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Statement by Mr. M.J. Akbar, Minister of State for External Affairs

Government of Republic of India

at RECCA VII Conference

(November 15, 2017; Ashgabat, Turkmenistan)

Excellency Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Meredov,
Excellency Foreign Minister Rabbani,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to begin with profuse thanks to our Turkmen and Afghan friends for their excellent organisation and generous hospitality. It is, hence, both a pleasure and a privilege to lead my country's delegation to the RECCA VII Conference in this beautiful and historic city of Ashgabat.

Friends,

RECCA was initiated in 2005 to support the peace process in Afghanistan and build greater stability through economic co-operation in South, West and Central Asian regions. Even a casual assessment suggests that RECCA has been able to make appreciable gains towards stated goals, creating fiscal and economic bridges between Afghanistan and its near and wider regions.

For India, RECCA is vital because, as a powerful engine for economic growth, it shapes the aspirations of the young. If we do not offer economic empowerment to the young, their faith in future will ebb. We are deeply committed to the RECCA process. We believe in both bilateral and multilateral mechanisms to help the Afghan economy.

We had the honor to host the third Conference of RECCA in November 2006 in India. But despite some visible and tangible improvements, Afghanistan continues to face a multitude of challenges, from extreme terrorism, low investment, blocked or interrupted connectivity and fluctuating institutional capacity. A friend in need is a friend indeed, as the proverb goes; this is the moment for friends of Afghanistan to enhance their act. India has worked with belief, confidence and imagination. The thrust of our efforts has been on capacity building, human resource development, infrastructure, connectivity, trade and investment.

India's overall developmental assistance to Afghanistan since 2001 has amounted to over US\$ 2 billion. In September 2016, India pledged another US\$ 1 billion assistance to Afghanistan. This was followed by unveiling of the 'New Development Partnership' between Afghanistan and India in 2017, to focus on priorities as identified by the Government and people of Afghanistan. India has already announced 116 new 'High Impact Community Development Projects' and several large scale projects such as *Shahtoot* dam and drinking water for Kabul city, and low-cost housing for returning Afghan refugees. India's new assistance projects will be implemented across all 34 provinces of Afghanistan.

A key priority for India is building robust, reliable and year round connectivity for Afghanistan. We assert that lack of connectivity directly impacts the economic, security and political stability in Afghanistan. The trilateral transit and transport agreement via Chabahar between India, Iran and Afghanistan in May 2016 was a milestone. A fortnight ago, on November 1, 2017, the first ship carrying Indian wheat grain assistance to Afghanistan reached Chabahar from where it was taken overland to Afghanistan. It is the beginning of a new era of enhanced connectivity for Afghanistan, West Asia and beyond to the larger Eurasian regions.

