

Speech of H.E. Spanta, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

Minister Verhagen, Ambassador Kai Eide, Distinguished Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a matter of utmost honor for me to welcome you to this important meeting. Afghanistan is immensely grateful for your participation on such a short notice. Our special thanks go to the Kingdom of the Netherlands for the hosting and the extraordinary organization of the Conference. This meeting could not have taken place without the tireless efforts of Kai Eide and his able colleagues in New York and Kabul, for which we are very thankful.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is more than seven years since the Bonn Conference, when we started our journey to join the family of nations as a secure, prosperous, progressive and democratic nation after decades of wars and conflicts.

To our hectic lifestyle of 21<sup>st</sup> century, seven years may seem like a long time. But seven years is not sufficient to overcome the legacies of decades of underdevelopment and conflicts, while struggling with formidable challenges such as international terrorism and the drug mafia in a difficult security environment. Having said that, we are proud of our joint achievements during the last seven years.

News coverage of terrorist activities had overshadowed our joint achievements since the collapse of the Taliban. Suffice to say that we have made history almost in every field: from rebuilding our state institutions, enrolment of more than 6.5 million students to the emergence of our emerging civil society and flourishing private sector and maintaining international solidarity.

The presence of representatives of more than 80 nations and international organizations here in The Hague is the manifestation of growing international solidarity with Afghanistan, for which we are extremely grateful.

On Friday, the result of the Strategic review of US's policy towards Afghanistan was released. We are very pleased with the entire report, in particular, with the assurance of the long-term commitment of the United States of America. Such an assurance is vital to our success to complete our transitional journey and to deter pursuing hedging strategies by our adversaries.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The sustained and long-term commitment of the international community must be completed by adequate resources, effective implementation and patience. We must resist compartmentalized policies, short-termism, double-standard or a second class treatment of Afghanistan. Only by committing to a comprehensive state-building strategy, adequate

resources, mutual accountability, international solidarity and regional cooperation, we can cease the vicious cycle of violence and suffering in Afghanistan.

In the city of The Hague, it is the right place to share with you Afghan's fear on the prospect of downgrading of democratization of Afghanistan. Regrettably, there are voices that see democracy as a luxury or as opposite of stability. However, as there cannot be any trade off between justice and peace, stability and democracy are intertwined.

We are facing with two choices in Afghanistan. If we succeed in our joint journey, Afghanistan will become the crossroads for regional cooperation and interaction between the South Asia, Central Asia, Middle-East and the Far-East. If not, it will become once again the launching pad for the international terrorism and the drug mafia.

I am confident today's Conference will help all of us to identify the best ways towards building upon our achievements and strengthen our enduring partnership.

Once again, many thanks for your participation and I look forward to your contributions.

Thank you.