

STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR JAWED LUDIN
ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF AFGHANISTAN
AT THE 16TH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL OF THE ORGANISATION FOR
SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE, HELSINKI, FINLAND, 4-5
DECEMBER 2008

Madam Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I congratulate His Excellency Foreign Minister Alexander Stubb and the Government of the Republic of Finland for an outstanding organisation of the 16th Ministerial Council of the OSCE. I also appreciate the fact that during Finland's successful Presidency of the OSCE, the organisation opened new horizons for promoting cooperation, including with Partner countries outside the OSCE.

As an active and committed Partner for Co-operation with the OSCE, Afghanistan deeply cherishes this partnership. Last month, my Government hosted the OSCE and four of its Asian partner countries, Japan, South Korea, Thailand and Mongolia, in Kabul at the first OSCE conference on Afghanistan. We highly welcome the new impetus within the OSCE for broadening cooperation with Afghanistan, of which last month's conference in Kabul was a good example.

Ladies and gentlemen,
Afghanistan today remains a country where the enormity of the challenges we face is matched by a relentless cooperation of the international community to address those challenges. Thanks to this cooperation, and the determination of our own people, much progress towards political stability, democratisation and economic recovery has been achieved over the past seven years. Indeed, there is no aspect of life of the Afghan people where this progress is not discernible, particularly when contrasted to the dark age of the Taliban rule and the long years of violence and destruction before.

On the other hand, grave challenges remain, international terrorism being the gravest among them. The horrific terrorist attack on Mumbai in India over a week ago was yet another clear proof that terrorism has grown into a deadly menace across the whole region. It is not a coincidence that the Taj and Oberoi hotels in Mumbai fell victim to the same enemy that attacked the Marriott Hotel in Islamabad and the Serena Hotel in Kabul before them.

In the fight against terrorism today, no measure is more crucial, more compelling today than regional cooperation. Without a sincere, sustained cooperation between Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and other countries of the region, to complement the ongoing international war against terrorism, the war will not succeed. As part of President Hamid Karzai's commitment to nurturing regional diplomacy and cooperation, he has extended his fullest backing to President Asif Ali Zardari of Pakistan and his democratically elected government.

Also crucial in this regard is the role of other partner nations who can help facilitate this dialogue. I particularly recognise Turkey's efforts who is, as we speak, hosting a tripartite meeting of the Presidents of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Turkey.

Madame Chairperson,

Regional cooperation in a wider context, to also include our efforts at fighting the narcotics trade and border management is one area where Afghanistan welcomes the OSCE's assistance and cooperation. We value OSCE's contribution in this respect and call for broadening and deepening the cooperation in the framework of the Asia Contact Group.

On narcotics, I am pleased to report that over the past year we in Afghanistan have achieved a 20 percent reduction in poppy cultivation – in fact more than half of Afghanistan's provinces today are totally poppy-free. However, this success can only be sustained and expanded if accompanied by effective border control measures and fighting the vicious drug mafia that lies largely outside Afghanistan's borders.

Connected to this challenge is the important task of police reform and training. We are grateful for the cooperation we have received from the OSCE and its individual participating states towards building Afghanistan's security institutions;

notably the significant contribution of the United States to building up Afghanistan's national army and national police. Building Afghanistan's police force is one of our top priorities as we continue on the path towards self-reliance, and further cooperation from the international community, including the OSCE is highly encouraged.

In less than a year from now, we in Afghanistan will hold the second round of general elections. Needless to say that the successful conduct of these elections of vital importance to Afghanistan's stability, state-building and democratisation. While once again acknowledging the highly useful part that the OSCE played in support of our previous rounds of elections in 2004 and 2005, I call on OSCE's continued and broader support for the upcoming elections.

Madam Chairperson,
Afghanistan's security and wellbeing is inextricably linked to that of Central Asia and the wider OSCE region. A close partnership between Afghanistan and OSCE is, therefore, not just in the interest of Afghanistan, it is also a contribution to your own security. I reiterate my Government's strong commitment to our partnership with the OSCE and our desire to build this partnership further in all dimensions.

In conclude by expressing my deep appreciations to the Government and people of Finland for extending a generous hospitality to us on the occasion of this Conference. I also wish the incoming Greek Presidency every success for 2009. Thank you.