

Statement by Adviser to the Prime Minister on National Security and Foreign Affairs Fourth Ministerial Conference of the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process Beijing, 31 October 2014

“H.E. Mr. Wang Yi, Minister for Foreign Affairs of China, H.E. Mr. Zarar Ahmad Osmani, Foreign Minister of Afghanistan, Ministers, Heads of Delegations, Distinguished participants!

It was Pakistan’s poet-philosopher, Allama Mohammad Iqbal, who in the 1930s characterized Afghanistan as Qalb-e-Asya -- the ‘Heart of Asia.’ In his inimitable style, Iqbal wrote in Persian, and I translate: “Asia is comparable to a living body. The heart that beats inside the body is the homeland of Afghans. The destruction of Afghans would be the destruction of Asia. In their [Afghan] progress and prosperity lies the well-being of Asia.” Over eight decades later, these lines remain prophetic. Asia’s well-being remains tied to Afghanistan’s future. We appreciate the inspiring inaugural address delivered by His Excellency Premier Li Keqiang. Pakistan fully supports China’s constructive contribution and Premier Li’s five point proposal for Afghanistan’s peace and economic development. We are also grateful to His Excellency President Ashraf Ghani for his comprehensive statement. His bold vision and reform agenda and strong leadership are key to building a secure and prosperous Afghanistan. This Ministerial Conference is a powerful illustration of the international community’s commitment to support Afghanistan in its quest for peace, progress and prosperity. Excellencies, Afghanistan is at the threshold of the Transformation Decade. There is well-placed optimism in the air.

Ensuring the success of political, security and economic transitions is critically important to preserving this precious moment of hope. Pakistan has welcomed the historic transfer of power from one elected President to another elected President -- as part of the peaceful democratic transition that we have all along supported. The agreement to form a national unity government is both a testimony to the statesmanship of the new Afghan leadership, and an essential framework for ensuring a stable and unified Afghanistan. It is imperative to preserve and consolidate the gains made over the past 13 years. For this purpose, the troop drawdown and the security transition must be managed in the most orderly and responsible manner. No one from outside should seek to fill any perceived security vacuum. A regional consensus on non-interference remains indispensable for the stability of Afghanistan and the region. An economic vacuum in Afghanistan could have fateful consequences. Continued international engagement for financial support to Afghanistan

is, therefore, indispensable. The Afghan government must be helped with its urgent economic needs, and with its longer term goal of building a self-reliant economy.

Excellencies, The cause of peace and stability in Afghanistan would be greatly advanced with an inclusive intra-Afghan reconciliation process. We welcome and support the new Afghan leadership's call to the armed opposition for political talks with the government. The international community should also be unanimous in calling upon all Afghan stakeholders to seek a peaceful solution, as a return to the 1990s would be unacceptable. It cannot be stressed enough that reconciliation must be a truly Afghan-owned and Afghan-led process. Countries in the region and beyond can support and facilitate, in ways that Afghanistan suggests. Excellencies, The fraternal ties between the peoples of Pakistan and Afghanistan go back several millennia, and have been fortified by geographical proximity, cultural affinity, and shared history. Today, these are reinforced by the shared vision of our respective leaders for a comprehensive, forward-looking and enduring partnership. We are working constructively to build the edifice of such partnership – committed to address common challenges through common endeavors. We also have a common resolve to seize the historic opportunities before us and realize the immense untapped potential of our relationship. Our engagement on the bilateral plane is deepening -- as it encompasses peace and stability, counter-terrorism, counter drug efforts, border security and management, trade and economic cooperation, energy and connectivity, cultural and people-to-people exchanges. As countries situated at the confluence of major regions, Pakistan and Afghanistan also have a shared interest in enhanced regional cooperation. President Ashraf Ghani's visit to Pakistan in the coming weeks would take forward this process of engagement in concrete terms. Excellencies, The 'Heart of Asia' process has evolved into an important platform for our collective endeavors in support of Afghanistan's stabilization. We must all remain faithful to the common principles and commitments guiding the Istanbul Process. Pakistan's involvement with all the six CBMs is a manifestation of our abiding interest in promoting the shared goals of stability and prosperity in the Heart of Asia, through constructive regional cooperation. As co-lead with Kazakhstan on the Disaster Management CBM, Pakistan has been steering the agreed priority activities. We thank the member countries as well as supporting countries and organizations for their invaluable support. I do also wish to take this opportunity to express our deep appreciation for the wise stewardship provided to this process by China and Afghanistan as co-chairs since the Almaty Ministerial in 2013. As we move forward, Pakistan will further enhance its contributions and work closely with our "Heart of Asia" partners to help advance the cause of regional cooperation and confidence building. In consultation with the two co-chairs, China and Afghanistan, Pakistan has offered to host the Fifth Ministerial Meeting of the Istanbul Process. With renewed spirit of cooperation in the Heart of Asia region, Pakistan looks

forward to intensifying our joint efforts for peace and development of Afghanistan. I also reassure our brothers from Afghanistan that as they become masters of their destiny and continue their journey of peace and progress, the people of Pakistan will walk with them every step of the way. I thank you.”