



MC.DEL/64/13
10 December 2013

ENGLISH only



Statement by

H.E. Ambassador Ayoob M. Erfani

Permanent Representative to the OSCE and

Head of the Delegation of Afghanistan

at the

20th Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council

Kyiv/Ukraine

5 - 6 December 2013

Statement by H.E. Ambassador Ayoob M. Erfani, Permanent Representative to the OSCE and
Head of the Delegation of Afghanistan

Kyiv, 6 December 2013

Mr. Chairman,

Secretary General,

Honorable Ministers,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honor for me to be here in Kyiv and to address the 20th Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council.

This morning, we heard the sad news of losing Nelson Mandela. On behalf of my delegation, I would like to express our deepest condolences to the Government and people of South Africa and to all peace-loving people. Nelson Mandela devoted his life to peace, justice and dignity of humanity, his vision and legacy endure forever.

Let me begin by thanking my Ukrainian colleagues for welcoming us so warmly here today in Kyiv and for demonstrating such excellent leadership of the OSCE during 2013. I thank the OSCE Secretary General, H.E. Lamberto Zannier and his staff for the outstanding service to the cause of OSCE and we appreciate his personal commitments for a stable and prosperous Afghanistan. I would like to extend the best wishes from the Deputy Foreign Minister of Afghanistan, H.E. Ershad Ahmadi who could not join us today due to another very important engagement, to all of you and for a successful conference.

I wish to express my delegation's gratitude and appreciation to all previous distinguished speakers during yesterday and today's sessions expressing their support for Afghanistan and stressed the continued co-operation of the OSCE and the international community as a whole with Afghanistan, for its transformation to a stable and prosperous country.

The OSCE will celebrate its 40th Anniversary in 2015 and has proved to be a strong regional mechanism in Confidence-Building Measures while offering a forum for dialogue between the East and West, from Vladivostok to Vancouver, throughout different periods from its establishment until today. The realities of 1975 have changed, but the OSCE's principles and visions as a forward-looking organization, deeply rooted in the comprehensive, multi-dimensional concept of security, remain very relevant in today's security environment. We believe that the OSCE, certain internal differences aside, has enormous opportunities to play—collectively—an even bigger role and make a real difference to the lives of citizens throughout its region, and beyond. We hope that the efforts of the Helsinki +40 process will get momentum and will allow the OSCE to emerge stronger at the eve of its 40th anniversary. Afghanistan, as a Partner for Co-operation, reiterates its commitment to the principles, norms and values of the OSCE, with the goal that all people in our region may live together in peace and security.

Mr. Chairman,

As Afghanistan, after twelve years of partnership with the international community and ten years of partnership with the OSCE, is approaching the end of its planned short-term transition in 2014 to the long-term transformation (2015-2024), I would like briefly illustrate Afghanistan's journey over the past twelve years, our historic achievements that have transformed Afghanistan, the remaining challenges -- mostly of global nature -- that are our national priorities, the vision of the Afghan people and Government for the future of our achieved democratic values, which we are now consolidating and entrenching. Let me also address the critical importance of Afghanistan's relations and co-operation with countries in our region and with our partners in the international community, with a view to realizing our vision for a stable, prosperous and democratic Afghanistan.

Mr. Chairman,

The people of Afghanistan had experienced enormous suffering, losses and pains throughout two consecutive decades up to the removal of the Taliban in November 2001.

At the time of Taliban's collapse, Afghanistan was an isolated nation. The country had become a safe haven for international terrorism and its people were deprived of all basic human rights. Severe poverty and disease threatened the life of Afghans with little or no access to healthcare services. Less than half a million, and only male students, could attend schools and universities. The average annual per capita income was about \$100. Roads, bridges, irrigation systems and other components of critical national infrastructure were completely destroyed. No national army nor a national police force nor any other state institutions did exist. Afghanistan became a failed state. Al-Qaeda, supported by other extremist and criminal groups posed a real danger to regional and international peace and security, tragically culminating in the horrible attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001.

Thanks to the determination of the Afghan people, and as a result of their sacrifices, as well as the sacrifices and support of our international partners and friends during our twelve years of partnership, Afghanistan came a long way with significant progress and democratic values of which we can be proud of today.

Today, Afghanistan is a forward-looking young democracy with functioning state institutions, an elected president, an elected parliament and elected provincial councils everywhere in the country, with a vibrant civil society, the most powerful, independent and free media in our region – with more than 50 independent TV channels, over 100 community radio stations, hundreds of print publications, and more than 20 million mobile phone and internet users across the country. Our per capita income has increased from \$100 a year to over \$600 a year, the national currency has been consistently stable, and international trade is expanding. The number of enrolled children stands at well over ten million, with 40% of them girls. Also, hundreds of thousands of young men and women attend some 70 government and private colleges and universities. Women are actively participating in all social, political, security and economic spheres of society. More than 70% of our citizens today have access to basic healthcare services, which has increased average life expectancy from around 40 years to

above 60 years in just one decade. Thousands of kilometres of roads, irrigation canals, bridges, and other critical physical infrastructure have been built.

Afghanistan again has become an active member of the international community while managing our ever-expanding relations and co-operation with countries and organizations around the world through a network of some 70 diplomatic and consular missions.

The above are the examples of our achievements that provide a true picture of the reality in today's Afghanistan, which has been achieved in just 12 years, in a country that has experienced more than 35 years of war and destruction. This is a clear demonstration to counter a narrative of doom and gloom for Afghanistan by those who are ignorant about our historic accomplishments and realities in Afghanistan.

Mr. Chairman,

Today's Afghanistan is going through a critical period of security, economic and political transition which faces difficulties and challenges but is helping us to consolidate our historic democratic achievements and to strengthen our national sovereignty, independence and ownership, which is the aspiration and vision of the Afghan people and Government for the years leading up into the long-term transformation of 2015 to 2024.

In the security area, more than 350,000 brave and professional Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) are directly responsible for the safety of the Afghan population. We are fully confident that with the continued financial assistance of the international community for equipment and training pledged at the Chicago NATO Summit in May 2012, the ANSF will be able to comprehensively provide security to the Afghan people and defend the country against external threats.

Parallel to our ongoing efforts to enhance the capacity and capabilities of our national security forces to fight terrorism and organized crime, the Afghan peace process remains an urgent priority of the Afghan government and the enduring desire of the Afghan people. We are continuously increasing our efforts to engage in negotiations with those Taliban and other armed groups, who denounce violence, renounce terrorism, accept the Afghan constitution and actively participate in the stabilisation process in the country, in attempts to end the continuing conflict. We understand that prolonged peace can only be achieved if the political process is respected. The Islamic Republic of Pakistan, as our major neighbour, can play a key role in supporting our peace efforts. We've been encouraged by the recent visit to Kabul by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and the positive and constructive dialogue that took place between the two governments during that visit. We look forward to further practical and result-oriented steps and progress in the weeks and months to come by the new leadership in Pakistan.

The economic component is another essential element of our successful transition. We realize that the presence of the international military forces over the past decade has generated employment and income opportunities for thousands of Afghans, and there will be an adverse impact resulting from the withdrawal of these forces. The Afghan government is taking practical steps to reduce the negative economic ramifications of the withdrawal and to

strengthen our national economy, through focusing on the development of the agriculture and agribusiness sector, processing our natural resources, attracting foreign investments, creating conditions for trade and transit through enhanced regional co-operation. Also, the Tokyo conference last July generously pledged over \$16 billion through 2015 to help the Afghan government fill its projected fiscal gap—this will be critical in tiding us over the next few years. Afghanistan and its partners are working on the implementation mechanism of a mutual accountability framework of the Tokyo commitments.

In addition to the security and economic transitions, next year's presidential and provincial council elections are a crucial political transition in the country and the Afghan government is doing everything that is possible to ensure free, fair and credible elections. A successful presidential election will entrench our democratic process and greatly contribute to our efforts towards lasting peace, security and prosperity. We welcome the OSCE's positive response to provide an ODHIR Election Support Team for the 2014 elections in Afghanistan.

Mr. Chairman,

As we are preparing ourselves for the long-term transformation, another key foundation of our long-term success will be the strategic partnerships we have forged with some of our closest friends and allies over the past few years. Since October 2011, when we signed our first long-term strategic partnership agreement with the Republic of India, we have entered into similar long-term strategic partnerships with the United States, Germany, Australia, France, the United Kingdom, Italy, Norway, Finland, Denmark and Poland. We have also concluded or are currently negotiating similar partnerships with the European Union, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates.

Specifically with the United States, we negotiated a separate Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) The draft of this agreement was overwhelmingly approved by the historic consultative Loya Jirga (or grand assembly) of 2500 delegates from all around Afghanistan, held in Kabul two weeks ago.

All bilateral security agreements Afghanistan signs with other countries will solely be for the purpose of ensuring peace, security, development and the consolidation of our young democracy and will not affect our relations with third countries.

Mr. Chairman,

As recent history has clearly demonstrated, the peace, security and stability of Afghanistan as the centre of the Heart of Asia region, has a direct impact on the peace, security and stability of the entire region and beyond. We want Afghanistan to serve its rightful role as the key land bridge in our vital region for the flow of people, goods and investments. In this regard, we are making every possible and sincere effort for the success of the young 'Heart of Asia' confidence-building mechanism, which has codified a new agenda of our regional co-operation, to advance and foster peace and prosperity in our region.

Mr Chairman,

These many achievements also remind us of how far we have come as a nation. These developments would by no means have been possible without the continuing, unwavering long- term assistance, commitment and support of our partners in the international community, which most of whom are present here today.

Afghanistan and the OSCE have come a long way together by continuously expanding and strengthening a fruitful and confidence-building partnership ever since its establishment ten years ago. The OSCE's engagement with Afghanistan have contributed to our decade-old achievements, particularly in the areas of law enforcement, counter-terrorism, counter-narcotics, human rights, democratic governance and border management and security, especially through the OSCE Academy in Bishkek and the Border Management Staff College in Dushanbe. However, there is still room for further engagement to expand and strengthen the co-operation between the OSCE and Afghanistan, including through OSCE's proactive engagement and support to the relevant CBM's of the newly established "Heart of Asia" process. We are confident that this partnership will be further strengthened in post-2014 Afghanistan and will continue to bear fruits in the coming years for the cause of security and stability in the OSCE region.

In conclusion, Mr Chairman,

Afghanistan has come a long way over the past twelve years. Afghanistan is determined to institutionalize and consolidate its democratic achievements for a better future, and remains committed towards its international, regional and national obligations and responsibilities. I wish to emphasize that as of 2014, Afghanistan will not be and should not be considered as the source of security threats to the region and the greater global community – rather, we should be looked at as an opportunity for trade, transit, investment and connectivity in our region. While we remain positive about the upcoming years, we are realistic about the situation surrounding us, and recognize the remaining challenges to be addressed. These challenges, including narcotic drugs and terrorism are global, and require a global and comprehensive approach, based on the principle of shared responsibility. Afghanistan is not a drug- and threats-originating country. In fact, the people of Afghanistan have been a prime victim and continue to pay a heavy price to fight these global menaces, in particular narcotic drugs and terrorism, yet we will remain committed to do our part in responding to all these global challenges for the security, safety and well-being of our people.

Let me also assure you, Mr. Chairman, that as we in Afghanistan work to preserve our gains and consolidate our young democracy in the crucial years ahead, we will remain an active partner of the OSCE.

We thank Ukraine, the outgoing chair for the excellent Chairmanship during 2014 and express our best wishes for the success of the incoming Swiss and Serbian joint Chairmanships in 2014 and 2015, respectively.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman