

NINTH MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE OF THE HEART OF ASIA - ISTANBUL PROCESS
(Virtual, 30 MARCH 2021, DUSHANBE, TAJIKISTAN)

STATEMENT BY H. E. MR. ESALA RUWAN WEERAKOON, SECRETARY GENERAL OF SAARC

His Excellency Mohammad Ashraf Ghani, President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan,
His Excellency Emomali Rahmon, President of the Republic of Tajikistan,
His Excellency Mohammad Haneef Atmar, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan,
His Excellency Mr. Sirojiddin Muhridin, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,

It is indeed an honour and a privilege for me to address the distinguished gathering of the Ninth Ministerial Conference of the Heart of Asia - Istanbul Process convened under the theme “Strengthening Consensus for Peace and Development in the Heart of Asia Region”.

I wish to convey warm greetings to the respected Heads of Delegation and distinguished delegates from the participating and supporting countries and organizations of the Heart of Asia – Istanbul process. Your presence in this Ministerial Conference reflects the resolve of the participating and supporting countries and organizations to support Afghanistan in its development.

I thank Their Excellencies the Foreign Ministers of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and Republic of Tajikistan for inviting me to participate in this important Conference. I also congratulate the organizers, particularly the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and Republic of Tajikistan for taking the initiative to organize this Ministerial Conference and the Senior Officials’ Meeting that successfully concluded yesterday.

Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,

Since assuming office as the Secretary General of SAARC in March last year, it is the second occasion that I am participating in an important event on Afghanistan. I had the privilege to participate in the Geneva 2020 Conference on Afghanistan in November last year, which aimed at committing the Afghan government and the international community to a shared development objective for 2021-24. SAARC has also been supportive of the RECCA process and has been participating in its events. SAARC as a regional organization stands ready to cooperate with the government and people of Afghanistan in its bid for ensuring enduring peace, security and stability in the country, all of which are prerequisites for its development. In the meanwhile, we duly recognize the importance of Afghanistan as a bridge among the regions it connects and agree on the significant role the country can play in further promoting regional cooperation and integration.

Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,

As you are aware, SAARC was founded in December 1985 with the primary objective of promoting the welfare of the peoples of South Asia and improving their quality of life. The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, which gained entry in April 2007, is a valued member of SAARC and has been contributing

meaningfully to strengthen regional cooperation. We felicitate the Government and people of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan for successfully integrating into the SAARC process.

SAARC deeply values the efforts made by the Afghan Government for promoting peace, security and stability in the country. It is in this context that we greatly value the Heart of Asia - Istanbul Process geared towards the overall development of Afghanistan. We also take this opportunity to thank all the participating and supporting countries and organizations of the Heart of Asia – Istanbul Process for their constant support to the Government of Afghanistan and its people. The convening of this Ninth Ministerial Conference demonstrates the willingness of the participating and supporting countries and organizations of the Istanbul Process to support Afghanistan.

I wish this important Ministerial Conference every success.

I thank you.

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