

Statement By

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Stability and Statebuilding: Cooperation with the International Community

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بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

Distinguished audience,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Good afternoon! Thank you very much for your welcome. I am really pleased to be here. As I reach near the end of the official part of my visit to Finland, I have a deep feeling of gratitude for the extremely generous hospitality extended to me and my delegation during this visit. It has been a delightful experience to come to your beautiful country for the first time, and I definitely wish to return to see more of it – perhaps if not as a Foreign Minister next time, then certainly as a normal visitor.

Before moving to other discussions, may I briefly say that my purpose of visiting Finland is foremost to thank the people of Finland, on behalf of my own people, for your commitment and solidarity with Afghanistan at a most critical period of our history.

We are grateful for your military contribution, the service of your young men and women, and for your assistance in the development sector.

My visit is also intended to be an important step in further expanding and deepening bilateral relations between our two countries. We in Afghanistan have a great deal to learn and benefit from relations with Finland and, if you agree, we would like to take the existing bilateral ties to a higher level.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Just over six years ago, Afghanistan was a totally devastated country. We had experienced the Soviet invasion and foreign interference from countries of the region. We were ruled by the Taliban, an extremist movement created by some regional players and associated with global terrorist networks such as Al Qaida. Almost one third of our population was either refugees outside our borders or displaced internally.

Our people were denied even the most basic human rights including education and health. Our suffering continued un-noticed, as the world was not interested in Afghanistan, ignoring in the meantime the threat of international terrorism emanating from our region.

Then came the horrible attacks of 11 September 2001, and the world realised that it had been a mistake to leave a country so vulnerable at the hands of extremism and regional interference. The United States of America and many other countries from the international community came to Afghanistan not only to fight the forces of international terrorism but also to help rebuild Afghanistan's state, society and economy. To defeat terrorism, it was not just enough to fight a war, but also to ensure that terrorists can never again exploit our hardships, and the absence of a strong state, to establish their safe havens.

Six and half years later, what we in Afghanistan have achieved together with our friends from the international community is simply historical.

We have established a democratic political process which provides a framework for genuine political participation for our people. Our new constitution is a model of progressive law-making in our part of the world. The democratically elected government and parliament we have today are the first of their kind in our history.

On the other hand, today, more Afghans enjoy access to health and education than ever before in our history. We have cut child mortality rate, one of the highest in the world only two years ago, by 25.7 percent. Over five million of our refugees have returned home; we have implemented more development projects during the past six years than the previous three decades put together.

These are just a few examples of the progress Afghanistan has achieved in six short years. I believe, at a time when negative and pessimistic perceptions about the progress in Afghanistan are so widespread, and the

media is focusing on finding negative stories to tell, it is important to remind ourselves of the remarkable achievements we together have had. Ladies and gentlemen,

Despite our successes, many significant challenges remain. On the security front, despite our initial victory over the Taliban and Al Qaida, our continued military efforts in the fight against terrorism, and our investment in rebuilding Afghanistan's national army and national police, have not yet produced the assured security and stability that we desire. Terrorists still enjoy sanctuaries and extensive support from networks and entities beyond our borders. They are still able to come and kill our innocent people on a daily basis. They are attacking our schools, mosques and hospitals. They seemed determined to prevent Afghanistan from achieving stability, democracy and prosperity.

On the political and governance side too, Afghanistan has a very long way to go before our institutions take root, before our democratic gains become irreversible and before our people can finally enjoy their full rights and freedoms.

The weakness of our institutions is still frequently responsible for abuse of our people's rights, a hindrance to our capacity to deliver services.

And finally on the development side, our progress is, at best, mixed and fragile. Today, Afghanistan remains among the poorest countries of the world. The narcotics industry is a serious threat to the growth of our legitimate economy.

Addressing these and other challenges that remain is going to take more time and much more effort: from military action in the fight against terrorism to the promotion of democratization and governance, to addressing the various social root causes of terrorism such as poverty and political alienation. Our work must continue on all these fronts.

On the military side, the war on terror in Afghanistan and the wider region must continue. The presence of international military forces in Afghanistan remains a crucial necessity for fighting terrorism and ensuring the longterm stability of Afghanistan.

The continued presence of international military forces is required until such a time when our own institutions, our army and our police forces, are strong enough to take responsibility for fending off terrorist spoilers and enforcing the rule of law on their own.

Make no mistake, ladies and gentlemen: terrorism was not born in Afghanistan. Therefore, it cannot be eliminated if our focus remains limited to Afghanistan. In fact, much of the elaborate terror infrastructure, including their networks, are situated outside our borders. Over the past six months, we have seen a relative reduction in the number of terrorist attacks in Afghanistan, but this is mainly because terrorist activities in Pakistan, across our eastern and southern border, have increased considerably. Pakistan is as much vulnerable to, and affected by, terrorism as is Afghanistan. A strong and sustained cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan is vital for success in the war against terrorism. In this context, the success of recent elections in Pakistan is a promising prospect for even stronger and broader cooperation.

There must also be no doubt in our minds that it is not just Afghanistan or its surrounding region that are threatened by terrorism. Threats such as terrorism can never be contained within boundaries. The ultimate goal of terrorism is to reach you here in Europe and attack the foundations of your stability, your democracy and your progress. Therefore, if you don't fight this scourge in Afghanistan, sooner or later you will have to fight it at your doorsteps!

On the other hand, Afghanistan's plight is not just about insecurity and terrorism, and military action is, therefore, not a sufficient solution. Only a fully democratic, irreversibly stable and economically prosperous Afghanistan can withstand the forces of terrorism in the future. Therefore, economic development, the empowerment of poor

communities, uprooting the narcotics economy, reducing poverty and disease and restoring the Afghan people to their basic rights must make the corner-stone of the international community's assistance strategy for Afghanistan.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today in Afghanistan, there is a unique opportunity for the international community to prevail over the forces of terrorism by denying them a space to exist, and by helping us build a stable, moderate and democratic state. The opportunity is also there for the international community to help build and strengthen one of the youngest democracies of the world. We in Afghanistan have a vision: we want our country to be, once again, a land-bridge, connecting South Asia to Central Asia and the Middle East in commerce and shared prosperity. As a devoutly Muslim society that aspires to democracy and progress alongside the rest of the world, Afghanistan can also become a cultural-bridge in a divided world. Afghanistan can prove the concept of a clash between cultures and civilisations wrong by suggesting cooperation and the fulfilment of international responsibility as the alternative way forward. We in Afghanistan have the vision, but to succeed in achieving our vision, we need your continued engagement and support.

In this context, I am pleased to acknowledge that Finland, alongside your fellow Nordic countries, has had an extremely valuable contribution to make to both the military and development efforts in Afghanistan. The continuation of these contributions is vitally important. This is particularly so in the development sphere because, when it comes to effectiveness of development aid, the Nordic countries have set an example that can, and must, be replicated.

Also in this context, it is part of my purpose of visiting the Nordic region to explore the possibility of getting our Nordic partners even closer together in a more organised effort, alongside the Afghan government and other partners from around the world, to lead the development

agenda in Afghanistan. Given what is at stake in Afghanistan, the future of an entire nation as well as the security of the whole world, this cause is worth any contribution you are able to make.

Ladies and gentlemen,

My country, Afghanistan, is at a critical cross-roads today. We have come a significant distance, but the way forward is long and hard. From where we stand, the choices we make, the direction we take, and the extent to which we succeed in achieving our aspirations, all these will have important implications for you here in Finland and for the world at large.

I take heart in the fact that, over the past six years, we have together achieved important results in Afghanistan. The key is to continue along the course we have taken. To do otherwise, would be to take the wrong turning at this critical cross-roads.

I thank you for your attention.