

Istanbul Process: A New Agenda for Regional Cooperation in the 'Heart of Asia', 'HEART OF ASIA' MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE - KABUL 14 June 2012 Conference Declaration

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'HEART OF ASIA' MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE - KABUL

14 June 2012

Conference Declaration

1. The 'Heart of Asia' Ministerial Conference – Kabul was convened on 14 June 2012 in Kabul, Afghanistan, as the first follow-up ministerial meeting of the Istanbul Process. The Conference was inaugurated by His Excellency Mr. Hamid Karzai, President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, and co-chaired by His Excellency Dr. Zalmay Rassoul, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, and His Excellency Mr Ahmet Davutoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey.

2. The conference was attended by 14 ministerial and high-level delegations from the 'Heart of Asia' countries (listed in paragraph 35), 14 ministerial and high-level delegations from the supporting countries (listed in paragraph 36), and 11 high-level delegations from regional and international organisations (listed in paragraph 36).

3. We, the Foreign Ministers of the 'Heart of Asia' countries, joined in Kabul by ministers and senior representatives of supporting countries and regional and international organisations;

Adhering to the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and the fundamental equality of nations enshrined in the United Nations Charter, and recognizing the central role of the United Nations in international affairs;

Re-affirming the commitments enshrined in the 2002 Kabul Declaration of Good Neighbourly Relations;

Agreeing that promoting regional security and cooperation requires measures to build confidence and trust among countries;

Recalling the landmark Istanbul Conference for Afghanistan: Security and Cooperation in the Heart of Asia, held on 2 November 2011, and reaffirming, as the foundation for the present Conference, the understandings reached among the 'Heart of Asia' countries to cooperate in a sincere and result-oriented manner for a peaceful and stable Afghanistan, as well as a secure and prosperous region as a whole;

Reaffirming our commitment to the principles stipulated in the Istanbul Process on Regional Security and Cooperation for a Secure and Stable Afghanistan document;

Agreeing that the Istanbul Process provides a new agenda for regional cooperation in the 'Heart of Asia' by placing Afghanistan at its centre and engaging the 'Heart of Asia' countries in sincere and result-oriented cooperation for a peaceful and stable Afghanistan, as well as a secure and prosperous region as a whole;

Recognizing that the Istanbul Process is a genuine regionally owned process led by Afghanistan with support and collaboration from its near and extended neighbours, and reiterating that, to reinforce the regional ownership of the process, decisions must be made through close consultation among the 'Heart of Asia' countries;

Clarifying that the term 'Heart of Asia' countries refers to Afghanistan and Afghanistan's near and extended neighbours, and that it does not denote a new geographical entity;

Taking note of Afghanistan's crucial role as the land-bridge in the 'Heart of Asia', connecting South Asia, Central Asia, Eurasia/Europe and the Middle East;

Agreeing that terrorism and violent extremism are common threats to the region; and emphasizing the need for joint and concerted efforts and cooperation among the regional countries to address the challenge of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, including the dismantling of terrorist sanctuaries and safe havens, as well as disrupting all financial and tactical support for terrorism;

Reaffirming our commitment to strengthen cooperation with Afghanistan, as well as regional and

international cooperation, to counter the threat to peace and stability in the region and beyond posed by the illicit production, trade, trafficking and consumption of narcotic drugs, in accordance with the principle of common and shared responsibility; and noting, in this context, the importance of outcomes of the 3rd Ministerial Conference of the Paris Pact Partners on Combating the Illicit Drugs and Opiates Originating in Afghanistan held on 16 February in Vienna;

Anticipating that implementation of the confidence building measures identified in the Istanbul Process document will contribute to the building of trust and confidence among the regional countries;

Appreciating the active support and participation of all the 'Heart of Asia' Countries in the Istanbul Process and, in particular, the Republic of Turkey's active role and stewardship in launching the Istanbul Process by hosting the Istanbul Conference and in its continuing support for the process;

Welcoming Afghanistan's willingness and determination to use its regional and historical position to promote security, stability, and peaceful economic cooperation in the region, including through leading the steps forward adopted at this forum;

Welcoming the central and impartial role of the United Nations, in line with the Security Council resolutions, in support of regional cooperation, including the Istanbul Process;

Recognizing the important role of existing regional organisations, and emphasizing that the role of regional organisations should be supported in the interest of expanded economic cooperation and integration in the region, improved security and greater people-to-people relations, and calling for greater synergies to be created among these regional organisations;

Re-affirming that the Istanbul Process is not intended to substitute the existing efforts of regional organizations, but to cooperate with them, and complement their work where necessary, particularly where they relate to Afghanistan;

Re-affirming our pledge to give strong emphasis and further impetus to the ongoing regional cooperation endeavours;

Welcoming the successful conclusion of the 5th meeting of the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA V) held on 26-27 March 2012 in Dushanbe, and the valuable role of the Republic of Tajikistan in hosting this event, and agreeing that working towards implementation of the regional projects identified in the RECCA V Declaration will also be important steps towards greater confidence building in the region;

Recalling the strong mutual commitments between Afghanistan and the international community expressed at the Bonn International Conference on Afghanistan, which was chaired by Afghanistan and hosted by the Federal Republic of Germany on 5 December 2011 in Bonn, concerning the continued international support for Afghanistan's stabilisation and economic development beyond the Transition period and into the Transformation Decade of 2015-2024;

Welcoming the upcoming Tokyo Conference on Afghanistan to be held on 8 July 2012 at the invitation of the Governments of Japan and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, and calling for continued international support to Afghanistan's sustainable economic development during the Transformation Decade on the basis of mutual commitments between Afghanistan and the international community, and in this context, appreciating the initiative by the Republic of India to organise the Delhi Investment Summit on Afghanistan, a conference of regional and international investors focusing on Afghanistan, to be held on 28 June 2012 in New Delhi, and other such initiatives that could usefully contribute to the deliberations at the Tokyo Conference;

Stressing the importance of intensifying cooperation and dialogue between Afghanistan and regional countries, including the various combinations of bilateral, trilateral and multilateral processes, aimed at promoting regional cooperation between Afghanistan and its neighbouring countries and, addressing the interlinked nature of various challenges faced by all countries in the region;

Hereby declare as follows:

4. We endorse the Concept Paper produced by Afghanistan, and considered by our senior representatives at the first and second preparatory meetings of the Istanbul Process on 29 February in Kabul and 18 April in Ashgabat and, in particular, we agree on the following three elements for the follow-up to the Istanbul Process:

- A) Political consultation involving Afghanistan and its near and extended neighbours;
- B) A sustained incremental approach to implementation of the Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) identified in the Istanbul Process document; and
- C) Seeking to contribute and bring greater coherence to the work of various regional processes and organisations, particularly as they relate to Afghanistan.

A) Political Consultation

5. In view of our common aim to promote a secure and prosperous region as a whole, we agree to work together to ensure that the security interests of all regional states are addressed peacefully and sustainably. In this context, we re-emphasise our determination to help Afghanistan overcome the challenges it faces on the way to achieving stability, peace and a self-reliant economy. Afghanistan, for its part, reiterates its commitment to peaceful and mutually rewarding cooperation with the region, and becoming an asset for the future of a secure and economically integrated region. Afghanistan commits that it will not allow any threat from its territory to be directed against any other country and expects its neighbours to do the same.

6. We note with satisfaction the developments in the on-going Transition process in Afghanistan and welcome the significant achievements that Afghanistan has made in gradually taking over responsibility for its security and defense from the international forces. With the announcement of the third tranche of Transition in May 2012, the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) are taking lead responsibility for security for 75% of the Afghan population across all of Afghanistan's 34 provinces. By mid-2013 the Transition will cover the entire country. The ANSF will have full responsibility for security nationwide by the end of 2014, thus allowing the withdrawal of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). We further note that, beyond Transition, Afghanistan will require continued support towards training, equipping, capacity development and sustainment of the ANSF during the Transformation Decade 2015-2024.

7. We emphasise the importance of a political solution as the surest path to lasting peace in Afghanistan, and agree to actively facilitate the current Afghan-led process of reconciliation in Afghanistan. We endorse Afghanistan's efforts to reconcile the Taliban and other militant groups through an inclusive peace process that is based on the principles of renunciation of violence, cutting ties with all terrorist groups, preservation of Afghanistan's democratic achievements and respect for the Afghan Constitution, including its provisions for the human rights of men and women. We call on members of the international community, including Afghanistan's regional partners, to extend any possible support to an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned inclusive peace process with the goal of putting an end to violence in Afghanistan.

8. We respect Afghanistan as a sovereign, independent and democratic country, which constitutes an integral component of the peace, well-being and prosperity of the region and beyond. We are mindful of the challenges that can derail Afghanistan's stabilisation and development, and harm regional and international security. Terrorism, violent extremism and narcotic drug production and trafficking are among the major threats that Afghanistan faces. While these and other challenges do not affect all countries of the 'Heart of Asia' to a similar degree, they have the potential to seriously undermine the prospects of security, peace and prosperity for the whole region. We further recognise that no single state, or organisation, can deal with these challenges by itself and, therefore, a concerted effort towards stability and prosperity is needed. Consequently, regional and international cooperation are indispensable to address these challenges.

9. In dealing with our shared threats and challenges, we acknowledge that terrorism, extremism and separatism pose a serious challenge to many of our countries, as well as the region and beyond, which can only be addressed through our concerted effort and, we reiterate our strong resolve to combat terrorism, extremism and separatism in all its forms and manifestations, including the financing, harbouring, training and equipping of terrorist activities.

10. Another challenge that poses a serious threat to the peace and stability of the region is the challenge of narcotic drugs. In this context, and with a view to the principle of common and shared responsibility, we will strengthen cooperation with Afghanistan, as well as regional and international partners, to counter the threat posed by the illicit production, trafficking and consumption of drugs.

11. Recognising the need for strengthening trust and cooperation in the region, and thus contributing to the stability and prosperity of Afghanistan and its surrounding region, we agree to take part in a process of continuous and effective dialogue between Afghanistan and its near and extended neighbours concerning all issues of common interest and importance for Afghanistan and the region as a whole.

12. We further recognise that undertaking regular political consultations at a high level is the most effective way of ensuring a continuous dialogue. Therefore, we commit that Foreign Ministers of the 'Heart of Asia' countries will meet once a year for political consultations in the format of Ministerial Meetings, to be hosted by any participating country on a voluntary basis, and if needed in the margins of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), where Afghanistan undertakes to make all appropriate arrangements.

13. We assign our senior officials to prepare the agenda for Ministerial Meetings. We anticipate that the focus of political consultations at these meetings will include, but will not be limited to, briefings and discussions on the developments in Afghanistan, as well as other issues of common interest to the 'Heart of Asia' countries, including common threats to regional security, such as terrorism and extremism, the menace of narcotics and other forms of organized crime. We will also consult on positive opportunities that exist for enhancing prosperity and the full realisation of the aspirations of the peoples of the region.

14. The Kabul-based Ambassadors and representatives of the Istanbul Process participant countries and organisations will meet regularly to exchange and coordinate views on relevant issues.

B) Implementation of Confidence Building Measures (CBMs)

15. Consistent with the understandings and agreements reached at the Istanbul Conference of 2 November 2011, we reaffirm our commitment to building greater trust and confidence within the region through implementation of the broad range of confidence building measures (CBMs) identified in the Istanbul Process document.

16. We emphasise the importance of comprehensive implementation of all the CBMs contained in the Istanbul Process document. However, recognizing the need for a sustained and incremental approach at this stage, we initially decide on the following CBMs for implementation, covering the areas of political and security, economic cooperation and education fields:

- i) Development of joint guidelines for cooperation in the field of disaster management (the 'Disaster Management CBM');
- ii) Enhanced cooperation for fighting terrorism, including through exchange of information (the 'Counter Terrorism CBM');
- iii) Cooperation and interaction among regional countries in the area of counter-narcotics, including through countering the production, trafficking and consumption of opium and other narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, and their precursors, as well as through enhancing bilateral efforts to prevent illicit cross-border movement of personnel and material (the 'Counter Narcotics CBM');
- iv) Establishment of a framework for enhanced cooperation among Chambers of Commerce (the 'Chambers of Commerce CBM');
- v) Improvement of the exchange of information on commercial opportunities and specific trading conditions (the 'Commercial Opportunities CBM');
- vi) Development of a coherent strategy to develop and maintain a regionally connecting infrastructure, with support from international partners (the 'Regional Infrastructure CBM');
- vii) Broadening cooperation and exchanges in the field of education and science on a short or long-term basis (the 'Education CBM').

17. With a view to implementation of the above CBMs, we welcome the following decisions by the Heart of Asia countries to participate in the implementation of specific CBMs and, in particular, take note of the willingness of countries to play a lead role in this process:

- i) Disaster Management CBM: Afghanistan, China, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan and Turkey decide to participate in implementation, and Pakistan and Kazakhstan express their willingness to lead the CBM implementation. We also welcome the readiness of Denmark, the European Union, France, Japan, the Royal Kingdom of Norway, the United Kingdom and the United States to support the implementation of this CBM;
- ii) Counter Terrorism CBM: Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, China, India, Iran, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates decide to participate in implementation, and Afghanistan, Turkey, and United Arab Emirates express willingness to lead the CBM implementation. We also welcome the readiness of France, the United Kingdom and the United States to support the implementation of this CBM;
- iii) Counter Narcotics CBM: Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, China, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates decide to participate in implementation, and Russia and Azerbaijan express willingness to lead the CBM implementation. We also welcome the readiness of Canada, Denmark, the European Union, France, the United Kingdom and the United States to support the implementation of this CBM;
- iv) Chambers of Commerce CBM: Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkey and Turkmenistan decide to participate in implementation, and India expresses willingness to lead the CBM implementation. We also welcome the readiness of Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States to support the implementation of this CBM;
- v) Commercial Opportunities CBM: Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, India, Iran, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates decide to participate in the implementation, and India expresses willingness to lead the implementation of this CBM, in conjunction with the Chambers of Commerce CBM. We also welcome the readiness of Australia, Canada, the European Union, and the United States to support the implementation of this CBM;
- vi) Regional Infrastructure CBM: Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkey and Turkmenistan decide to participate in the implementation, and Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan express willingness to lead the CBM implementation. We also welcome the readiness of Germany and the United States to support the implementation of this CBM;

vii) Education CBM: Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkey and Turkmenistan decide to participate in implementation, and Iran expresses willingness to lead the CBM implementation. We also welcome the readiness of Australia and the United States to support the implementation of this CBM.

18. We expect that our Senior Officials, through their regular meetings between the Ministerial Meetings, will monitor progress of preparation, development, and implementation of the CBMs and provide a progress report to the Ministerial Meetings. In this regard, we call on our fellow 'Heart of Asia' countries participating in implementation of the various CBMs to take an active part in this process and to treat the fulfilment of these measures as a shared responsibility.

19. In the interest of ensuring a comprehensive approach to implementation of the Istanbul Process CBMs, we invite all relevant regional and international organisations, including UN agencies, to participate in development and implementation of these CBMs and, where applicable, to share information and expertise about the measures they are already implementing which may be similar, or linked, to the relevant CBMs.

20. To ensure effective and coordinated implementation of the above CBMs, the participating countries will introduce a technical focal point for each CBM to participate in a regional technical group focusing on the CBM's implementation. The technical focal points will be experts from the government departments in each country that are concerned with implementation of the CBM. The role of lead countries mainly involves coordination and follow-up of meetings and activities of the technical groups and providing updates to the Senior Officials of the 'Heart of Asia' Countries as required.

21. For each CBM, the lead country will convene meetings of the regional technical group, involving the technical focal points of all the participating countries and organizations, to work on developing the relevant CBM implementation plan. We anticipate that the first set of CBM implementation plans will be ready for review by the Senior Officials of the 'Heart of Asia' countries by the end of September 2012. In the meantime, the 'Heart of Asia' Ambassadors' Group in Kabul may also be convened as necessary to review the progress in the development of the implementation plans. The CBM Implementation Framework prepared by Afghanistan may be used by the regional technical groups as a basis for developing their relevant implementation plans.

22. We acknowledge the valuable interest of the international community to support the Istanbul Process and, in this regard, take note of the readiness expressed by various supporting countries and organisations to provide assistance to the process of implementation of the CBMs contained in this document. We anticipate that support for implementation of CBMs will include, apart from possible financial contributions, the sharing of expertise and other forms of technical support.

23. We agree that the CBM implementation will be a voluntary and inclusive process, and that participating countries and organisations can, at any time during preparation, or implementation of a certain CBM, choose to join it as participants, or withdraw from it.

24. We express our wish to continue to enhance understanding and cooperation among countries of the region and, in this context, we envisage that future Ministerial Meetings will choose to prioritize additional CBMs from the list contained in the Istanbul Process document, and make necessary decisions concerning their implementation.

25. We support the creation of conditions conducive to the voluntary and safe return of refugees in a dignified and orderly manner and their sustainable reintegration, as well as continued international support to refugee hosting countries. Afghanistan expresses its gratitude to the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan for hosting Afghan refugees for the past three decades. In this context, we recommend that the CBM on refugees, already mentioned in the Istanbul Process Document, should be prioritized for implementation in the next phase.

26. We recognise with gratitude Afghanistan's readiness to act as the main focal point for various senior officials meetings, including the technical groups, as part of the CBM implementation process.

C) The Role of Regional Organisations

27. We recognize the important role of the regional organizations covering different combinations of the 'Heart of Asia' countries. In particular, we highlight the role of Organization for Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA), the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC) Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (UNSPECA), and the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC), in the context of regional cooperation towards enhanced security and economic development in the region.

28. We respect the activities of regional organizations intending to develop CBMs in the region and, in this context, welcome the forthcoming CICA Ministerial Meeting in Astana later this year. Taking into account potential complementarity between the above CBMs and the work of CICA, we encourage the

optimum level of coordination between the Istanbul Process and CICA.

29. We welcome Afghanistan's active participation in the regional organisations it is currently a member of, including OIC, SAARC, RECCA, CICA, ECO, UNSPECA, and CAREC. We also welcome the decision by the SCO to grant Afghanistan Observer status at the recent SCO Summit in Beijing on 6-7 June 2012. We also welcome the SCO's decision to grant Dialogue Partner status to the Republic of Turkey.

30. While noting the importance of a more structured approach to regional cooperation through various regional organisations, we also recognise the value of ad hoc, or enduring initiatives, of bilateral, trilateral and quadrilateral formats between Afghanistan and various other countries from its near and extended neighbourhood. We urge that, where these processes add value to Afghanistan's cooperation with the region, or to the agenda of regional cooperation as a whole, they must be maintained and replicated as necessary.

31. In the interest of ensuring greater coherence among the various regional cooperation processes, we envisage that at each Ministerial Meeting, interested regional organizations/agencies will, upon invitation, make presentations about their major activities, and Afghanistan will update its fellow regional countries about the progress made in the various trilateral and quadrilateral processes.

32. Once again, we reiterate our strong commitment to regional cooperation as the most important strategy to achieve lasting security and development at the regional level, and reaffirm our desire to work together through the Istanbul Process and other existing regional mechanisms and processes in the shared interest of Afghanistan and its surrounding region.

33. We express our gratitude to the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan for hosting this important first follow-up Ministerial Conference after the Istanbul Conference, and commend its leadership and commitment to taking the Istanbul Process forward in the interest of lasting security and confidence building in the region.

34. We welcome with gratitude the expression of willingness from the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Republic of Kazakhstan, and the Republic of Tajikistan to host the next Ministerial Meeting of the Istanbul Process. In this regard, re-iterating our thanks to Tajikistan for hosting RECCA V Conference in March 2012 in Dushanbe, we decide that the next Ministerial Meeting of the Istanbul Process will be hosted by Kazakhstan in the city of Astana, in the first half of 2013.

35. This declaration was adopted on the 14th day of June 2012 by Foreign Ministers and senior representatives from the 'Heart of Asia' Countries, which consist of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the Republic of Azerbaijan, the People's Republic of China, the Republic of India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the Russian Federation, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Republic of Tajikistan, the Republic of Turkey, Turkmenistan, the United Arab Emirates and Uzbekistan.

36. This declaration was welcomed and supported by the Commonwealth of Australia, Canada, the Royal Kingdom of Denmark, the Arab Republic of Egypt, the Republic of Finland, the Republic of France, the Federal Republic of Germany, the Republic of Iraq, Republic of Italy, Japan, the Royal Kingdom of Norway, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States, as well as the Agha Khan Development Network (AKDN), the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC), the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), Organization for Islamic Cooperation (OIC), South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the European Union (EU), North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and the United Nations (UN).