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AFGHANISTAN

STATEMENT BY
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OSCE

18TH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL MEETING

VILNIUS/LITHUANIA

7 DECEMBER 2011

Mr. Chairman,
Mr. Secretary General Lamberto Zannier,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,

I wish to start by joining previous speakers in expressing my delegation's appreciation to the Lithuanian Chairmanship for the warm hospitality and excellent organization of this meeting and to the OSCE Secretariat for their hard work in assisting with preparations.

Mr. Chairman,

Over the past ten years, Afghanistan, with the generous assistance of the international community, has accomplished a lot and could witness manifold positive developments. However, in order to sustain further expansion and strengthening of our co-operation and to achieve our common long-term objectives, we must jointly address a vast set of challenges impeding Afghanistan's efforts to reach genuine peace, stability and socio-economic development. In order to tackle challenges inside the country as well as threats emanating from the region, we require shared resolve and reinforced collective efforts at national, regional and international levels.

Mr. Chairman,

In this respect, 2011 has been an important year for Afghanistan and its allies. As far as significant developments and events in and related to Afghanistan are concerned, I wish to highlight the process based on the understanding forged between Afghanistan and the international community at the NATO summit meetings of Heads of States and Governments held in Lisbon, Portugal, on 19 and 20 November, 2010. In due consideration of the restoration of Afghanistan's national institutions and devoting particular attention to the expansion and strengthening of the country's armed forces and security agencies, the Government of Afghanistan and its international allies, based on the Lisbon NATO summit agreement, started the gradual process of transferring security responsibility from allied to Afghan forces in July 2011, with national security forces assuming the lead in the conduct of security measures in seven areas of the country. Last week, the Government of Afghanistan announced the second phase of this gradual process, comprising a further 18 areas where Afghan security forces will take over lead responsibility.

In addition to this, on the political stage, the Government of Afghanistan, backed by both a strong mandate of the people of Afghanistan and the support of its international partners, launched a process of reconciliation and reintegration of members of the armed opposition in Afghanistan. Our efforts in this respect suffered a serious setback, following the assassination of the Chairperson of the High Peace Council of Afghanistan and former President of Afghanistan, Prof. Burhanuddin Rabbani, on 20 September 2011. But the traditional Loya Jirga or

Grand Assembly, held on 17 November 2011 in Kabul, reaffirmed once again the importance of reconciliation with and reintegration of armed opposition groups as well as the continuation of the respective process.

Mr. Chairman,

As far as regional efforts are concerned, Afghanistan's ambitions to establish enduring and irreversible peace and stability in the country are substantiated and underpinned by the country's expanded engagement with its neighboring states and other countries of the region. In this context, the agreement of the Istanbul Conference for Afghanistan, convened on 2 November 2011, constitutes a significant building block to these efforts. Let me again thank the Government of Turkey for hosting this successful conference, the first to bring together the near-neighbors of Afghanistan, as a major complementing step in our overall regional efforts. The Istanbul final document contains specific participants' commitments which will contribute to a better understanding of current challenges and threats and will serve to build confidence among the countries of the region. Participants reaffirmed their commitment to contribute to a stable and peaceful Afghanistan and to the cultural, social and economic development of the country. The participants also declared their dedication to immediate and long-term measures in fulfilling the vision as contained in the Istanbul final document.

Mr. Chairman,

Afghanistan continues its engagement with the international community through enhanced partnership and reinforced collective efforts. In this context, the most important development took place on 5 December when the Bonn International Afghanistan Conference was convened. As reflected in the conference's final document, Afghanistan and the international community reaffirmed their commitment to jointly work towards achievement of lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan and to further expand and strengthen regional co-operation with a view to enhancing confidence-building and collaboration among the countries of the region and the international community as a whole.

Mr. Chairman,

In the co-operation with the international community, Afghanistan also highly values its precious partnership with the OSCE, formed in April 2003, as well as the continued expansion and strengthening of co-operation ever since. Afghanistan shares OSCE's core values, norms, principles and commitments and the Government remains dedicated to safeguarding them, in close collaboration with the OSCE and across all three dimensions of its activities.

At an informal briefing on the OSCE engagement with Afghanistan, held at the OSCE's Conference Center in Vienna on 5 October 2011, it was reflected on lessons learned over the past eight years. Based on the Madrid Ministerial Decision no. 04/07 on the OSCE engagement with Afghanistan, the OSCE's executive structures created a first package of 16 projects for Afghanistan, with a view to enhancing capacity of Afghanistan's law enforcement agencies charged

with the country's Border Security and Management. Realizing our unique relations and the importance of the continued engagement of the OSCE with Afghanistan, and also bearing in mind the Astana Commemorative Declaration towards a Security Community, agreed upon at the OSCE Summit in December 2010, as well as recalling the pressing challenges in the country and persisting threats emanating from the region, and the participating and partner States, emphasizing the significance of long-term engagement with Afghanistan, which has evolved into a framework of multidimensional co-operation, the Chairmanship developed a perception paper defining our collaboration until 2014 and containing a second package of projects for Afghanistan covering all three dimensions of the OSCE's activities. Let me recall the two main elements of the future basis of our co-operation: 1) A comprehensive policy which includes long-term OSCE engagement with Afghanistan 2) Implementation of a second package of assistance projects covering all three dimensions of OSCE's activities.

As elaborated in the Perception paper, the time has come to adopt an enhanced conceptual and strategic approach, strengthening OSCE's engagement with Afghanistan and effectuating improved integration of OSCE's engagement with Afghanistan into long-term and strategic international assistance efforts.

My delegation seizes this opportunity to express once again its appreciation to all those participating and partner States which have financially contributed to the implementation of the projects as contained in the first package and is confident that sufficient funds will be allocated, also through the Partnership Fund, to ensure timely and full implementation of the second package, thereby translating OSCE's reaffirmed commitment toward Afghanistan into practice. My delegation also appreciates the new draft decision concerning Afghanistan, the result of extensive consultations, and stipulating OSCE's long-term commitment for a stable and peaceful Afghanistan.

Mr. Chairman,

My Government remains committed to its close co-operation with the OSCE and I wish to express once again our gratitude to the Lithuanian Chairmanship for all the assistance rendered and support facilitated in 2011, while looking forward to working closely together with the incoming Irish Chairmanship to whom I can pledge our full co-operation. Let me close by reiterating our hope for OSCE's engagement with Afghanistan remaining a priority for the organization in 2012.

Thank you