

Transcript of Remarks Delivered by President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani at the Sixth RECCA Conference

Kabul, Afghanistan

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In the name of Allah, the compassionate, the merciful

Minister Rabbani, thank you for the excellent introduction. Excellencies the ministers, heads of international and regional organizations, distinguished ambassadors, experts, Afghan colleagues, ladies and gentlemen!

Thank you first for your presence, for your commitment, for your interest, for your support and interest, and most significantly for your engagement and ideas. Your presence here is a very strong signal of hope, we stand for hope against climate of despair and your presence signals that very strongly so on behalf of the nation, the state and myself, I welcome you and thank you for your engagement.

Our choice is simple, do we become a roundabout or we become a cul-de-sac? [Inaudible], the historian traveling Afghanistan and summarizing history and came with two terms: *roundabout*, a place through which ideas, people and goods flow and from which they disperse throughout the entire region. *Cul-de-sac*: a dead-end Place where ideas, people and goods were unable to connect and flow within a wider system. It was a place of entrapment.

Afghanistan for millennium was a roundabout end of the 19 century, emergence of two European colonial empires turned it into a cul-de-sac, but we suffer from a short term image vis a vis a long [inaudible] of history. The 19th century colonial image has defined the sasmetaphore for outsiders. Our goal is to restore our long connectivity which is to become a hub and a center of interactions and relations. We all talk about the Silk Road, what was the Silk Road? Was it a mere road or was it a system?

First, let me very quickly highlight some of the features of the Silk Road. First, it was one of the most sophisticated financial systems in the world, the word “cheque” was invented here and the transactions from Nepal to Nishni Novograts was one system of transaction where you did not have to carry cash and endanger your lives, and second, it was a system of dispute resolution, one of the most sophisticated systems private sector dispute resolution interacting both with the Mongols code with the Islamic laws and prior to that, with the Zoroastrian, Greek and Buddhist system.

Third, it had a system of nodal cities, each city served as a center of interactivity with enormously sophisticated populations. Kabul had citizens from 16 to the end of 19th century of every conceivable religion, sect and nationality. It was based on comparative and competitive advantage, spices, silk, etc. Everything float.

There was an integrated transport network. Today we look at our nomadism as a relic of the past at that time it was central to make system possible. The jingle of the caravans still echo, but most significantly, its present today, its legacy is entrepreneurial cultures and commercially oriented systems. In the absence of the Silk Road, you could not possibly imagine north India, south India is connected much more to the ocean trading systems, the Central Asian, Afghans, and Iranians interacting and understanding each other.

This legacy is a very important legacy to build upon. But everything depends of course on perspective, so what are ways of looking? Looking out, if you are an Afghan and you are looking out, what do you see? We see the emergence of Asian continental economy. Asia has been at war for 500 years, Europe was at war for 500 years too. These are called the two long wars, we envisage twentieth century has been bad to Asia. We have been the heartland of conflict and twenty first century began very poorly. But in the next fifty years, we hope to see the end of the long Asian war, and the emergence of an Asian continental economy. Looking in from outside, what do people see? A difficult balance of constraints and opportunities. People are frightened by insecurity, people are frightened by acts of terror, but today's meeting I hope is an indication that the Afghan will never surrender.

Our guests and our partners have shown that threats will not deter you, so we need to understand the balance of constraints but also see the opportunities but the most important thing I think is looking forward and what is it that allows us to move forward. We can use inspiration from the past that we were a roundabout and the place of inventions and systems. In order to build a common future, we have no choice but to build a common future.

A region, ladies and gentlemen, distinguished colleagues, is not an active geography. There is no definition of what a region is geographically, it is an act of political economy, it is an act of cultural understanding and it is an act of overcoming geographical and historical constraints. It is an act of imagination, where the past yields to the future and where the present is used as a stepping stone and as a platform for the future. So what is a suggestive framework? First, we need to engage, identify critical stakeholders. You around this table in this room are our critical stakeholders, we need to establish a common understanding because that common understanding among stakeholders is critical to moving forward.

This basis of this ladies and gentlemen, is course common interests. Lose-lose propositions have robbed us of opportunities, win-win propositions will allow us to build a common future. Women are stakeholders in this, the poor are stakeholders in this, the youth are the stakeholders in this, but most significantly, our citizens are the stakeholders in this. Political elite have the obligation and the moral responsibility to lived one of the poorest groups of people on earth to prosperity because what is tragic both for Afghanistan and for our neighbors, close or far, is that we are an incredibly rich country but inhabited by the majority of the poor people and we need to change this so that

we have a country where all of us share, stakeholders are created to literally owning pieces of assets and identifying with the systems.

Second, map our assets. We have tremendous assets and I will do a quick stock taking it, but three, also identify our constraints. What is it that is preventing us? Particularly in the areas of knowledge and governance from moving forward, and lastly, identify the policy constraints and infrastructural constraints and deal with them. We have to both work with them and deal with them. That is difficult.

What are Afghanistan's resources? First, I hope no one will dispute that we have been given one of the best climates. Our Qatari colleagues and others know that, (laughter). Once there is peace, our Chinese colleague has reminded us that we could have a million tourists from China alone.

Beijing is incredibly hot, Kabul is delightful and when I take you to Badakhshan or to Paktia or to Andarab or to Bamyan you will see that our climate has given us a blessing. We also have four distinct seasons. But second is our location; Frederick Starr has done this fantastic book; it is called the lost enlightenment. The best roads of connectivity between different parts of Asia go through Central Asia and Afghanistan; so our location for 200 years has been a curse; in the next 500 years, I think will be one of our most significant advantages. Second, agriculture, horticulture and pastoral potential; we were one of the places where systematic underground irrigation was invested, where 2500 years ago we created some of the most sophisticated irrigation networks as the systems of cooperation and that stayed with us.

Third is our energy potential. From water, hydro we have about 25,000 but altogether... Dr. Qayumi, my distinguished colleague and friend, whom we honored because he just resigned as President of San Jose state university to serve again his nation in his birthplace has identified 360,000 megawatts out of wind and sun and other sources.

Our mineral resources... 33% of our current mineral wealth has been mapped; it is estimated between 1 and 3 trillion dollars; once the 100 % is mapped and a very distinguished Minister of Mining, Dr. Saba, is leading the effort, we will really see what is on and what is off; we do have the potential to become the largest producer of copper and iron in the world within the decade. We will be a significant player in the Gold Market; we have 14 of the 17 rare earth materials that will determine the future of technology globally and it goes on.

Water resources, the five river systems; we provide water to all our neighbors except China, which we share and harnessing of these waters, internal waters that we suffer \$1 billion a year from floods; our distinguished Minister of Agriculture, Mr. Zamir and his colleagues as Minister Usmani and others are working on this.

We have an entrepreneurial culture, legacy of the Silk Road, and we have a very significant diaspora- a million Afghans live in Europe, North America and Australia and they are connected by thousands ties and millions of ties-the remittance is a very significant asset; we find millions of our compatriots living in Iran and Pakistan; we are grateful to both governments for their support but these are very significant asset; this you cannot plan for Afghanistan based on notions of an isolated state or a country bounded by constraints; it is the opportunities.

And last and I hope most significantly, the government of National Unity has both the political will and a capable team; we are incredibly proud of our government, the national security team that Mr. Atmar very ably leads; this is a country composed of people with dedication, with patriotism and with a common framework. So let's do the quick storm thinking in terms of the infrastructure because that is the key issue. I list very quickly and go through them:

Airports- we have invested over 10 billion dollars in airports; these were done through military assistance; six of those airports within the next two months are going to be on offer for private-public partnerships; these are major assets that have been created in the last 14 years; we have airport capability in some of our remotest locations; 110 formerly security bases are now being??? and they offer an immense opportunity both to our regional partners and to ourselves as takeoff point.

Canals and dams: as I said our water is an immense resource and of course we both need a national and a regional framework of cooperation; canals and dams will now be built systematically. 85 % is it Minister Zamir? 85 % of our historical canals are now digitized, so we know exactly what to do and fortunately we have over 200 projects again in the small and medium irrigation fields that are ready for implementation; the feasibility studies have been completed.

Fiber Optics: Mr. Wahidi is here; we are in the process of completing the fiber optics string load and it is a priority in the set of connectivity.

Pipelines: we are focused both on early wins as well as regional integration; we are going to bring pipelines from our neighbors; Minister Saba is very ably leading this effort to start a petrochemical industry and a fertilizer industry; we don't need to wait for the entire regional connectivity in order to jumpstart this very significant thing and we are delighted that the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Qatar is here and Qatar has been path breaking experience where we call on and of course our Iranian colleagues, our Tajik and Pakistani colleagues are all here.

Railways: we created our first railway authority in 1927; we brought a Dutchman courtesy of German foreign assistance and I thank the German ambassador because we just celebrated our 100 anniversary of cooperation but that tree did not translate and what is really fantastic is the road, is the route that the then German team prepared is exactly the route that we are working on right now. So finally, I think we will be able in the 100th anniversary to shift to reap the dividends. The feasibility studies are fast underway and our connectivity with ...Uzbekistan has been established; we are working on connecting Turkmenistan and Tajikistan very quickly as well as building connectivity to the wider region and Iran was the first country to assist us with the railway and we are looking at completion of that project.

Roads: we have invested billions of dollars in our road system so Afghanistan of today is not Afghanistan of 14 years ago; Minister Baligh is very ably leading this effort; our key is operation and maintenance of the past assets and moving forward to creating this system.

Transmission Systems: transmission lines are the first part where we are delivering regionally. CASA-1000 would have broken all the constraints; we have shown that we can trade long-term gains for short-term losses so the price structure that was an obstacle we decided to break it and I hope that this can show the first delivery between Central Asia and South Asia. Our bilateral cooperation with Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Iran in this area has been well established; now our key goal is to become a regional transit hub and that hopefully will very quickly be realized. The reason I took this quick stop taking is to indicate to you that we are not beginning from scratch; we have a lot of assets to build upon and to connect; at times, a decision by one of our neighbors to build a 10 or 60 mile additional connectivity can make all the difference to utilization of the existing assets; it should be really important to map these missing gaps and to focus on those as a priority; now there is need for... we have adopted a systems approach; what are some of the key characteristics? First, infrastructure is going to be a cluster and not an isolation.

The areas that I indicated to you would be approached simultaneously, building project by project is a recipe for defeat, for cost increases, for lack of quality, a system approach will bring this together and if signification develop. Second we can assure you that we have a transparent and efficient procurement system, I personally preside over the national procurement process organization, Dr Abdullah vice president Danish, Ministers of Economy, Finance and Justice. Every Saturday we take two to five hours to go through every project, so that our international colleagues, our regional partners and our international organizations in particular our own entrepreneurs can be assured that corruption will not take its toll that inefficiency that people particular that delays will not happen. Thirdly we are clarifying the core functions of the ministries, all ministries are not going to do projects, it is going to be concentrated in couple of major ministries like public works, so that the division is clear and responsibilities. Fourthly, we are investing in the national construction industry , I don't know of a single country that is been able to spend money properly and effectively, without investing in the national construction, in here we invite global partnerships, regional partnerships, to work. Fifthly, is public-private partnership.

Public-private partnership is absolutely the key to this both vis a vis the region and we want to embark on new form in innovative way. The history of public private partnership is mixed. Australia is a very negative experience and is documented, UK is an excellent experience have in the region falls in between so it is important.

Next is the regional projects. The rate of return, the economic feasibility would look differently, if we approach projects just from a national prospective, but transit once its added in regional connectivity is figured, the economic will change fundamentally, and so would the buy it. So we very much welcome regional investment and support, you are our key partners in this and we are delighted to work with you.

Let me conclude with a message of hope. Networks of terror and violence want to turn the Arab Islamic word into a cul-de-sac. Their message is one of despair; their form of violence is directed to ensure that innocent people and our culture heritage are destroyed. What possible danger could the statue of Buda of Palmira, beautiful heritage or Baghdad's or any other city's heritage pose to our holy religion.

We need to have the courage to speak for the absolute majority of the Muslim world, and that messages that the absolute majority of the Muslim worlds rejects the message of hate, rejects the message of violence, rejects the message of intolerance. We invented, I hope it is not taken a mess, look at the [inaudible] civilization, look at the [Fatimid] civilization in Cairo, the Uma civilization in Kurtuba, these were global center for interactivity. The global centers the grand Islamic civilizational syntheses was based on tolerance, on understandings, what other civilization would have invested one hundred years of continuous investment in project of translation to translate historical arithmetic and mathematical words from India to Greek works, to Roman law and to others.

That is the civilizations that we are the heirs of. The cul-de-sac proposal is a rejectionist proposal and we reject that very concept.

Their ecology and morphology is distinctive and is a threat to the region and the world, but our people are with us and stand for hope. Your commitment and engagement embodies hope and trust in the future. On behalf of our brave defense and security forces, our peace loving people, our noble people, the nobility is not because we are Afghans, the nobility is that we have taken 40 years of suffering and are still standing tall. Our message to all those who support terror who support violence is in historical afghan proverb, "You cannot force an afghan to heaven, you can persuade him to go to hell", we do not want to go to hell, but let's together pave the way towards the future of common understanding and cooperation.

Thank you.