

Australian Intervention: RECCA VII, 15 November 2017

Delivered by Jill Collins, Deputy Head of Mission, Australian Embassy, Moscow

I would like to thank the co-chairs, H.E. Rashid Meredov, Foreign Minister for Turkmenistan and H.E. Salahuddin Rabbani, Foreign Minister for Afghanistan, for this opportunity to participate in the Seventh Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan.

Australia commends RECCA members for their work since the Ministers last met in September 2015. The Conference is an important forum for the countries of the region to build trust as they pursue common goals of regional prosperity and stability.

Alongside others in this room, Australia is pleased to be a firm and continuing partner of Afghanistan and the region. Earlier this year, Australia and Afghanistan signed a new Development Partnership, reaffirming our mutual commitments made at the Brussels Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan.

We have also responded to NATO's request for additional 'train, advise, assist' support by raising our commitment to about 300 troops to support the development of the long-term capabilities of Afghanistan's security forces. Australia believes that in this environment the NATO-led Resolute Support mission continues to play a crucial role in supporting the efforts of the Afghan security forces to build a secure future for Afghanistan, with benefits for regional stability accruing to the countries represented in this room and beyond.

The expansion of transport, energy, communications and infrastructure connectivity – central to this forum's agenda – is critical to promoting region-wide economic growth and to building a prosperous future for Afghanistan.

Australia has contributed \$20 million to a new Economic Infrastructure Support Facility in Afghanistan – managed by the World Bank – which will provide support for the development of regional energy and transport infrastructure projects. Australia is pleased to be a substantial contributor to the multilateral development banks to provide critical infrastructure funding in support of the region's integration.

We encourage regional partners to continue working closely together to overcome the very real risks and security constraints to building regional connectivity.

We recognise the Afghan Government's efforts in pushing forward key national reforms in extremely difficult circumstances and welcome the initiation of the Kabul Process in June 2017, to build regional and international support for a sustainable peace, and look forward to the next meeting in January. Australia continues to believe that an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned negotiated political solution as the only viable path to durable peace.

We recognise that unlocking Afghanistan's potential will also require investment in human development, including for women and girls. Women have made impressive gains in Afghanistan over the past 16 years. Supporting women's empowerment has been a core pillar of Australia's contribution to Afghanistan since 2002.

Australia looks forward to complementing the work of the RECCA in the coming years in support of the common goals of building sustainable peace and economic development.