

Chairmen's Statement of the International Conference on Afghanistan

Issued Under the Authority of the Three Co-chairs

**The Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
The Foreign Minister of the Kingdom of the Netherlands
The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan**

The Hague, 31 March 2009

The Government of Afghanistan and the international community met today in The Hague at the invitation of the Government of the Netherlands. They agreed that greater energy and clear direction must urgently be provided to ensure more effective support for the people of Afghanistan, for its security and prosperity as well as for its democratic and human rights.

They acknowledged that greater attention must be given to achieving a well coordinated and strategically integrated approach. They underlined the critical importance of building on the will of the Afghan people and on the leadership of the Afghan Government in guiding strategic discussions on Afghanistan's future and its ownership in the implementation of our efforts to support and assist Afghanistan.

They emphasised the central role of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) to coordinate international action and assistance and to support the Afghan Government. The participants urged UNAMA to expand its presence into as many provinces as possible, and committed themselves to respecting UNAMA's role.

The participants underscored that important progress and achievements have been made in recent years. They agreed to expand on these achievements with clear priorities that must be set based on a strategic vision for the development of Afghanistan. The aim must be to enable the Afghan people in this next phase of its cooperation with the international community to assume greater responsibility for its security and economic development. This vision must be founded on the development of Afghanistan's human capital, its natural resources and its potential as a regional corridor for trade and energy transmission.

Building on this vision, the participants agreed to pursue the following priority goals: to promote good governance and stronger institutions; to generate economic growth; to strengthen security and to enhance regional cooperation. They pledged to provide the resources required to achieve these goals.

In particular, they emphasised that effective, well-funded civilian programmes are as necessary as additional military forces and training programmes. They agreed to expand significantly the resources and personnel devoted to civilian capacity-building programmes. They also pledged to improve aid effectiveness, in line with the June 2008 Paris Declaration.

In this context, they welcomed a new US strategic review as an important contribution to re-energizing our common efforts in Afghanistan. They agreed on its emphasis on bringing together civilian and military support in a coherent way and in a regional perspective.

The participants emphasised the importance of a determined fight against terrorism and violent extremism in Afghanistan and of eliminating sanctuaries for Al Qaeda and other terrorist networks wherever they exist. They reaffirmed their view that such networks represent a global threat.

The participants welcomed the Afghan Government's efforts to reintegrate into civilian life those Afghan fighters who distance themselves from international terrorism, respect the Constitution and lay down arms.

The Afghan Government expressed gratitude to all NATO/ISAF contributing nations for their courageous efforts to stabilise Afghanistan. It strongly commended donors for their support.

The international community emphasized its support for strengthening the Afghan National Army as well as for the Afghan National Police, which is now undergoing a comprehensive reform. It pledged to support encouraging plans for agricultural and private sector development and agreed to capitalise on the projected reduction in poppy production.

The participants welcomed the role of Afghan civil society at this Conference and underlined the importance of its involvement in the development of Afghanistan. The participants urged the World Bank and other International Financial Institutions to maintain strong support for Afghanistan.

To pursue their strategic vision for Afghanistan in an integrated and coordinated way, the participants commit themselves to the following priorities:

PROMOTING GOOD GOVERNANCE. To accelerate efforts to improve governance and strengthen institutions, they agreed to:

- Give firm support to the preparing and holding of elections that are secure, transparent, fair and credible, so as to enjoy the confidence of the Afghan people and to consolidate democracy in Afghanistan. The participants underscored the importance of the broadest possible participation of women and men.

- Strengthen Afghanistan's national, provincial and local government institutions. They will provide adequate personnel and financial resources for ambitious nationwide programmes for training and technical assistance

- Assist Afghan Government institutions in promoting transparency, increasing accountability and merit-based appointments as well as intensifying the fight against corruption at every level. They committed to strengthening an independent judiciary and the rule of law.

ACCELERATING ECONOMIC GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT. To generate economic growth, they agreed to:

- Review aid programmes and set clearer priorities based on the Afghan National Development Strategy, reduce dependency on expensive foreign contractors, and ensure equitable development gains across the country. They agreed to continue support to successful national programmes such as the National Solidarity Programme.

- Support a national strategy to expand agriculture production, improve capacity to market and process agricultural goods, and increase employment.

- Expand higher and vocational education to create jobs and meet projected requirements for skills in key sectors, such as mining, construction and engineering. They agreed to build private sector capacity to produce and trade goods domestically and internationally, and bolster micro-enterprise programmes.

- Improve irrigation and water management, transportation networks and energy utilities to underpin growth.

- Expand efforts to ensure that women are more fully integrated into assistance programmes in recognition of the need for Afghanistan to mobilize its entire population in the development of the country.

STRENGTHEN SECURITY. To reinforce the fight against terrorism, they agreed to:

- Increase rapidly the actual size and capability of the Afghan National Security Forces enabling them to gradually take the lead in fighting terrorism and provide security for the Afghan people.

- Integrate existing counter-narcotics programmes more closely into broader strategies for improved governance, economic development and stability. They will further strengthen support aimed at increasing poppy free provinces.

- Strengthen Afghanistan's border security by intensifying cooperation among Afghan National Security Forces, NATO/ISAF and regional partners, and thereby countering illegal trafficking in arms and drugs.

EXPAND REGIONAL COOPERATION. To make the fight against terrorism more effective and to better use the potential for cooperation among all countries in the region, they emphasized the need to:

- Eliminate sanctuaries for Al Qaeda and other terrorist networks in the region.

- Develop among Afghanistan, Pakistan and NATO/ISAF, operating within its current mandate, a comprehensive security strategy, consistent with the sovereignty and territorial integrity of both countries.

- Improve the security and integrity of national borders by working with governments in the region to strengthen cooperation on law enforcement, counter-narcotics efforts and customs policies.

- Set clearer and common priorities for infrastructure projects in the region and provide assistance for their implementation. In this respect, cooperate more closely on expanding and integrating regional electricity, water and transportation networks.

- Promote regional trade and improve customs and trade and transit agreements.

- Make better use of regional expertise to build capacity in key economic sectors, such as agriculture and education.

- Support the Friends of Democratic Pakistan and the Pakistan Donors Conference Meeting in Tokyo on 17 April to demonstrate strong support for Pakistan, whose partnership is also critical to achieving our common goals in Afghanistan.

- Welcome the increased attention given to Afghanistan and the regional context as exemplified by conferences in Tehran, Moscow, The Hague, Islamabad and Trieste as important steps in enhancing development and in fighting terrorism, drug trafficking and transboundary organised crime.

The participants reaffirmed their commitment to a strong, long-term and mutual partnership, based on Afghan leadership. They reaffirmed their determination to fulfil the vision of a democratic, peaceful, pluralistic and prosperous state based on the Afghan Constitution and the principles of Islam, as set out in the Bonn Agreement of 2001, in the Afghanistan Compact of 2006 and in the Paris Declaration of 2008.