



ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF AFGHANISTAN

STATEMENT BY

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Check Against Delivery

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Mr. President, Mr. Secretary General, Honorable Heads of State and Government, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Nelson Mandela once described his country's transition to democracy as a long journey to freedom comprised of many milestones, each realizing new opportunities for him and his nation. We, the Afghan people, started our journey to stability and democracy almost three years ago. I am delighted to report to you that eighteen days from today, our people will go to the polls for the first time to elect their President, marking the most significant milestone in our journey.

Mr. President,

As the presidential elections will mark the end of the transitional period set forth in the historic Bonn Agreement, allow me to outline some of Afghanistan's achievements over the past three years, and discuss our challenges.

Much has changed in my country, but there is no change that is more visible than the confidence of the Afghan people in the future of our country. We have seen this confidence in the return of over three and a half million refugees who are now rebuilding their lives. We have seen this confidence in the enthusiasm of families who are sending their boys and girls to school, rebuilding their homes and setting up their businesses. And we have seen this confidence in the enthusiasm of ten and a half million Afghans who have registered to vote in the upcoming elections.

Mr. President,

Earlier this year, the Constitutional Loya Jirga adopted an enlightened Constitution, establishing a democratic Islamic republic. It guarantees equal rights and equal protection for every citizen – men and women. The vision of the Constitutional Loya Jirga is becoming a reality. About forty-two percent of the registered voters are women, and women will make up at least twenty five percent of our future parliament. Our Constitution also guarantees freedom of speech and the freedom of the press.

During the past year, we enacted the election law, established the necessary mechanism to organize and manage elections, completed voter registration and are now preparing to hold presidential and parliamentary elections. Thanks to the cooperation of our two brotherly neighbors, Pakistan and Iran, hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugees who still live in those countries will also participate in the election.

In partnership with the international community, we have intensified our efforts to rebuild our national security institutions. Today, there are fifteen thousand national army soldiers and nearly thirty thousand national police officers providing security to our

citizens. We are grateful to the thousands of International Security Assistance Forces and Coalition troops that are assisting our security forces.

We have also taken steps towards disarming, demobilizing and reintegrating private militias. Nearly all of the heavy weapons have been collected from the city of Kabul, and thousands of former combatants have been disarmed in various parts of the country.

We have continued the reconstruction of our country. At the Berlin Conference earlier this *year*, the international community renewed its commitment to rebuilding Afghanistan. The generous pledges that we received in Berlin will be committed to national reconstruction and development programs that will create economic opportunities for our citizens and further promote economic growth throughout the region. Eradicating poverty and meeting the education and health needs of our citizens will continue to remain among our top priorities. We will continue to focus on building our roads to reestablish Afghanistan as the land bridge for trans-continental trade. Upon completion of Afghanistan's ring road, every major Central Asian capital will be less than 32 hours from the Persian Gulf and the port of Karachi.

Mr. President,

While our achievements are significant, we continue to face challenges. Terrorism remains one of our main challenges. The remnants of terrorism continue to attack our citizens and threaten our security. As long as terrorism continues to exist in our region, neither Afghanistan, nor our neighbors, nor indeed the rest of the world can be safe. Eliminating the remnants of terrorism in Afghanistan and in the region requires not only continued support from the international community, but also strong and sincere commitment from other countries in the region. To stop the movement of terrorists across borders, the countries in the region must cooperate closely.

The cultivation and trafficking of narcotics is another major challenge to Afghanistan and the world. Drug profits finance terrorism and undermine our efforts to build a healthy and legitimate economy. Afghanistan is fully committed to eliminating this menace. However, we cannot succeed without the strong partnership of the international community.

Poverty continues to remain another serious challenge. Even though we have made considerable progress over the past three years, we are still one of the poorest countries. We still have the second highest infant and maternal mortality rates in the world. We have one of the highest illiteracy rates. Very few Afghans have access to safe drinking water and only six percent of the Afghans have reliable access to electricity.

Mr. President,

Our achievements have not come without a cost. During the elections for the Constitutional Loya Jirga, terrorists did everything to disrupt the process, including bombing an elementary school and killing over twenty children. During the registration

for the elections, terrorists showed their desperation by intensifying their attacks. They bombed vehicles carrying women registration workers, killed civilians who carried registration cards, and bombed religious schools killing children. These attacks have not stopped our people from crossing one milestone after another.

The valuable role of the international community has been crucial to our success. Nations from different continents with different cultures and religions have come together to help rebuild Afghanistan. This is a clear example of cooperation of civilizations. On behalf of the Afghan people, I thank all the nations that have supported us with their troops and resources, especially the United States of America, Japan, Germany, the United Kingdom and Canada. We are most grateful to the United Nations for the commitment and engagement of the UN agencies and employees during the past three years.

Mr. President,

Afghanistan is on the road to recovery from the devastations of more than two decades of war. Much has been accomplished in the past three years. Yet, establishing a stable, democratic and prosperous Afghanistan requires sustained and collaborative efforts by the Afghans, our neighbors and the international community. We, the Afghan people, will do our share. Working together for a stable and prosperous Afghanistan is not only a good example of successful international cooperation, but will also contribute to regional prosperity and global security.

Thank you.