

## Address by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev at the international conference on Afghanistan "Peace process, security cooperation and regional collaboration"

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Your Excellency President Mr. Ashraf Ghani!

Dear Ms. Federica Mogherini!

Distinguished foreign ministers, heads of delegations!

Ladies and gentlemen!

Allow me on behalf of the people of Uzbekistan to cordially welcome all participants and guests of the high-level international conference on Afghanistan in the capital city of our country.

I sincerely thank you for your participation in this Forum and I am pleased to see you on the hospitable land of Uzbekistan.

This conference is a joint initiative of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

It is a logical continuation of the efforts to ensure peace and stability in Afghanistan made by the international community.

I would like to extend a special gratitude to His Excellency President Mr. Ashraf Ghani for his personal participation in our Forum.

I also express a sincere gratitude to the United Nations Secretary-General Mr. Antonio Guterres, who from the onset has supported our initiative to hold the international conference and sent his welcoming address to its participants.

We highly appreciate the commitment of Mr. Antonio Guterres to advancement of negotiations in the framework of the process of peace settlement in Afghanistan, as well as his efforts in terms of assistance to security and sustainable development in our region.

In January this year the debate on Central Asia and Afghanistan under the presidency of Kazakhstan took place at the United Nations Security Council. Taking this opportunity, I

would like to express a sincere gratitude to the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Nursultan Abishevich Nazarbayev for the initiative to discuss this most important problem.

I am also grateful to all members of the United Nations Security Council for valuable proposals enunciated in the course of discussions. Many of them were taken into account in the draft of the final document of our conference – Tashkent Declaration prepared jointly with the Afghan colleagues.

I am pleased from the bottom of my heart to also welcome:

– High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Ms. Federica Mogherini;

– the heads and representatives of foreign policy institutions of the People's Republic of China, Russian Federation, United States of America, Japan, Germany, Great Britain, France, Italy, Turkey, India, Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, as well as international and regional organizations.

I would like to underscore that the representatives of all Permanent Member States of the UN Security Council and countries of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization are gathered today in this hall.

Dear participants of the Conference!

These days we are broadly celebrating our traditional holiday of spring and renewal – Navruz. From of old, during this period the wars used to cease, people forgave grievances to one another and used to come to accord even on the most, as it seemed, the insoluble problems.

I am confident that today we will also be able to constructively discuss and elaborate the joint solution on one of the most acute regional and global problems of modernity – the conflict in Afghanistan, which, to a great regret, has already been going on for nearly 40 years.

In essence, "the flame of war" was imposed to the Afghan people from outside. It is not his choice. For over these years hundreds of thousands of peaceful citizens became victims of the confrontation while millions of people had to flee their homes and seek shelter in other countries.

The constant engagement of new forces in the conflict has led to its unprecedented

aggravation. This conflict has ceased to be exclusively Afghan one while transforming in greater terms into a complex international problem.

The expansion of presence of international terrorist groups in Afghanistan, ongoing violence and bloodshed, and drug business – all of this speaks about that it is inadmissible to ignore by the international community the situation in this country.

Most importantly, the entire generation grew up in Afghanistan in the conditions of armed confrontation and violence. However, this is not "a lost generation" as some experts cynically refer to.

These are just people who have tired of war, deprivations and hardships, who want and try to put an end to enmity and return to peaceful life and creativity for the good of their country.

I am deeply convinced: the Afghan people have strength, wisdom, courage and perseverance to start a new and peaceful life, and to build it for the sake of prosperity of their children and future generations.

The states and high-profile international organizations, whose representatives are today participating in our Forum, can and must play a decisive role in assisting peaceful settlement of situation in this long-suffering country.

The events in the Middle East and North Africa led to the fact that the situation in Afghanistan was left for some time out of focus of world politics. However, the conflict didn't lose its tenseness and sharpness.

The following factors have necessitated the proposal to hold the international conference in Uzbekistan and the need to unite efforts aimed at ensuring peace and stability in Afghanistan.

First, our initiative fully corresponds to Uzbekistan's foreign policy concept, which defines as a main priority consolidation of friendly and mutually advantageous relations with neighboring countries.

Second, for over the span of millennia the people of Uzbekistan and Afghanistan developed in one culture and civilization space.

Since the ancient times, the people have been residing on both banks of Amudarya River. They share similarity of languages, common sacred religion and spiritual values.

Amudarya River has always been a source of life for us, but never a barrier for a free

movement of people, development of close trade ties, exchange with scientific achievements and mutual enrichment of cultures.

Such outstanding representatives of the Central Asian Renaissance as Abu Raikhan Beruniy, Lutfiy, Alisher Navoiy, Kamoliddin Bekhzod, Zakhiriddin Muhammad Babur, Boborakhim Mashrab and many others – our great ancestors lived and created in the Afghan land.

Today Uzbekistan and Afghanistan lead close political, trade-economic and cultural-humanitarian relations. Millions of Uzbeks live in Afghanistan. In line with Afghanistan's Constitution, Uzbek is one of the official languages.

Third, all of us are firmly convinced that security is indivisible and it can be ensured only through joint efforts. We must not, and speaking more concretely, we do not have a right to perceive some threats as "our own" and yet others as "not ours".

Afghanistan's security is security of Uzbekistan, linchpin of stability and prosperity of entire greater region of Central and South Asia.

It must not be allowed for the international terrorist organizations to turn Afghanistan into their constant safe heaven.

Fourth, Uzbekistan has the experience of assisting the peaceful process in Afghanistan.

In 1999 on the initiative of Uzbekistan the meeting of the Group "6+2" took place in Tashkent on the level of heads of foreign policy institutions of states neighboring on Afghanistan, as well as Russia and the United States.

The representatives of the Northern Alliance and Taliban movement also participated at that meeting.

On the outcomes of negotiations, the Tashkent declaration on major principles of peaceful settlement of the conflict in Afghanistan was adopted, which became an official document of the 54th Session of the UN General Assembly and Security Council.

In this regard, we have all grounds, both political and moral right to speak about our common future with Afghanistan and raise issues which equally bother both our Afghan brothers and us.

It is therefore that Uzbekistan calls upon all countries of the world to support our efforts in this noble cause.

Dear friends!

At present, the multifaceted and not simple issues of settlement of the situation in Afghanistan are broadly discussed on the regional and international levels.

The Kabul process, Moscow format, International Contact Group, Istanbul process – "The heart of Asia", Contact group "SCO-Afghanistan" and other multilateral platforms deserve most serious attention which are established to seek ways of settlement of the military-political crisis in Afghanistan.

Uzbekistan supports decisions adopted by participants of the second meeting in the framework of the Kabul process in favor of launching direct talks between the Afghan government and Taliban movement "without preliminary conditions and threats of use of violence".

However, we believe that the main condition of advancement towards peace is, first of all, to draft and implement in practice the sole, both regionally and globally endorsed Comprehensive peace program for Afghanistan.

Proceeding from this, the following must become our major goals and tasks:

First is to draft basic principles of peaceful settlement and secure broad international consensus on them;

Second is to develop a mechanism to start negotiations between the Afghan government and the armed opposition;

Third is to adopt a "Road map" of assistance by the international community to the process of national reconciliation in Afghanistan.

And finally, it will be of invaluable significance the resolute and unanimous appeal of all interested external forces to the armed opposition with a call to come to the negotiating table with the Afghan government and put an end to confrontation and violence.

There is no alternative to this. In our opinion, this is the key message of today's meeting.

Dear ladies and gentlemen!

Taking into account the extremely complex and contradictory nature of the conflict in Afghanistan, the involvement of various forces in it, and based on the certain resolutions of the UN Security Council, we believe it is important to ensure promotion of a

comprehensive peace process on three interrelated and interdependent levels.

At the intra-Afghan level – it is necessary to ensure start of a direct dialogue, without preliminary conditions, among the central government and main forces of the armed opposition, primarily, the Taliban movement.

The questions that the parties have towards one another may become a subject of the forthcoming negotiation process.

It is obvious that the start of the intra-Afghan political process can no longer be postponed. Its delay will cost the lives of many more innocent people.

In order to ensure success of peace process, it is important that the choice of format, time and venue of peace talks should be Afghan-led and Afghan-owned.

Primarily, the point is about refraining from combat activities and unconditional compliance with ceasefire both by the armed opposition and the Afghan national security forces.

Sharing the common responsibility for a peaceful future of Afghanistan and based on traditionally friendly relations between the Uzbek and Afghan people, we stand ready to create all necessary conditions, at any stage of the peace process, to arrange on the territory of Uzbekistan the direct talks between the government of Afghanistan and Taliban movement.

In case of the opposition's participation in the peace talks and achievement of national reconciliation, all conditions should be created for its integration into political life of Afghanistan.

The representatives of the armed opposition, including Taliban, as a part of the Afghan society and citizens of Afghanistan, have a voice in defining the future of their country.

Along with this, it is extremely important to start the inter-Afghan dialogue in the period before the parliamentary and presidential elections in the country which will provide for broad opportunities to all layers of society, including the opposition forces, for their full participation in the construction of a new Afghanistan.

At the regional level – it is necessary to ensure a firm consensus, primarily with the support of Pakistan, India, Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar and the countries of Central Asia.

I think we all well understand that addressing a whole range of key issues of economic

development, ensuring security and stability in Afghanistan in many respects depends on neighboring states, on our good will and firm determination, readiness to actively promote national reconciliation and ending violence in this country.

The efforts of all neighboring countries and partners should not replace, but complement one another. We need to develop the agreed measures, approaches and practical mechanisms to resolve this problem.

As the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres stated at the UN Security Council meeting in January this year, the new dynamics of regional interaction "will open up great opportunities to all of us to fulfill common, long overdue and urgent tasks".

We need to start considering Afghanistan as not a country from the territory of which the threat to peace and stability is emanating. Afghanistan is our friendly partner and neighbor.

I am confident that our common efforts to involve Afghanistan into the system of trade, economic, transport-communication and cultural-humanitarian relations with neighboring countries will significantly contribute to normalization of the situation and returning of this country to a peaceful life.

I have no doubt that in the long run peace on the Afghan soil will open up the new opportunities and bring real benefits to all states of the greater Eurasian continent. It will promote strengthening common security and stability, create favorable conditions for the construction of motorways and railroads, laying of pipelines, development of regional and trans-regional trade.

Taking this opportunity, I would like to note that Uzbekistan is contributing a fair share to the socio-economic revival of Afghanistan.

Since 2002 we have been supplying electricity to Afghanistan.

With commissioning of a new power transmission line Surkhan-Puli-Khumri the volume of electricity supply from Uzbekistan to Afghanistan will sharply increase.

We are jointly promoting the implementation of another strategic project – extension of the currently operating Hairaton-Mazar-i-Sharif railway built by Uzbek specialists up to Herat.

This project will allow to make a real and practical contribution to reconstruction of Afghanistan's economy, create new jobs and increase the transit potential of the country.

Launching the trans-Afghan transport-communication projects in close integration with other and not less significant regional projects such as Uzbekistan–Turkmenistan–Iran–Oman and Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan–China will also create all necessary conditions for the development of intercontinental transport corridors in almost all directions – from north to south and from east to west through the shortest route.

The relationships in the sphere of humanities are actively developing. A Center for training Afghan citizens specially established in our border town of Termez started functioning in January.

At present, about 100 young men and women from Afghanistan are already studying there.

We intend to expand the list of specialties and fields of training of Afghan specialists in this Center.

At the global level – it is necessary to ensure a principle political support by leading world powers and donor organizations to the peace process and ensure financial assistance to

Afghanistan's socio-economic recovery.

Thanks to their assistance, the country has already embarked on a path of peaceful development. Today, Afghanistan is absolutely different country from what it used to be 20 years ago.

The open democratic elections gave a start to the new stage of state building and positive changes are witnessed in the life of ordinary Afghan citizens.

The government has been able to widely cover the population with education and health services.

All of this testifies to the aspiration of the Afghan people to a peaceful life and development.

The important political events – the parliamentary and presidential elections are due in the next two years in Afghanistan which must confirm the consistent progress of the country along the path of stable democratic development.

Dear friends!



Obviously, we all need to realize that we are struggling not just for the future of Afghanistan, but for our common security, for a world without terrorism, fanaticism and violence.

We must not repeat the mistakes of the past. We must remember our shared responsibility.

The task of achieving peace in Afghanistan is closely interlinked with efforts aimed at combating terrorism and extremism, which now have indeed turned into an unprecedented threat to global security and development.

We are deeply convinced that it is very important that all external forces unconditionally support the Afghan government in an effort to eliminate the strongholds of foreign terrorist organizations in Afghanistan, deny financial and logistical support to terrorism without any distinction.

Uzbekistan has always adhered to a principle position in the fight against terrorism, ideology of extremism and radicalism.

These threats must be fought not only by use of force, but firstly through enlightenment, especially among the youth, against ignorance which gives rise to violence.

Last year at the 72nd Session of the UN General Assembly Uzbekistan proposed to develop and adopt the International Convention on the Rights of the Youth.

Our main goal is to provide universal access for young people to a quality education and create all necessary conditions for their self-realization.

We propose all our foreign partners a close interaction in terms of communicating to people, especially the youth, the humanistic essence of Islam.

To this end, I think it would be expedient to use the potential of the Imam Bukhariy International Research Center, Center of Islamic Civilization and Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan established in Uzbekistan.

As a follow-up initiative, we also propose to establish a special International Fund to Support Education in Afghanistan.

The primary goal is to assist Afghanistan in training its national cadres on the most demanded fields, allocation of scholarships and grants for talented students and young scientists.

We firmly believe that forming the prestige of education in society and promoting strive for self-improvement among youth is a guarantee of sustainable and steady development.

All of this, of course, will contribute to protecting younger generation from the ideology of violence and radicalism.

Dear participants of the forum!

I am confident that conducting this Conference, engaging in constructive dialogue and discussions, and adoption of the final Tashkent Declaration will allow to achieve practical positive results and become a kind of a "Road map" of the peace process in Afghanistan.

In fact, with your support, a document will be adopted which reflects the political will and mutual understanding of all stakeholders on the key issues of Afghan settlement.

The future of Afghanistan must not turn into an example of failure of the international community to counter challenges and threats shared by all of us.

Today, more than ever it is important for all of us to unite and extend the hand of peace, cooperation and support to the long-suffering people of Afghanistan.

I sincerely wish all participants of the Conference a productive work!

Thank you for your attention.

**Source: [Press Service of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan](#)**