

Closing remarks by
H.E. Dr. Abdullah Abdullah
Chief Executive of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

You have arrived at the conclusion of the Sixth Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA-VI). We are, all together, also commemorating the 10th anniversary of RECCA, an important regional cooperation platform that was kicked off in 2005. This in itself is an accomplishment, and I want to congratulate all member states, international organizations and other delegates for their efforts in this regard.

I am told that it has been a very busy two days for all participants, as much territory has been covered and discussed, and we have together come to some important conclusions about the way forward.

I take this opportunity to thank all regional partners and other stakeholders, and express my sincere appreciation for your input and valuable contributions.

I can say with confidence that RECCA has moved into a new era. This forum is now truly regional in its perspective, and pragmatic in its approach to economic cooperation and regional economic integration.

Using modern analytical tools backed by empirical data collection and up-to-date information, it is easier to undertake feasibility studies, research and evaluations on bankable small-to-large scale infrastructure projects. More importantly, we have reached new milestones as our collective endeavors have taken us closer to project implementation thresholds.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to take this opportunity and express Afghanistan's appreciation to Turkmenistan for hosting the next round of RECCA to be held in Ashgabat. As the visit of Turkmenistan's President to Kabul a few days ago demonstrated, important initiatives to modernize and expand projects in the transport, energy and trade sectors are underway in our region - stretching from Russia and Kazakhstan to Turkey and the Persian Gulf region on one side, and to China and India on the other.

This demonstrates that we are all positively impacted by the ongoing infrastructural revolution, the opening of new corridors and the creation of new opportunities and livelihoods for millions of our citizens.

As our greater region undergoes change, we see the re-emergence of multiple new Silk Roads. We are eager to see them complement each other, leading to land and maritime connectivities that benefits all stakeholders.

There is no doubt that regional connectivity will be increasing with the finalization of the Lapis Lazuli and Five Nation Railway corridors.

The key to getting projects off the ground is through partnerships – public, private and a combination of both, in the contexts of bilateral, multi-lateral and regional cooperation.

The technical feasibility and financial viability of these projects will continue to be assessed to assure bankability, best practice, accountability and fair market value.

The near-completion of the CASA1000 energy project, which will add to our power capacity is an example of win-win regional cooperation.

Although some of the larger mega projects that are listed in the annex of the RECCA Main Document are of longer-term significance, and will be dealt with in due time, the projects that were presented to you here in this Conference are deemed feasible, chosen because of their prospective catalytic impact and their modest investment cost. In other words, these projects represent the low-hanging fruits that need to be harvested by the regional partners.

Dear friends and colleagues,

In our Declaration, we have committed ourselves to take advantage of the emerging geo-economic environment, in order to seize the opportunities before us as part of the construct of the multiple new Silk Roads. As the RECCA process has highlighted, the selected projects are proposed strategically, in order to facilitate activity, energize the pathways and reduce the bottlenecks on these emerging trade and transit corridors.

It is in this spirit, that Afghanistan's National Unity Government welcomes the ongoing realization of five economic corridors in our region. They each have the potential to unlock our regional economic capacities at a time when volatility is becoming a cyclical norm as demonstrated by currency fluctuations, stock market instability and commodity price vacillation.

Some of our partners come from the public sector; some come from the private sector. Both are crucial. Furthermore, governments – as in donors - and international financial institutions (IFIs) can play an important role in providing seed capital for viable project kickoff, easing the risk factor for private investors.

The key to this process moving forward now is the launch of the RECCA Implementation Phase. We welcome stakeholders, partners and investors to work with us hand-in-hand during this critical phase. To facilitate our interactions, I am happy to see that high-tech connectivity in the form of an online portal will act as a window and allow us all to monitor in real-time the investment road shows and progress reports on all aspects of project management and implementation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Per the Economic Impact Analyses presented at this conference, there is real incentive and tangible economic benefit for all regional partners of South and Central Asia to engage in increased trade, transit, transport, energy transfer and investment along the new pathways being developed.

Afghanistan stands at the crossroads, as part of the roundabout, as a key hub and a land-bridge for the realization of our collective interconnectivity.

We are working on eliminating the threats posed to security and stability in the form of terrorism, radicalism and narcotics. We are very much a victim of these scourges and appreciate the international effort to combat these threats.

We do, however, need more robust measures to tackle terrorism in all its traditional and newer forms. It is not sufficient to engage in talk and promises, but fail to deliver in deed and action.

We are paying a high price, but we are united in our aim to address these menaces in all its forms. We need your cooperation, as you need ours, to bolster our defenses and protect our people, and the well-being of our social, political and economic institutions.

Dear friends,

As we deal with a diverse set of challenges, this conference has proven to us once again that the opportunities and potential for growth and prosperity at the regional level are real and attainable. The work has already started, and Afghanistan is ready to play its role in the larger context.

You have spent several years and worked hard within the RECCA framework laying down a solid foundation. Let us now go forward, united behind the vision of our joint Declaration. Let us bring projects to life to help in the growth of our regional corridors; and let us partner on this road until we bring to the peoples and nations of our greater region the stability and prosperity they so much deserve.

Thank you very much.