

Chairman Salahuddin Rabbani's Speech in the 60th Pugwash
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Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my distinct pleasure to be with you today to discuss prospects for the future of Afghanistan. Before I begin, I wish to express my deep gratitude to Pugwash Conferences on Science and World affairs, the Secretary General Prof. Paola Cotta Ramsuina, and the honourable host country for providing us with this opportunity to talk about Afghanistan beyond 2014.

Before explaining on what lies ahead for us in 2014, let me start by briefly mentioning the progress Afghanistan has made since 2001, when the blueprint for a new system of governance based on democratic principles was formed.

Afghanistan has achieved a great deal over the past 12 years especially in the areas of economic and infrastructure development, and public service provision.

Afghan security forces are becoming formidable in the face of militant attacks, providing protection to civilians. Government tax

revenue exceeded \$1 billion for the first time in 2011 (however much of the country's GDP comes from NATO aid).

More than 2,500 km of roads have been laid. Over two-thirds of all Afghans now have access to electricity, up from just 6% in 2002. Many new schools have now been built and nearly 9 million children go to school, 37% of them are girls.

Women now play a very active and visible role as civil society leaders, their inclusion and participation in the political process in the country has increased during this time. As an example, women now hold key positions in the Government including holding 28% of the seats in parliament.

The registration for the 2014 Presidential elections is now complete. We now have several candidates including women who have registered for the elections.

Ladies and Gentleman,

For a country that has been at war and internal strife for three decades, these are remarkable achievements, which would require sustained effort, patience and resilience to maintain and advance them further.

As we continue to strengthen our nation and peace building efforts inside Afghanistan, our outreach in the region and partnerships with our international allies will be crucial to protect the progress made over the past decade.

The positive outcomes in Afghanistan I just listed highlight the fact that partnerships forged after 2001, will strengthen the prospects for peace and further development beyond 2014 with multiple transitions taking place on security, governance and economic development fronts.

The transition of security responsibilities from international forces to Afghan Security Forces will be completed by 2014. The Afghan National Army is now a credible force against increasingly unpopular militant groups, ANA has the capacity to provide protection for, and ensure the security of Afghan citizens throughout the country.

I take this opportunity to thank all the international partners of Afghanistan for their instrumental role in building the capacity of our national army and national police.

Here I would like to point out that, to continue the forward momentum of the Afghan Security Forces' success, and guarantee Afghanistan is able to maintain order and continuity, the Presence and Support, of a sizeable number of NATO personnel in an advisory role, providing training and technical assistance as well as counter terrorism support will be necessary beyond 2014.

Another important transition scheduled for 2014 is the democratic transfer of power through elections from one administration to another, which will further strengthen our political achievements and build upon experiences learned over the past 12 years.

The elections and the peaceful and successful transfer of power will open a new chapter in the political history of Afghanistan. It will be an opportunity to demonstrate the maturity of the Afghan political system.

In the wake of NATO's troop withdrawal and upcoming elections, Afghanistan will also undergo an economic transition. To sustain the economy during and after the transition, in addition to the international support, Afghanistan also needs a security and political situation conducive for private sector and international investments to take hold and grow.

A key component for this economic growth will be close regional cooperation, particularly given Afghanistan's strategic location as a land bridge connecting Russia, China, and Central Asia to South Asia and the Middle East.

The "Heart of Asia process" that began here in Istanbul two years ago is an important step in bringing countries in the region closer; while the process has had a slow start; it nevertheless is an important initiative that can contribute towards securing a stable and prosperous future for Afghanistan and the region as a whole.

Long-term international commitment and support will pave the way for Afghanistan to move through these transitions smoothly and allow Afghan to become increasingly self-reliant.

Therefore, to achieve this objective, it will be important for all the international partners of Afghanistan to pay equal attention to all of them.

In light of these developments, the Afghan peace process is particularly important and serves not only as a "signalling mechanism" that Afghanistan is transitioning into a different phase in its history, but also working to create a more inclusive and just society to help three transitions achieves their objectives..

The mandate for the peace process is in support of these important goals;

1. to end the conflict through outreach, contact and negotiation,
2. to strengthen intra-Afghan cohesion at political and societal levels,
3. And to promote regional cooperation,

The notion of bringing peace through negotiations has gained substantial support inside the country. A peace process is more likely to lead to success, legitimacy and sustainability, if it is inclusive with wider participation of all the stakeholders.

We have reached out to all civic, political and religious forces to build national consensus and ensure the inclusivity of the process.

To date, our engagements with these forces have generated a momentum, and we want to build on this momentum to achieve our ultimate goal of sustainable peace and stability.

Cognizant of the important role Ulama play in our society, in addition to working with the Afghan Ulamas, we have started outreach with religious scholars and Ulamas of the Muslim world.

Recently, we held a very successful Ulama Conference in Kabul, in which prominent Ulamas from many Muslim countries took part and committed their unequivocal support for the Afghan peace process.

Afghan Peace and Reintegration Program, the APRP, is an integral part of the peace process, which aims to provide an opportunity to live peacefully and engage in the political process, to those who are ready to lay down their arms, accept the Afghan Constitution, and sever ties with terrorist organizations.

The peaceful assimilation of these former fighters into communities has led to significant improvements in security situation in certain areas of Afghanistan.

Negotiations continue with many additional combatants, who are considering joining the process.

We have also made much progress in our efforts to clear the way for peace talks. We have addressed almost all of the issues hindering the start of the direct peace talks.

Close multi-lateral collaboration has been established with the United Nations to ensure that Taliban representatives who take part in peace talks, are able to safely travel to any agreed upon third countries.

Our efforts to transform armed opposition forces into peaceful political movements have generated results. Some members of the Taliban, who have been delisted as a result of HPC's efforts, have become more politically active.

The most important step, which we look forward to, is the start of actual direct talks. As we work toward establishing direct talks, we need not only the support of our international partners, but regional ones as well; particularly the support of Pakistan is crucial for the success of the process.

We are hopeful that the election of the new Pakistani government led by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif will lead to substantial progress in the peace process.

The release of Mullah Baradar is a positive step taken by the new Pakistani Government, I hope the delegation of HPC will soon get access to meet him and use his role in the support of the peace process.

We also welcome the recent visit that was made by Mawlana Fazlul Rahman, leader of Jamat-e-Ulema Islam, and hope this visit will be a step forward towards substantial collaboration between the Ulamas of Afghanistan and Pakistan, who can play a very important role in addressing the current violence that takes the lives of many innocent people everyday in both countries.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The past decade in Afghanistan has been marked by great promise, but we still have some very difficult challenges to overcome. While these challenges will require continued and sustained regional and international support and commitment, Afghanistan is ready and willing to take the lead, in shaping its future and is on a trajectory toward self-reliance in the coming years.

2014 with its multiple transitions will be a big test for Afghanistan. These transitions are crucial and their success in providing civilians with: protection from terrorist attacks, rule of law through the democratic election of a new elected government, and the opportunity for greater economic advancement through sustainable development and cooperation, will bolster public trust

in Afghan institutions and leadership, further strengthening the space for peace.

The Afghan peace process, under the leadership of the High Peace Council, serves as a channel to integrate these transitions, given that it aims not only to engage with the armed opposition, but also to strengthen nation-building efforts, and build relationships with neighbouring countries in the region and beyond.

Let me conclude by saying that the overarching aim of the peace process is to: strengthen peace, security, and rule of law, and enable further opportunities for economic and political development.

However, our top priorities until the Presidential and Provincial Council Elections will be to work throughout Afghanistan to provide a better environment for the elections to take place.

We will continue our dialogue with the armed opposition, and encourage the pro-peace members such as Mr. Motassim Agha Jan to take a lead role in facilitating direct negotiations with the Taliban leadership.

As we see positive signs in support of the peace process coming from the new Pakistani administration, we remain hopeful of progress in our efforts to start direct negotiations with the Taliban.

We will use every opportunity that brings us closer to a sustainable peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Thank you