

## Summary

### Senior Officials Meeting of the 'Heart of Asia'-Istanbul Process

27 September 2015, New York

The 12<sup>th</sup> Senior Officials Meeting of the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process was held on 27 September 2015 in New York, in the margins of the 70<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly.

The meeting was inaugurated by H.E. Salahuddin Rabbani, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and co-chaired by H.E. Mr. Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry, Foreign Secretary of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and H.E. Mr. Hekmat Khalil Karzai, Deputy Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

Representatives of the Heart of Asia countries, supporting countries, and regional and international organizations attended the meeting.

In his inaugural address, H.E. Foreign Minister Rabbani said: that the process, since its inception, has received great regional and international recognition. He added that “despite its comprehensive and complex nature and the existing and emerging challenges that pre-occupies participating countries of this process in a least integrated region, every ministerial meeting has taken the process to the next level” attributing this success to the participating countries’ contribution. He thanked the Islamic Republic of Pakistan for hosting the Fifth Heart of Asia- Istanbul Process Ministerial Conference. He also expressed his appreciation to the previous co-chairs of the process and to the countries and organizations supporting the process.

H.E. Mr. Chaudhry in his opening statement said he believes that peace in the region depends largely on peace in Afghanistan thus Pakistan remains committed to the idea of an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process. He added that the ‘Heart of Asia’-Istanbul Process offers a rich opportunity to build a comprehensive and enduring relationship, based on trust and deeper cooperation in a number of areas including security and counter-terrorism, trade and economic cooperation, energy and connectivity, support for reconciliation and regional cooperation.

He said that the two chief goals of peace and prosperity: peace, through countering security threats and prosperity, through deepening connectivity can only be ensured through our unwavering commitment to the ideals envisioned by the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process.

H.E. Karzai, in his remarks, while thanking the co-chair and all participants, said that the focus of the Senior Officials Meeting is to discuss the draft declaration of the Islamabad Ministerial, which is produced jointly by the co-chairs of the process. He added that the draft contains creative, substantive and practical suggestions for cooperation in order to address common regional challenges and turn them into opportunities.

As per traditional practice, the SOM was conducted in two sessions. The representatives of the 'Heart of Asia' countries and the United Nations attended the morning session and the representatives of the supporting countries and regional and international organizations joined the afternoon session.

### **Summary of the Morning Session**

Following the Keynote statement made by H.E. Salahuddin Rabbani Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the session began with opening remarks by co-chairs and followed by participating countries' representatives and the United Nations introductory remarks. While commending the co-chairs for developing a substantive draft declaration, some of the representatives noted that they needed additional time to consult with their relevant agencies in their capitals to finalize their input and views on the draft. The participants agreed that the goal is to further enrich the draft declaration in a cooperative and constructive manner during the weeks to come in preparation for the ministerial conference. The discussion continued on specific paragraphs of the declaration. The meeting agreed on the following general points and next steps, while the co-chairs noted detailed comments shared by participants on specific paragraphs of the draft declaration.

- The Ministerial declaration of the 'Heart of Asia'- Istanbul Process is an important consensus-based regional process with a particular focus on Afghanistan. Since the ministerial declaration of this process are of significant value carrying regional consensus on particular issues, the messages conveyed

in this document need to be concise, clear and carefully selected. Thus, it was suggested that the draft should be shortened and tightened.

- The issue of illicit drugs is a serious challenge for the region and therefore needs to be further discussed in the declaration.
- The issue of emerging threats particularly that of ISIS needs to be incorporated and highlighted within the security discussions.
- The implementation of the CBM activities constitutes an important part of the process. Hence, each CBM should focus to identify two or three truly regional activities and implement them rather than trying to implement many ad hoc or bilateral activities passed under the 'Heart of Asia' Process.

Moving forward, the participants agreed on the following steps: all comments on the draft should be sent to the co-chairs by 20<sup>th</sup> October 2015, the co-chairs will revise the draft based on the comments received and share it with the participants by first week of November, a meeting at the Senior Officials or Ambassadorial level will be organized during the third week of November to discuss comments on the revised draft. The co-chairs will announce the exact date and venue for this meeting later.

The meeting also discussed the Republic of Latvia and the Turkic Councils' applications to become supporters of the 'Heart of Asia' process and decision on their application was referred to the next Senior Officials Meeting.

### **Afternoon Session**

In this session, the co-chairs welcomed the supporting countries and regional and international organizations. H.E. Hakmat Khalil Karzai in his remarks said that: "the supporting countries and regional and international organizations are an instrumental part of the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process." He thanked the supporting countries and organizations for their continued support and commitment and encouraged them to continue to support the process. Then the co-chairs provided the meeting with a summary of the first session and moved on to the next agenda item which was on implementation of the CBMs.

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

H.E. Karzai thanked the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Republic of Turkmenistan, Republic of Azerbaijan, the Russian Federation and Republic of Turkey, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United Arab Emirates for hosting Disaster Management, Regional Infrastructure, Counter Narcotics and Counter Terrorism Regional Technical Group (RTG) meetings respectively. He said that as the process is moving forward every year we try to make the outcome of our activities more systematic and sustainable, this is partly the reason for having fewer activities implemented over the past year and half.

He also pointed that observations reveal that one of the major obstacles toward implementation of the CBM activities is due to participation of representatives who are not well acquainted to the process and its objectives in the Regional Technical Group (RTG) meetings. He added that the RTG participants particularly from the lead countries must be fully in the picture of what the purposes of these meetings are and how they are fitting in the overall process. In order to address this issue, he said, the co-chairs will revise and circulate some of the guidelines already adopted during SOM held on 10<sup>th</sup> July 2014 in Beijing for review and comments of countries, final version of which will be annexed to the declaration of the Fifth Ministerial Conference.

After that the CBMs lead countries were requested to provide a report on the progress made on the respective CBMs. India, the lead country for Trade Commerce and Investment Opportunities reported that they were hosting the RTG for this CBM on the first week of October and presented their plan. The Islamic Republic of Iran is still to provide a date for holding the RTG for the Education CBM.

Then, the representatives of the supporting countries and regional and international organizations delivered their statements. They commended Afghanistan for leading the processes and stated their appreciation to Pakistan for co-chairing the process this year. They also noted the High Level Meeting on Afghanistan held the day before and mentioned that many of the stakeholders in that meeting made references to the Heart of Asia- Istanbul Process as an important platform for consolidating regional efforts. The Swedish representative stated that reference to Human Rights and Women's Rights should be also added to the draft declaration. Similarly the

representative from Denmark stated that issue of refugees reintegration is an important one. The representative of the United States said that they appreciate the proposed focus of the draft declaration on producing a comprehensive strategy for combating terrorism in the region and beyond. Italy emphasized that paragraphs 33 and 34 of the draft may result in great outcomes. The European Union representative said that only concerted efforts of regional partners can make the Peace and Reconciliation process successful, he said that they support paragraph 13 but suggested that the issue of removing trade barriers should be also included.

Other participants also stated their support for the process, made suggestion on issues to be emphasized and terminologies to be corrected and thanked the co-chairs for organizing this meeting.

The representative of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, concluded the session by closing remarks thanking all participants for their constructive contributions. He said that the palpable linkage between peace and development is well reflected in the theme of the upcoming conference as well as in the draft declaration. He emphasized that the overarching goal of the process is to promote regional cooperation and with balancing realism and ambition the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process as a dynamic process can greatly contribute towards that.

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