STATEMENT

BY

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(Check against delivery)

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Mr. President

Excellencies Ministers,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to extend my thanks to the organizers of this Comprehensive High-level Midterm Review. I also wish to thank the High Representative and her team for their continued efforts and follow up for effective implementation of the Vienna Program of Action for the Land Locked Developing Countries.

Afghanistan pays high importance to the the Vienna Program of Action. It provides a critical and comprehensive framework to address the unique challenges landlocked and developing countries like us face.

Regional connectivity and economic integration are essential means when it comes to achieving the 2030 Agenda. Focusing on priority areas like trade expansion, infrastructure development and increased economic growth are the foundations for poverty reduction and sustainable development.

As a land-locked developing country that endures continued security concerns, Afghanistan is faced with a number of challenges to the priority areas identified in the Vienna Program. Lack of access to regional and international markets is a great challenge for Afghan goods.
We understand the vulnerability of solely depending on one country for the import and export of our goods. Living in the complex world where we are today, and the rise in geo politics of the region, the unpredictable closure of those trade routes, was our weakness.

Our traders had to heavily depend on a very unpredictable political environment not knowing if their goods, which usually for Afghanistan as an agrarian economy are seasonal fruits and vegetables, could be exported at the right time.

In order to address this challenge, our first priority in our recent economic development agenda was to diversity trade, and connect Afghanistan to markets outside of the region. To do so, we not only started reaching out to our central Asian neighboring countries, but we have looked beyond, to markets in Europe and in the Gulf.

We invested in turning Afghanistan from a landlocked country, to land-connected country. We invested in establishing various trade and transit routes to link not only Afghanistan to the markets beyond the region, but in fact build a transit between the South and Central Asian economies. The Lapis Lazuli trade and transit agreement, which is signed between Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Turkey and Georgia, helps our good to reach the European market. Similarly, the Chabahar port agreement between Afghanistan, India and Iran provides us another trading and transit route.
We also took an innovative approach in opening air corridors. Afghanistan recently was able to open air corridors with India, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Uzbekistan, Indonesia. This was an important step for increasing our export volume and balancing our trade deficit.

Afghanistan has been strongly determined and convinced that we are capable of turning our geographical location, from a source of vulnerability to a source stability for greater connectivity and economic integration.

We should start looking into the potential the landlocked countries provide. Our unique geographical location can serve as the bridge between regional markets. For instance, in Afghanistan to our north we have an energy rich market, while to our south, there is a great demand for energy. Afghanistan plays a crucial role in connecting these two markets for greater development and growth in the region.

The TAPI gas pipeline project is an important example which helps in the supply of the Turkmen gas through Afghanistan to markets in Pakistan and India. Therefore, despite many difficult odds, Afghanistan has been able to make strides, in incorporating the Vienna Program into the work of our economic development agenda. We have been able to achieve a great deal over the past three years, including the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA), which works with our neighbors to solidify Afghanistan as a regional hub for transit, trade and connectivity.
We must acknowledge that the discussion of regional connectivity is not purely economic, but also is driven by various regional political agendas. However, what is important is when we have a greater understanding of its benefit and start to focus on regional economic connectivity and look into not as a “zero-sum gain” but rather a “shared gain” for all those who participate.

There is a benefit to live in the 21st century and that is the boom in technology and virtual connection. This virtual connection helps our nations to be linked faster than our adjustment to the reality, similarly the means available makes it easier. We are starting to realize that growth and development is not any more a phenomenon of being beneficial only to one country, but rather to all. We are in a unique position of thinking broadly for all of us and embracing the benefit of regional connectivity and our shared market gains.

The June 2019 report by the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Program showed promising results in some sectors, but the areas for improvement were clear, specifically as it relates to trade. We hope that the midterm report concludes with a clear understanding of challenges still faced by the land-locked developing countries and presents workable solutions to those challenges.

Working collaboratively is the best way to fully implement the Vienna Program, and we look forward to an inclusive dialogue and participation from all member states.

We remain optimistic that the goals and targets laid out in the Vienna Program for Action will be realized in the next five years. However, in order to achieve this, the full cooperation of the
international community is crucial, especially for those heavy infrastructure projects that help transport linkages.

Donors must fulfill their commitments to the land-locked developing countries, specially those in conflict and post-conflict situations. With this support, countries, like Afghanistan, will continue to work towards sustainable development and lasting peace.

I thank you.