



Statement by

H.E. Abdul Raouf Ibrahimi,

Speaker of the House of Representatives

Of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

At the Winter Session of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly

Vienna – February 13-14 2014

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Your Excellency Ranko Krivokapic , President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly,

Your Excellency Barbra Prammer, President of the National Council of Austria,

Distinguished Heads of delegations,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, please allow me to express, on behalf of my delegation, my heartfelt greetings to all of you and to thank the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly for convening this important session in the beautiful city of Vienna and for inviting my delegation and as well as for the warm hospitality extended to us.

It is my pleasure that I have the opportunity to be part of the Winter Session of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, which provides an excellent forum for dialogue between the parliaments of the member states as well as the partner countries. Taking this opportunity I would like to share with you Afghanistan's achievements over the past few years, the current situation as well as the perspective of our endeavors on the path towards sustainable stability and development in the coming years and the challenges that we face on this path.

Distinguished delegations,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Twelve years ago, Afghanistan and the international community embarked on a common journey aimed at fighting international terrorism and providing sustainable stability and development in Afghanistan. This has resulted in remarkable

achievements in various areas. A brief comparison between Afghanistan today and Afghanistan before 2001 helps us better understand the importance of these achievements.

Prior to 2001, Afghanistan was a clear example of a crisis-torn country with destroyed infrastructures in all areas. The administrative and education systems were completely destroyed; freedom of speech was brutally repressed and there was no room for media activities; women as half of the population were deprived of their basic rights and were prisoners within their own homes. Such a situation which was indeed the result of an international disengagement from Afghanistan, paved the way for international and regional terrorists and the enemies of our people to use the country as a safe haven.

After 12 years of sacrifices and efforts made by the people of Afghanistan and our international partners, the majority of which are represented here in today's meeting, Afghanistan is today an active and dignified member of the international community. We currently have a modern constitution, an elected president and an elected parliament as well as elected provincial councils. Despite the challenges, our people have successfully participated in two presidential and provincial councils elections and two parliamentary elections, and are on the threshold of the third presidential and provincial council elections. They are preparing with better experience and greater excitement. Women's role and engagement in various areas including in the parliament and the government institutions has been significantly strengthened. 28 percent of the seats in the Afghan parliament belong to women and this is an outstanding percentage, compared to many countries in the region and beyond. Afghanistan currently enjoys active, independent and responsible media. The number of national and local TV channels has reached over 84 channels and

the number of radio channels has increased to 213. Print media also exists across the country and almost the entire country is under media coverage. Afghanistan has witnessed the emergence of a vibrant civil society in the past 12 years. Our gains in the two key areas of education and health have been promising. The number of school children has increased from less than 1 million in 2001 to more than 8 million today of which 40 percent are girls. Today over 60 percent of our people have access to basic health services and many health indicators have improved significantly.

On behalf of the people of Afghanistan, I would like to take this opportunity, to express my gratitude to our regional and international partners that are present here today for their continued economic assistance and for the sacrifices they have made towards the prosperity of our people in the past 12 years.

**Distinguished delegations,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Our common journey has not yet been completed and we still have a long way ahead of us to build a stable, democratic and self-reliant Afghanistan. This year in particular for several reasons is an important year for Afghanistan.

Firstly, in the framework of the transition program, all security responsibilities are being handed over from the international forces to the Afghan forces. According to the agreed timetable, this process is due to be completed by the end of this year. Despite the increase in the number of national security forces to around 350000, they still need additional training and more equipment. Our army needs heavy weapons and artillery and our air force needs to be further strengthened. Therefore, the continued support of our security sector by the international community in the

form of advising, training, equipment and financial assistance including under the commitments of Chicago Summit is of utmost importance to us.

Secondly, from an economic point of view, Afghanistan has not yet become self-reliant and experience shows that post-conflict countries require more time to achieve self-reliance. Afghanistan, while committed towards increasing the level of its national income, strengthening good governance and moving gradually from aid dependency to self-reliance, will continue to need international assistance in order to carry out its national priority programs throughout the decade of transformation. Solving the disagreement between Afghanistan and the United States over the signing of the bilateral security agreement is crucial to the transformation decade and the Afghan economy in the post 2014 period. Both Afghanistan and the international community need to take practical and immediate steps in achieving the objectives set out in the Tokyo Framework.

Thirdly, Afghanistan is also on the threshold of a political transition. The success of the upcoming presidential elections in April this year will be an important and historic step towards strengthening the democratic values and consolidating the foundations of our young democracy. The creation of the required conditions for a transparent, countrywide election is a key priority within all three branches of government in the country. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe for supporting the presidential and provincial council elections in 2014 including their decision to dispatch an election support team to Afghanistan.

On a fourth point, the peace process, despite the setbacks and challenges, can still be promising. Our conditions for those opposition armed forces that wish to join the peace process are clear: they have to accept the constitution, renounce violence and cut their ties with international terrorism. We, while emphasizing the Afghan leadership of the peace process, believe that genuine regional commitment and cooperation is a key element in the success of this process. Additionally, the international community can also play an important and constructive role in the peace process including through providing financial and political support to reintegration programs

On a fifth point, the narcotics problem continues to pose a threat to the social and political stability of our societies. While we are committed to fight cultivation and production of narcotics in a decisive manner, we believe that success in the fight against this menace is only possible within a holistic approach addressing the full chain of cultivation, trafficking of precursors, production, drug trafficking and consumption. Additionally, the direct link between narcotics and terrorism needs to be taken into consideration as the terrorist networks are benefiting significantly from the production and trafficking of narcotics to finance their terrorist activities.

Distinguished delegations,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We believe that sustaining the achievements of the past 12 years as well as the achievements of the security and political transitions and the success of the decade of transformation will require continued partnership between Afghanistan and the international community. To this end we highly value Afghanistan's engagement in the framework of regional and international organizations and believe that the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, given its experiences in

various areas in the past few decades, can help Afghanistan take the decade of transformation forward. I hope that in the future we will witness strengthened cooperation between Afghanistan and the organization.

Finally, I would like to reiterate that the Afghan parliament as a young but active and committed parliament is ready to contribute to the consolidation of continued partnership between Afghanistan and the international community, in collaboration with the parliaments of our friends, including the parliaments of the OSCE member states as well as partner countries, , as we believe that sustaining the achievements that have resulted from our many joint endeavors and sacrifices in the past 12 years is a shared responsibility.

Furthermore, the Afghan parliament as a young parliament, while making every effort to sustain the democratic gains including in the area of human rights and to further consolidate democratic values in the country, hopes to have the opportunity to benefit from the experience of the parliaments of the OSCE member states and partner countries in areas such as legislation as well as the expansion of democratic institutions. We believe that to this end the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly can play a significant role.

Once again, allow me to express my gratitude to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly for inviting my delegation and I to this important session and for the warm hospitality extended to us.

Thank you