

The Heart of Asia - Istanbul Process
6th Ministerial Conference
4 December, 2016

Amritsar Declaration

Addressing Challenges, Achieving Prosperity

Preamble

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 Amritsar, the Republic of India, on 4 December 2016 at our Sixth Ministerial Conference of the Heart of Asia - Istanbul Process (HoA-IP). The Conference was co-chaired by H.E. Shri Arun Jaitley, Finance Minister of the Republic of India 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. Shri Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India for inaugurating the Sixth Ministerial Conference.
3. We recall the five Ministerial Conferences in Istanbul (2011), Kabul (2012), Almaty (2013), Beijing (2014), and Islamabad (2015) 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 aimed at promoting regional peace and prosperity.
4. We reaffirm the importance of the HoA-IP as an important regional platform for political dialogue and close regional cooperation aimed at promoting stability, peace and prosperity in Afghanistan and the entire Heart of Asia region, and for enhancing Afghanistan's connectivity with the entire Heart of Asia region. We recognize the role of cultural heritage as a catalyst for social and economic development of the Heart of Asia region.
5. We reaffirm our commitment to the United Nations Charter and its enshrined principles of sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity, 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. Further, we reaffirm our commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We reiterate the importance of increased political dialogue and consultations between countries of the Heart of Asia region for a stable, peaceful and prosperous region.

6. We remain committed to resolving our differences peacefully, and refraining from threat or use of force against the political independence, territorial integrity, or sovereignty of any state. We will also work towards regional consensus on non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, which is critically important for good neighborliness between countries of the region, and for peaceful co-existence as independent and sovereign nations, and re-affirm our commitment to these principles.
7. We stress the need for advancing regional cooperation as an effective means to address common challenges and to promote security, stability and socio-economic development in the Heart of Asia region. We, therefore, renew our commitment to strengthening enhanced cooperation among Member States in a sincere and effective manner.
8. We reaffirm our appreciation and express strong and unequivocal support for the ongoing constructive efforts of the Government of Afghanistan towards regional engagement and its commitment to building an increasing environment of trust and confidence throughout the region.
9. 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.
10. We welcome the assumption of full responsibility for security by the ANDSF and for their role in fighting terrorism and violent extremism in Afghanistan. We welcome the agreements between the International Community and the Government of Afghanistan, and relevant decisions, which allow for continued financial support to the ANDSF until 2020 and assistance to them by the Post-ISAF Mission, in support of long-term security and stability in Afghanistan. We also pay tribute to the sacrifices made by the ANDSF and international forces.

11. We commend the European Union and Afghanistan for convening the October 4-5 Brussels Conference on Afghanistan, and recognize the importance of the development assistance commitments made by over 100 countries and international organizations, and of the Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework (SMAF) and its deliverables. We call on the international community to further strengthen international and regional cooperation towards sustained efforts for a secure, stable and prosperous Afghanistan.
12. We appreciate the continued efforts by the OIC and Afghanistan to convene the International Ulema Conference in Mecca, Saudi Arabia with inclusive representation of the Islamic countries and hope a positive outcome would contribute to lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan.
13. 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.
14. We remain concerned by the gravity of the security situation in Afghanistan in particular and the region and the high level of violence caused by the Taliban, terrorist groups including ISIL/DAESH and its affiliates, the Haqqani Network, Al Qaida, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, East Turkestan Islamic Movement, Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammad, TTP, Jamaat-ul-Ahrar, Jundullah and other foreign terrorist fighters. Acknowledging the support that terrorism derives in our region, we demand an immediate end to all forms of terrorism, as well as all support to it, including financing of terrorism. We recognize that terrorism is the biggest threat to peace, stability and cooperation in our region. We encourage the international community to continue to assist the Government of Afghanistan. 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 in the Heart of Asia region, as well as disrupting all financial, tactical and logistical support for terrorism. 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 2006. Furthermore, we encourage early finalization of the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism with consensus.

15. We commend the government of Afghanistan in successfully pursuing peace talks with Hizb-e-Islami Gulbuddin Hekmatyar resulting in the signature of a peace agreement that sets a good precedent for future peace talks with all other armed groups.
16. We commend countries in the region and beyond, particularly Iran and Pakistan, for their hospitality in hosting millions of Afghan refugees for over three decades. We call on all these countries to continue hosting the Afghan refugees until their sustainable repatriation and reintegration in Afghanistan can take place in a voluntary, safe, gradual and dignified fashion, in accordance with the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees to Support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration and Assistance to Host Communities. We are concerned by the recent spike of Afghan refugee returns and the challenges that this sudden influx presents for returnee reintegration programmes. We therefore urge the international community to provide generous support and targeted assistance for Afghan refugees, returnees and host communities in the region, with emphasis on youth, education and livelihoods. We welcome 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. We 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.

Addressing Challenges

17. Recognizing once again that terrorism, violent extremism, radicalization, separatism, and sectarianism and linkages among them are the gravest challenges that the Heart of Asia region and the rest of the international community face, and these problems would continue to pose a severe threat to the sovereignty, territorial integrity, economic development and bilateral and regional cooperation, we renew our strong commitment to strengthening comprehensive cooperation among the Heart of Asia countries and intensify our efforts to combat terrorism in all its forms and manifestations through solidarity and collective action.
18. We reaffirm our recognition made in Islamabad last year that violent extremism facilitates, encourages and justifies acts of terrorism and violence and we undertake to introduce measures to curb the spread of violent

extremism and terrorism. We recognize the necessity of taking serious measures to address recruitment of youth to extremist and terrorist networks. We realize that the radicalization of disaffected elements of the population, especially youth, can only be prevented by effective de-radicalization and counter-radicalization strategies involving all the HoA countries.

19. We, therefore, believe efforts to eliminate the menace of terrorism and violent extremism will not succeed without a concerted and coherent regional approach involving all HoA countries. This approach will have to utilize the capacities of men and women throughout the cross section of society of the region that includes political figures, religious leaders, educational institutions, opinion makers, youth, civil society, mass media and social networks. We undertake to develop such a regional approach to counter radicalization by tasking our relevant experts from the fields of security, education and local governance to meet in the first half of 2017 to identify key areas to be addressed for developing this regional approach and provide recommendations to be presented to the Senior Officials Meeting of the HoA-IP in the first half of 2017 for further action on this critical issue. We encourage HoA member countries to share their experiences and best practices in the area of counter radicalization with a view to helping evolve their national counter radicalization strategies.
20. We welcome and support Afghanistan's initiative in taking the lead in exploring a regional counter-terror strategy, in accordance with the established principles of the UN charter, which we agreed was necessary when we last met in Islamabad in December 2015. We note the progress that has been made since the last Ministerial with an Ambassadorial meeting of the CT-CBM participating countries at which a draft framework strategy was shared by Afghanistan for further consideration and development. We call for convening an early meeting of experts to discuss the draft framework strategy with the view to its finalization for consideration by senior security officials.
21. We are concerned about the increase in production and cultivation of opium in Afghanistan, the volume of drug trafficking and demand in the HoA Region and beyond. This requires further eradication efforts and 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. We understand that acuteness and global scale of the drug threat requires appropriate international efforts aimed at intensifying measures to fight drugs production and trafficking

in Afghanistan and the region of HoA. We also stress the urgent need to respond to the serious challenges posed by the nexus between revenue and its financial support for terrorist entities in Afghanistan, the Heart of Asia region and globally. To disrupt these links, the HoA countries intend to increase dialogue between their relevant ministries and agencies to tackle this menace. In this regard, we believe it is essential to integrate a comprehensive approach in addressing the drug problem of Afghanistan and the HoA region.

22. 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 Afghan owned peace process. We urge all Afghan Taliban groups and all other armed groups 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 leverages and influence to help bring the Taliban to the negotiation table.

Achieving Prosperity

23. 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 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. Further, we encourage the early implementation of the multinational energy and connectivity projects of CASA-1000, TUTAP, Chabahar Agreement, the Five Nation Railway, TAT linking Turkmenistan, Afghanistan and Tajikistan by rail, all of which would play a central role in strengthening regional cooperation between Central Asia and South Asia and further forge economic connectivity and growth in the region. We welcome the MoU on Jointly Building the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road between the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. All these will lay the foundations for a

successful Seventh Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA) planned for November 2017 in Ashgabat.

24. 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 recognize the crucial significance of enhanced and assured sea-land access for Afghanistan to region's biggest markets. In this context, we note the significant step taken by Afghanistan, Iran and India by signing their trilateral transport and transit agreement based on sea access through Chabahar. Once implemented, this corridor will provide additional and dependable access for Afghanistan and Central Asia to regional and global markets. We also welcome the progress made on the Lapis Lazuli corridor, and believe that this will further increase the connectivity of Afghanistan.
25. We appreciate 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, establishing and implementing bilateral and multilateral regional transit-trade framework agreements. In this regard, we stress on the urgent need to integrate, through the land route, South Asia and Central Asia through the expansion of existing bilateral trade and transit agreement both northwards and southwards.
26. We recognize the importance of the role of small and medium size enterprises (SMEs) in the economic growth of individual countries and the region as a whole. 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. To realize these objectives, we task the members of the Trade, Commerce and Investment Opportunities CBM to explore measures, such as simplifying customs procedures, exchanging information on regional markets and addressing tariff and nontariff barriers, and submit a report to the Senior Officials Meetings, so as to take these ideas forward for implementation.

Confidence Building Measures

27. Reiterating our collective support to promote the implementation of six CBMs identified in the HoA-IP, we note with satisfaction that a number of activities under

various CMBs that were carried out since we last met in Islamabad in December 2015.

28. We request the lead countries of CBMs that did not hold their Regional Technical Group meetings as we stipulated in Beijing (2014) and in Islamabad (2015) to reflect on how they could strengthen their capacity to play a lead role, as per their commitments, in advancing the work of the CBM that they lead. We also call upon participants and supporters to collaborate closely to implement prioritized activities under the CBMs of which they are members. We urge lead countries, participating and supporting countries and organizations to ensure the implementation of the activities prioritized by each CBM.

29. 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 activities prioritized under each CBM. In order to have a more precise picture of the contributions by the international community to the Heart of Asia Process, we request the co-Chairs to provide us with an annual report on the activities of each CBM and the contributions made by the participating countries and supporters of this process. In this context, an assessment of the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process from its inception in 2011, including on the CBMs, was carried out by the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs and presented to the Senior Officials' Meeting of the Heart of Asia- Istanbul Process in New York. We encourage participant countries and supporters to consider the recommendations of this assessment.

Conclusion

30. We task our Senior Officials to hold the first 2017 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 and Islamabad and also to review the plans submitted by the RTGs.

31. We express our sincere appreciation to the Government of the Republic of India for hosting the Sixth Ministerial Conference of the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process in Amritsar. We welcome the willingness of Republic of Azerbaijan to host the next Ministerial Conference of the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process as Co-chair in 2017.

32. We welcome the presence of guest countries Austria, Bulgaria, Latvia and Uzbekistan in this Conference and note their interest in the Heart of Asia Istanbul process.

33. This Declaration was adopted in Amritsar, India on 4 December 2016, 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), Collective Security Treaty Organizations (CSTO), Economic Cooperation Organizations (ECO), North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).