

Statement By

His Excellency Hamid Karzai
President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Madam President,

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Every year, our gathering under this roof is homage to the foresight of our predecessors who, by founding the United Nations, envisioned the unity of nations. Today, this assembly embodies that vision: the vision of our interdependence as members of a single community of nations.

This vision has a strong resonance in Afghanistan, where both our past troubles as well as our recent accomplishments are, in large part, related to the outside world.

When I last addressed this assembly in 2004, I spoke to you about the tremendous progress that Afghanistan had achieved since 2001. Today, that story of success continues.

Over the past two years, we have taken further significant steps forward, meeting all the milestones in Afghanistan's post-war transition.

Millions of Afghans have participated in two general elections, one for the president and another for the parliament. With the inauguration of our National Assembly last year, all three independent branches of a democratic state were completed. We have continued to build schools and clinics and create opportunities for employment to our people. Our trade with the region and beyond is growing very rapidly; industrial activity is gradually taking root. As a result, Afghanistan's income per capita has doubled since 2002.

At the London Conference earlier this year, our government presented Afghanistan's National Development Strategy for the next five years which was endorsed by the international community. Afghanistan and our international partners also entered into a compact, the Afghanistan Compact, which provides the framework for continued international cooperation in Afghanistan.

Under the Compact, we Afghans committed to continue to work towards a stable and prosperous Afghanistan, with good governance and human rights protection for all under the rule of law. In return, the international community pledged continued and long-term political, military and financial assistance.

Madam President,

Regrettably, it is not all positive news that I have to share today. Over the past year, our efforts to build Afghanistan into a stable, prosperous and democratic polity have also encountered setbacks. We have seen terrorism rebounding as terrorists have infiltrated our borders to step up their murderous campaign against our people.

Terrorism sees, in the prosperity of the Afghan people, its ultimate defeat. That is why our schools and clinics get burned down, and our ulema, our teachers and our doctors get killed. That is why, today, 200,000 of our students, who went to school two years ago, are no longer able to do so.

It is also sobering to know that polio, the children's disease, increased from 4 cases in 2005 to 27 cases this year. All of these cases have occurred in some Southern areas of Afghanistan, where terrorists are preventing children from access to vaccination and healthcare.

Terrorists are prepared to cross any boundaries, and commit horrific acts of violence to try to derail Afghanistan from its path to success; they want the international community to fail in its collective endeavour to help Afghanistan rebuild. That is why they decapitate elderly women, blow up mosques full of worshipers, and kill school-going children in indiscriminate bombings of civilian areas. And that is why they are killing international soldiers and civilians who have to come to help the Afghan people; like the four Canadian soldiers who were killed four days ago while distributing notebooks and candies to children in a village in Kandahar, or the Turkish engineer who was building roads in Helmand.

Clearly, unless we confront them more decisively, terrorists will continue to take lives and to inflict greater damage.

To be sure, Madam President, terrorism does not emanate from within Afghanistan; Afghanistan is its worst victim! Military action in Afghanistan alone, therefore, will not deliver our shared goal of eliminating terrorism. We must look beyond Afghanistan to the sources of terrorism. We must destroy terrorist sanctuaries beyond Afghanistan, dismantle the elaborate networks in the region that recruit, indoctrinate, train, finance, arm and deploy terrorists. We must ensure that political currents and entities in the region are not allowed to use extremism as an instrument of policy.

Madam President,

Fighting terrorism effectively is also tied to our fighting against narcotics. The menace of narcotics feeds terrorism and threatens the foundation of legitimate economic development in Afghanistan.

A combination of factors, mainly lack of a conducive security environment for our counter-narcotics effort, absence of a comprehensive alternative livelihoods programme, and clandestine credit flows to poppy farmers, are behind the narcotics trade.

Afghanistan is committed to fighting narcotics, alongside terrorism, with strength and determination and through a combination of law enforcement and economic measures. We expect that the international community will continue to support us in this fight by enabling us to provide meaningful alternative livelihoods to our farmers.

Madam President,

In the context of the United Nations role in enhancing global security, we endorse recommendations of the Secretary General for a comprehensive counter-terrorism strategy, and welcome the recent adoption of the strategy by the General Assembly.

We also express our support to the proposal for convening a high-level conference on international terrorism, with a view to concluding the draft comprehensive convention on international terrorism at the earliest possible opportunity. Afghanistan also attaches great importance to the various initiatives undertaken to promote understanding and cooperation among civilisations. Afghanistan stands ready to contribute to further enriching these initiatives with our knowledge and experience of international cooperation and interdependence.

Meanwhile, we remain deeply concerned at the increased incidents of Islamophobia in the West. This trend does not bode well for the cause of building understanding and cooperation across civilisations. As a Muslim nation, Afghanistan is committed not only to safeguarding the interest of our Holy Faith, but also to building bridges of understanding and friendship among followers of all faiths.

The situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine, remains a source of great concern to all of us.

Afghanistan strongly supports the full realisation of the rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to sovereignty and an independent state of Palestine living side by side in peace and co-existence with the State of Israel.

To conclude, ladies and gentlemen, may I thank Secretary General Annan for his exemplary leadership in serving the cause of global security and prosperity. I thank him especially for his interest and commitment to Afghanistan, and for his contribution to making our world a more secure place.

And I wish to thank you, members of the international community, for your steadfast and generous support to Afghanistan over the past five years. In particular, I convey the gratitude of the Afghan people for the sacrifices that the men and women in uniform, from around forty countries around the world, have made in the fight against terrorism in Afghanistan.

We will honour those sacrifices by remaining true to our vision of building a secure, democratic and prosperous Afghanistan that will contribute to the progress of our region and security of the world at large.

Thank you.