resolve to continue the implementation of the broad range of CBMs identified in the Istanbul Process as a practical approach to building confidence and cooperation at the regional level. In this context, we welcome and appreciate the work that our senior officials and technical experts have done to develop implementation plans for the six CBMs that were prioritized at our meeting last June in Kabul, and we adopt the

implementation plans that have been endorsed by our Senior Officials for each of the six CBM's in the areas of i) counter terrorism; ii) counter narcotics; iii) disaster management; iv) trade, commercial and investment opportunities; v) regional infrastructure; and vi) education.

#### Counter Terrorism CBM (CT-CBM)

23. We welcome and adopt the implementation plan and thank the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the Republic of Turkey and the United Arab Emirates for leading the CT-CBM group, as well as the participating states of the CBM for actively supporting the development of the implementation plan. We particularly highlight the crucial importance of countering the financing of terrorism, dismantling of terrorist sanctuaries and safe havens, the illicit cross-border movement of explosive and lethal substances, as well as the strengthening of existing counter-terrorism initiatives and institutions in accordance with CT-CBM implementation plan. Meanwhile, we emphasize the timely implementation of other activities envisaged in the plan, including the sharing of information and expertise among relevant agencies from participating states, and the organization of technical workshops and expert meetings with a focus on developing and further strengthening counter-terrorism cooperation among countries of the region. In this context, while welcoming the readiness of the Republic of Tajikistan and Republic of Turkey to host two of the identified activities, we invite other participating states of the CT-CBM to come forward with similar undertakings.

24. With a view to the urgency of the security challenges facing the region, as stated above, we call on the CT-CBM group to focus, as a matter of priority, on countering the illicit cross-border movement of arms, munitions and explosive substances in the region, with particular attention to Afghanistan. We welcome the initiative by the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to organize, as part of the CT-CBM plan, a special consultation on this important subject.

#### Counter Narcotics CBM (CN-CBM)

25. We welcome and adopt the implementation plan and thank the Russian Federation and the Republic of Azerbaijan for leading the CN-CBM group, as



well as the participating states of the CBM for actively supporting the development of the implementation plan. While appreciating the efforts and sacrifices in terms of human and financial resources by Afghanistan and the neighboring countries, we welcome the commitment by regional countries to expand cooperation in this area, including by strengthening the work of existing organizations, mechanisms and initiatives, and by creating synergies among them. We highlight the emphasis in the implementation plan that counter narcotics efforts must not only be limited to tackling the production and trafficking of drugs, but also to prevention, demand reduction, and the provision of alternative sources of livelihood to poor farming communities involved in cultivation. Focusing on the trafficking of drug precursors and preventing its supplies to Afghanistan must also be a priority.

#### Disaster Management CBM (DM-CBM)

26. We welcome and adopt the implementation plan and thank the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and the Republic of Kazakhstan for leading the DM-CBM group, as well as the participating states of the CBM for actively supporting the development of the implementation plan. We welcome the focus of the plan on 1) conducting activities and events with a view to exchanging information and best practice to enhance the knowledge aspect of disaster preparedness, response, and disaster risk reduction 2) creating a mechanism for pooling of knowledge and experience focusing on impact of disasters and disaster mitigation strategies, and 3) developing robust early warning information and pre-identification system for droughts and other water-related hazards.

#### Trade, Commerce and Investment Opportunities CBM (TCI-CBM)

27. We welcome and adopt the implementation plan and thank the Republic of India for leading the TCI-CBM group, as well as the participating states of the CBM for actively supporting the development of the implementation plan. We welcome the plan's focus on highlighting Afghanistan's role in the context of the region's future prosperity, and encourage the activities envisaged in the plan aimed at highlighting the commercial and investment opportunities in today's Afghanistan; we strongly believe that promoting the involvement of

regional countries in utilizing the opportunities in Afghanistan will contribute to greater regional cooperation and prosperity. In this context, we welcome initiatives like the Delhi Investment Summit of June, 2012 that seek to harness these opportunities for regional cooperation towards Afghanistan and the region's prosperity and stability.

28. We welcome the efforts of Afghanistan to transform itself from an aid-based to a trade-driven economy and believe that capacity building of relevant Afghan institutions, including Chambers of Commerce, development and smooth functioning of trade and transit infrastructure linking Afghanistan to the rest of the region, and provision of better market access to Afghanistan would help the country to sustain its economy during the period of transition and the decade of transformation.

#### Regional Infrastructure CBM (RI-CBM)

29. We welcome and adopt the implementation plan and thank Turkmenistan and the Republic of Azerbaijan for leading the RI-CBM group, as well as the participating states of the CBM for actively supporting the development of the implementation plan. We welcome the plan's articulation of a wide range of infrastructure priorities, including large-scale energy projects, such as TAPI and CASA-1000, road, railway and ports projects. These will include initiatives that provide land-locked Afghanistan with regional and trans-regional connections through existing and new multi-modal transportation means. We also welcome the plan's focus on other productive sectors, such as water management, telecommunications, and the development of large scale agricultural, mining and mineral development projects. We believe there is no greater measure of confidence and cooperation in a region than the existence of infrastructure that connects peoples and facilitates interaction. Therefore, while road and railway connections are a priority, countries in the region should also be connected by air transport as well as by new forms of infrastructure, such as fiber optic cables, which facilitate modern modes of communication. We take note of the interest of the Russian Federation in

joining the CASA-1000 project with the concurrence of the participating countries.

### Education CBM (Ed-CBM)

30. We welcome and adopt the implementation plan and thank the Islamic Republic of Iran for leading the Ed-CBM group, as well as the participating states of the CBM for actively supporting the development of the implementation plan. We welcome the broad approach the plan has taken which not only envisages cooperation in the field of formal and non-formal education but also in the area of cultural exchange and awareness as prerequisites for building greater confidence at the regional level. In focusing on formal education, we highlight the importance of cooperation on higher education, including the provision of scholarships, support to universities, and the importance of vocational training to cater for the demands of an increasingly demanding market in Afghanistan and its surrounding region. In the context of cultural awareness, we emphasize the importance of exchange in areas of literature, art, music, and sports, and in the preservation of the tangible and intangible cultural heritage as well as interaction among media organizations, debate among scholars and religious leaders, and cooperation in science and technology.

### Ensuring effective implementation of CBMs

31. We task our Senior Officials to monitor and report on the timely and effective execution of CBM implementation plans. To this end, the Regional Technical Groups of the CBMs, should convene within two months from the Almaty ministerial with a view to starting implementation of activities as envisaged in the relevant CBM implementation plans, including securing necessary funding for activities that are ready for implementation. We further task our Senior Officials to identify, as appropriate, additional CBMs for development and implementation.

32. We encourage all countries participating in the CBMs to maximize the effects of CBM implementation by promoting and making use of synergies among CBMs wherever possible.

## Funding modalities

33. We recognize, once again, the importance of implementation of the CBMs in delivering concrete results towards building confidence and promoting cooperation at the regional level. However, timely, effective and result-oriented execution of these CBM implementation plans requires financial resources. Therefore, we task our Senior Officials to undertake an expert study of various options for a funding modality, including the proposal of a Trust Fund, by the time of the Senior Officials Meeting on the margins of the UNGA in September 2013. In the interim, participating countries, together with supporting countries and organizations for each CBM, should put in place ad hoc arrangements to finance, as appropriate, specific activities under the relevant CBM implementation plan.

## Role of supporting countries

34. We acknowledge and deeply appreciate the valuable interest of the international community to support the Istanbul Process. In this regard, we look forward to concrete contributions, including financial and technical, to be made by supporting countries and organizations towards the realization of the above CBM implementation plans.

## Role of Afghanistan

35. We recognize with gratitude Afghanistan's readiness to act as the overall focal point for the Istanbul Process, including the various Senior Officials meetings, Regional Technical Groups and other activities.

## **Conclusion**

36. We express gratitude and appreciation to the Republic of Kazakhstan for hosting the third Ministerial Conference of the Istanbul Process and organizing "side-events" in the City of Almaty which is becoming an important regional hub for multi-lateral cooperation in Eurasia. We thank His Excellency

Mr Nursultan Nazarbayev, President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, for addressing our meeting and for his personal leadership in the cause of promoting regional cooperation and confidence-building.

37. We also thank EurAsEC, CIS, CCTS, CARICC, the Republic of Latvia, UNDP, UNHCR and IDB invited by the Republic of Kazakhstan for their participation as guests at this meeting.

38. We welcome with gratitude the willingness of the People's Republic of China to host the next Ministerial Meeting of the Istanbul Process and, in this regard, decide that the fourth Heart of Asia Ministerial Conference will be held in China in 2014. Meanwhile, we look forward to the possibility of reconvening on the margins of the UNGA in New York in September 2013.

39. This declaration was adopted in Almaty on the 26<sup>th</sup> day of April 2013 by Foreign Ministers and high ranking representatives of the 'Heart of Asia' Countries, which consist of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the Republic of Azerbaijan, the People's Republic of China, the Republic of India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the Russian Federation, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Republic of Tajikistan, the Republic of Turkey, Turkmenistan, and the United Arab Emirates.

40. This declaration was welcomed and supported by the Commonwealth of Australia, Canada, the Royal Kingdom of Denmark, the Arab Republic of Egypt, the Republic of Finland, the Republic of France, the Federal Republic of Germany, the Republic of Iraq, the Republic of Italy, Japan, the Republic of Poland, the Royal Kingdom of Norway, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States, as well as the European Union (EU), the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC), the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), Organization for Islamic Cooperation (OIC), South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), North Atlantic Treaty

Organization (NATO), Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and the United Nations (UN).