

SPEECH BY EAM IN KABUL CONFERENCE ON 20TH JULY 2010

Hon'ble Co-Chairman,

I am privileged to address this august gathering, assembled today at a crucial stage of Afghanistan's contemporary history to demonstrate solidarity with the Government of Afghanistan for its long-term stability and reconstruction. We congratulate the Government of Afghanistan in holding this first-ever International Conference on Afghanistan in Kabul since 2001 with grace and efficiency.

India and Afghanistan are historic friends. Our two countries enjoy a relationship based on history, civilization, trade and cultural exchanges and shared values and interests stretching back thousands of years. India is committed to the unity, integrity and independence of Afghanistan underpinned by democracy and cohesive pluralism and free from external interference. India has contributed to these goals through our Development Partnership which is implemented entirely in accordance with the priorities of the Afghan Government and people. Our Assistance programmes are spread all over Afghanistan and cover all sectors of development: humanitarian, infrastructural, institution and capacity building, small-scale quick gestation projects, and agriculture. The ultimate aim of our assistance is to strengthen the capacity of the Afghan state and people to stand on their own feet in the areas of governance and services for the Afghan people. This Conference, with Afghan Government's determination to take full responsibility for Afghanistan's own development, security and governance, and the international community's willingness to realign international assistance in accordance with Afghan priorities and action plans, is a big step in that direction.

Afghanistan's stability and economic development depend a lot on its neighbours and the region as a whole. Afghanistan's greatest economic potential perhaps resides in its immense potential as a trade, transport and energy hub, and as a bridge linking Central, West, South Asia and the Gulf. Its prosperity also depends on the consumer market of nearly 1.5 billion people in the South-Asian sub-continent. The recent reports of Afghanistan's great mineral wealth also open up possibilities for mining and investment. But for Afghanistan to realize its full potential in these areas, Afghanistan's neighbours need to come together to forge greater regional cooperation and facilitate trade and transit. Growing economic inter-dependence will also help in weaning disaffected youth away from insurgency and militancy and in creating a zone of co-prosperity in the region. We support the wishes of the Government of Afghanistan to take the lead in this direction.

India also supports Afghanistan's efforts towards peace and reintegration. But, for such an effort to succeed, it must be fully Afghan-led and Afghan-owned and carry all sections of Afghanistan's population together as well as abide by the redlines agreed to at the London Conference, i.e., giving up violence, cutting off all links with terrorism - whether jihadi or state-sponsored - and accepting the democratic and pluralistic values of the Afghan Constitution, including women's rights. The international community must learn lessons from past experiences at negotiating with fundamentalist and extremist organizations and ensure that any peace process is conducted in an inclusive and transparent manner. Adequate capacity of the Afghan security forces and other Afghan institutions is a sine qua non for protecting Afghanistan's sovereignty, plurality and democracy. Gains of the last nine years stand to be squandered if this aspect does not receive the attention that it deserves as the international community ponders its next steps regarding Afghanistan. The international community should also ensure that there is no selectivity in dealing with terrorism. Terrorism cannot be compartmentalised. As President Karzai said today, it is the vicious common enemy we face. Today, one cannot distinguish between Al Qaeda and plethora of terrorist organisations which have imbibed

the goals and techniques of Al Qaeda. It is, therefore, essential to ensure that support, sustenance and sanctuaries for terrorist organisations from outside Afghanistan are ended forthwith.

Hon'ble Co-Chairman,

The determination exhibited by the Afghan Government to take charge of its own destiny and future for Afghan ownership and leadership and the solidarity demonstrated by the international community in supporting this process politically, economically and in the sphere of security, augurs well for the future. My country reiterates its commitment to stability, development and prosperity of the Afghan people and looks forward to working together closely with the Government of Afghanistan and the international community in realising these objectives.

Thank you, Mr. Co-Chairman for your patient hearing.

Kabul
July 20, 2010