

Welkomstwoord van minister-president mr.dr. Jan Peter Balkende op de Afghanistan-top, Den Haag, 31 maart 2009.

President Karzai, Mr Secretary-General, excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to the Netherlands and welcome to The Hague: the international city of peace and justice, home to the Peace Palace and to many international organisations such as the International Court of Justice. The Netherlands is proud to host this special conference on Afghanistan. We feel privileged to welcome so many distinguished guests from all over the world. Thank you all for coming at such short notice.

I believe that your presence here sends a powerful message of hope and confidence to the Afghan people. This conference proves that the international community remains strongly committed to a safe, stable and prosperous future for Afghanistan.

Despite all the successes and the progress of recent years, many challenges remain. But the determination and optimism of the Afghan people give us hope. Together we must help them fulfil their dreams. The combined power of defence, development and diplomacy shall prevail.

The aim of this conference is to re-energise our common efforts to improve the lives of the Afghan people and empower them to take their lives into their own hands. Whether we are here as neighbouring countries, as donors or as participants in ISAF, we all believe that the only way for Afghanistan to prosper is through close cooperation and coordination. So I hope all of us will send a clear political signal today that we stand shoulder to shoulder with the Afghan people.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This year marks the 110th anniversary of the international peace conference held in The Hague in 1899. Its achievements are still renowned. I hope history will inspire you and that this conference will contribute to a safe, free and prosperous Afghanistan. I firmly believe that together we can be successful. In that spirit, I would like to wish you a fruitful conference.

Thank you.