

Check Against Delivery



Statement By

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**High-level plenary meeting devoted to the midterm review
of the Almaty Programme of Action**

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H.E. President of the General Assembly
Honorable Ministers
Ladies and Gentlemen

I am pleased to address the High level Meeting of the General Assembly devoted to the Mid-Term Review of the Almaty Programme of Action. I would like to convey my thanks to H.E. Mr. Miguel d' Escoto Brockmann, President of the General Assembly for his efforts to ensure the continuing support of the international community to the land locked countries, commend H.E. Secretary General Mr. Ban Ki- moon for his strong leadership and focus towards implementation of the Programme and express my appreciation to the High Representative Cheick Diarra and his office for the excellent preparatory work for this meeting.

Since the adoption of the Programme of Action five years ago, many landlocked and transit countries, with the help of their development partners, have achieved certain progress towards realizations of this document. However, due to variety of impediment facing the landlocked countries, many of them, including Afghanistan, have not yet been able to fully use trade as an effective instrument to achieve their development goals.

Among the many areas of progress in Afghanistan, the Government of Afghanistan has:

1 – Expanded the role of private sector to invest in the transport and transit infrastructure. We have established the Afghan National Trade and Transit Facilitation Committee. In this Committee, public and private representatives deliberate on major trade, transit and transport policies and procedures and together decide on relevant courses of action.

2 – Simplified and standardized the documents and forms used at border transactions.

3 - Taken steps towards modernization of border crossing by applying automation, purchasing of modern equipment and construction of new facilities.

4 - Conducted surveys in 2007 and 2008 with the assistance of UNCTAD to identify transit challenges at the borders in cross-border control zones and adopted procedures to address them.

5 - Begun negotiation with neighboring countries to address the shared challenges which increase the cost of goods and services to the detriment of traders and consumers. As a result, we resolved our long-standing problem of transit/trans-shipment of Afghan fresh products through Wagah border to India, with Pakistan.

In the Almaty priority area of infrastructure development and maintenance, Afghanistan is:

- 1. Building new roads.** During the past seven years, Afghanistan repaired and or built nearly 7,000 kilometers of existing and new roads, including the ring road and secondary roads. By 2010 we hope to complete the national ring road and connect them to our neighbors in the North, South, West and East.

- 2. Building new railroads.** As part of Copper Mine Contract with a Chinese Consortium, a railway system that connects Central Asia to South Asia through Afghanistan is planned. Afghanistan is also working on joining the Trans Asia Railway. In addition, the 7th Ministerial Meeting on Transport and Communication of the ECO confirms that the Istanbul- Tehran- Islam Abad railway will pass through Afghanistan.
- 3. Improving our air infrastructure.** In the last few years, three private passenger and two Afghan air cargo companies have begun operation in Afghanistan. We have also just completed the construction of Kabul New International Terminal and the upgrading of its runway. We are also renovating and upgrading seven airports in other parts of the country.
- 4. Improving Communications.** Communications are repeatedly referred to as one of the big success stories of Afghanistan. In 2002, there were an estimated 38,000 landlines. Today, there are almost 6,000,000 phone subscribers in the country, which includes 4 providers and an investment of nearly \$1 billion dollars. By the end of 2009 we will complete the national fiber optic line and connect it to two neighboring countries. The improvement in communication services will allow better tracking information of import and transit cargo and connectivity to the region and the world. .
- 5. Constructing pipelines and Transfer of Electric Energy.** The agreement of transfer of natural gas from Turkmenistan to Pakistan and India through Afghanistan has been finalized. In addition, last month, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Afghanistan and Pakistan agreed to establish the secretariat of CASA 1000 project in Kabul to expedite the transfer of over 1300 MW electric energy from the two Central Asian countries to Afghanistan and Pakistan.

In the Almaty priority area of monitoring and follow-up on agreements, Afghanistan is: rejoining conventions such as the TIR Customs Convention to meet standards and accomplish reform of transit and freight sectors, as well as following up with Afghanistan's membership in FIATA (International Federation of Freight Forwarders Associations).

Despite these areas of progress, Afghanistan has been facing many challenges in meeting Almaty Programme objectives, notably with the international and regional community much needed support. First, while we appreciate the financial support of the international community towards improving our transport and transit infrastructure, a significant portion of the donor pledges has not yet been delivered. Much of this aid is also delivered without full regard of the goals of the Afghan government and the Almaty

Programme. We therefore urge the international community to increase their assistance to Afghanistan in the following Almaty priority areas:

- to help extend OUR roads to complete the “missing links” regional network
- to further upgrade OUR roads and improve its maintenance capabilities
- To improve our existing ports and establish new dry ports, to build railway system and modernize our airports.

These priority areas will enable Afghanistan to meet London Compact benchmarks and achieve the goals set-forth by the Afghanistan National Development Strategy.

Second, Afghanistan has concluded a significant number of bilateral and tri-lateral agreements with most of our neighbors since 2002. Afghanistan has joined most of the major regional organizations and will continue to work towards meeting the Almaty Program objectives on regional cooperation. Unfortunately, only a few of these treaties have been implemented due to lack of political confidence among countries in the region and / or lack of capacity and infrastructure. In short, we have yet to reap the benefit of these agreements.

To move forward, Afghanistan recommends renewed attention on international and regional partnerships. The Almaty Programme can only be implemented through these partnerships; this spirit is clearly stated in the Declaration. The Almaty Programme calls upon both bilateral and multilateral donors to increase finance and technical assistance to landlocked developing countries particularly those emerging from conflicts. It also contains comprehensive directions for donors and international community to assist the landlocked and transit countries. Moreover, the Programme encourages developing and developed countries to enhance cooperation on the basis of mutual interest. Any improvement in trade with Afghanistan promises great benefits to partnering countries as well.

Mr. Chairman, regional economic cooperation is becoming an integral part of globalization strategies of almost all neighboring countries of Afghanistan. As a result, Afghanistan now has a unique opportunity to realize its potential as a “land bridge” country between Central Asia, South Asia and the West Asian region. We are aware of our responsibilities to work with our neighbors towards policies and institutional mechanisms to translate this potential into concrete regional projects. But, we would like to encourage others to work with us with similar pace and the same spirit.

Mr. Chairman,

My delegation carefully reviewed the Draft Outcome Document for the Midterm Review of the Almaty Programme of Action. This document contains important recommendations and strongly appeals to the international community and donors to increase their level of support, particularly Official Development Assistance (ODA), to the landlocked and transit developing countries. It encourages the landlocked and developing transit countries to take a proactive approach towards bilateral and multilateral cooperation. If the recommendations remain only as words and on paper, we

might not witness a qualitative change. But, if undertaken in an honest, serious, effective and constructive manner, these recommendations can improve the nature of trade and transit and fully realize the objectives of the Almaty Programme of Action.

Thank you for your attention.