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## **BRIEFING**

**BY**

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**Ambassador, Permanent Representative of the I.R. of Afghanistan**

**At the OSCE Permanent Council on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Istanbul Process**

**Almaty Ministerial Conference “Heart of Asia”**

**02 May 2013**

**Vienna**

**Briefing by H.E. Ayooob Erfani**  
**Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Afghanistan to the OSCE**  
**At the OSCE Permanent Council on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Istanbul Process Ministerial Conference**  
**“Heart of Asia” held in Almaty, 26 April 2013**

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Mr. Chairman,

Mr. Secretary General Lamberto Zannier

Dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen. Good Morning.

Let me welcome Mr. SG's presence here among us and thank him for his active participation in the Almaty Conference. We appreciate your personal commitment and dedication, Mr. SG, for the cause of peace and stability in Afghanistan.

For us in Afghanistan, promoting regional co-operation is a key and essential pillar of our foreign policy. Afghanistan is determined to revive its historic role as this economically interconnected region's land bridge and roundabout to promote trade, transit, economic development and people-to-people contacts.

For this purpose, the Istanbul Process was launched on November 22, 2011 in Istanbul, Turkey.

I would like to express my gratitude to the brotherly country of Turkey for initiating and lending strong support for the Istanbul Process. I also sincerely appreciate the hospitality and leadership of our Kazakh brothers for hosting the Third Heart of Asia Ministerial Meeting in Almaty on 26 May, 2013. 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 Afghanistan, H.E. Dr. Zalmay Rassoul, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan, H.E. Mr. Erlan Idrissov.

Almaty was another important step in taking the Istanbul Process forward. This is extremely important because we realize that the security, stability and prosperity of all countries in the Heart of Asia region are closely linked to one another, without which the aspirations of economic, trade and transit ties among the region will not be realized. These ties will advance development, economic growth, and stability within the region.

The Almaty Conference was attended by 14 ministerial and high-level delegations from all 'Heart of Asia' member 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.

The conference has adopted specific and concrete implementation plans for the six confidence building measures (CBMs) in the areas of counter-terrorism, counter-narcotics, disaster management, commercial opportunities, investment and trade, regional infrastructure and education. It has tasked designated senior officials to ensure the timely and effective implementation of these measures in the weeks and months ahead.

The conference once again reiterated countries' support for the Istanbul Process, as an essential regional platform of dialogue and interaction. The Process consolidates our efforts to promote security, trust, greater confidence and results-oriented co-operation within the region, in accordance with the founding documents of the Istanbul Process and based on the principles and norms of international law.

The conference stressed that the security and stability of Afghanistan and the region are interconnected and the support of Afghanistan's non-regional partners, as well as the international and regional organizations, is essential to the success of this joint effort.

The participants expressed their commitment to use the Istanbul Process to build a common platform of shared regional interests, for a secure and prosperous 'Heart of Asia' region, where Afghanistan has a crucial role as a land-bridge and roundabout, connecting South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East.

The conference expressed its determination to work together, through the Istanbul Process, to respond to common security concerns including terrorism and extremism, which pose a serious challenge to the region and beyond, and can only be addressed through sincere and collective efforts. In this regard the conference called on all countries to strengthen their efforts to fight terrorism, particularly with a focus on dismantling of terrorist sanctuaries and safe havens, and disrupting the financing, training and equipping of terrorist activities, and enhancing bilateral and multilateral co-operation to fight organized crime networks and illicit cross-border movement.

The participants reaffirmed their commitment to strengthen co-operation, through comprehensive measures, to counter the threat posed by the illicit narcotics drugs in all its dimensions, in accordance with the principle of common and shared responsibility.

On refugees, as a humanitarian and development issue, the conference expressed support for the creation of conditions conducive to the voluntary and safe return of refugees in a dignified and orderly manner, and secure their sustainable reintegration.

The lack of infrastructure was acknowledged by the conference as a serious challenge to trade and economic opportunity and connectivity in the region, and participants called for the timely implementation of large-scale infrastructure projects to facilitate trade, transit and investment in the region.

Regarding the situation in Afghanistan, the participants welcomed the achievements made by the people and government of Afghanistan over the last decade, supported by its friends and partners in the international community. They expressed their concerns regarding remaining challenges, expressed their support for the ongoing Reconciliation and Transition processes, and voiced their solidarity and commitment to assist Afghanistan during transition and beyond.

The participants paid tribute to the sacrifices that have been made by the Afghan people and its partners for a better Afghanistan. They emphasized that a stable, democratic and prosperous Afghanistan is not only a realization of the true aspirations of the Afghan people, but also an important asset to the future of the region as a whole.

Mr. Chairman,

Afghanistan appreciates the outcomes of Almaty conference as another important step in our efforts to realize the vision of greater honest and practical co-operation in our region. We are optimistic about the success of this process that was initiated and developed by the region.

It has only been 17 months since the launch of the Istanbul Process in Turkey, and the active participation and ownership of the Heart of Asia countries in the process, as well as the strong backing of our important supporters, continues to grow. These seventeen months may look like a long time, but if we remind ourselves of where we started and compare that with the present day where we are moving from the planning to the implementation stage for six CBMs, we can certainly claim that we've come a long way in 17 months.

We know that the Heart of Asia countries' fundamental interests – security, stability and prosperity – are tied to one another. And it is time to build the necessary confidence and ensure the necessary results-oriented co-operation among the countries in the region. This is the moment to take action.

Afghanistan is fully committed to the Istanbul Process as its permanent co-chair and will do its best to take it to the next level of gradual but concrete, practical results.

We appreciate the willingness of the People's Republic of China to host the next Ministerial Meeting of the Istanbul Process in China in 2014.

Mr. Chairman,

Afghanistan attaches significant importance to its membership in existing regional organizations and initiatives and reiterates its commitment to contribute to strengthening the existing mechanisms. The Istanbul Process does not substitute the already existing mechanisms for regional co-operation, but will complement them.

For this purpose, we in Afghanistan have recently started a process of assessment of Afghanistan's role in regional organizations in order to ensure that we are able to play an active role in all organizations to which we are a member and to draw synergy in the Afghanistan-related efforts of these organizations.

We are grateful for all members and supporters of HoA countries and the international organizations, for their valuable interest and contributions to the Istanbul Process from the start and their sustained commitment to our success. It is not only key to the future of this region but directly relevant to peace, security and development on a global level.

We are looking forward to a more active role and involvement of the OSCE to take part in the relevant implementation plans of CBMs that have been adopted in Almaty.

Before concluding my remarks Mr. Chairman, please allow me to give you a brief update on the ongoing situation in Afghanistan, in a time in which we've marked a number of critical milestones.

On the ongoing transition process, Afghan national security forces today are directly responsible for the security of nearly 90 percent of the Afghan population. This is a clear demonstration of the success of the transition process that will be completed by the end of 2014, and ANSF will be

able to independently protect the Afghan people and defend Afghanistan against both internal and external threats.

Parallel to the transition of security responsibilities, the Afghan government is pursuing a comprehensive effort to seek a political solution to the ongoing violence. It is by now a clear fact that the vast majority of the Afghan people strongly support a political solution. What we need now is the honest and practical support of outside stakeholders, particularly the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, in the interest of peace and security in both countries.

In the ongoing situation in Afghanistan, security and development needs are intertwined and we have to address both of them at the same time.

Therefore, we're also engaged in an important economic transition. In this context, we're grateful to the substantial pledge of assistance from the international community at the Tokyo Conference last July to fill the projected fiscal gap in the Afghan national budget through the Decade of Transformation from 2015 to 2024. This would give us the opportunity to steadily move towards self-reliance by increasing our national revenues through further development of the Afghan economy and attracting investment in our key productive sectors, including mining, agriculture, transportation and transit. Afghanistan is doing its homework as required by the Tokyo mutual accountability framework.

At the same time, we're rapidly approaching another historic milestone with the April 2014 presidential election. The Afghan government is doing everything necessary to ensure free, fair, transparent and credible elections where all eligible Afghan citizens can cast their ballots. The success of these elections will solidify the foundation of Afghanistan's young democracy and build upon our historic progress of the past decade.

Our collective success in Afghanistan in the transition process, peace and reconciliation efforts, elections and the economic transition will have a defining impact on our shared vision of enhancing regional co-operation.

In conclusion Mr. Chairman, let me express my gratitude to all of our friends and partners for their efforts and support to enhance confidence and trust among Afghanistan and its near and extended neighbors. Together we can nurture and expand cross-border trade, transit, investment and result-oriented co-operation that will benefit Afghanistan and the region as a whole.

Thank you.