



## TRANSCRIPT

### **Opening remarks delivered by the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan, Deborah Lyons at the High-Level Event on Regional Cooperation**

*[as delivered]*

**Geneva, 23 November 2020**

Your Excellency Mr. President, esteemed ministers and colleagues,

It is a pleasure to address you all today at this high-level event on regional cooperation. Effective engagement by regional countries will be crucial in promoting and sustaining a durable peace in Afghanistan. A stable and secure Afghanistan will have immense benefits for trade and transit cooperation in Central and South Asia. And closer links with the region will foster the necessary socio-economic conditions for the consolidation of peace.

The 2020 Afghanistan conference comes at an opportune moment, following the launch of intra Afghan negotiations, and amid a regional atmosphere marked by a renewed emphasis on political cooperation and economic diplomacy.

I am hoping that today's event will help showcase the many concrete benefits of regional engagement, in the areas of infrastructure, energy, water, trade and transit, health, and education.

To take just one area – infrastructure – it is clear that both Afghanistan and the region can draw immense benefits from the many power, energy, and road projects currently underway. Our map shows several key projects, including the TAPI pipeline, the CASA-1000 and TAP powerlines, the Five Nation railroad, Chabahar transport corridor, and the Lapis Lazuli corridor. They are a powerful symbol of progress towards integration and closer cooperation. This cooperation will be essential if Afghanistan is to realize its geographic potential as a regional hub of trade and economic activity.

This will become all the more important as Afghanistan moves towards peace. Because, as we all know, peace and regional cooperation are mutually reinforcing processes. Closer ties between Afghanistan and its neighbours in all domains can help build a regional environment that is conducive to the Afghan peace process. As the peace process unfolds towards an eventual agreement, the support of regional countries can also help consolidate the gains of peace, delivering real material benefits for the people of Afghanistan and the region. Cooperation between Afghanistan and its neighbours will be needed to provide for the safe return of Afghans to their homeland; to create a thriving private sector capable of generating employment for returnees and ex-combatants; and to create an enabling security environment in which peace can flourish.



At the same time, a peaceful Afghanistan is needed to realize the full potential of the regions of Central and South Asia. Stability in Afghanistan can help promote investor confidence and pave the way for increased foreign investment in key projects. Enhanced security would help lower the costs of trade and transit, allowing Afghanistan to realize the potential of its export industries such as agriculture and extractives.

Just as importantly, stability in Afghanistan is needed to allow an effective joint response to the many threats to peace and security in the region. In other fora, many of you have expressed concern about the ongoing challenges of terrorism, of violent extremism, and of transnational crime such as the trafficking of people and narcotics. Significant efforts have already been made to address these issues. But to tackle them effectively, the region needs a stable and secure partner in Afghanistan.

For our part, UNAMA has taken steps this year to reinvigorate its work with the region, bolstered by a robust regional cooperation mandate given to us by the Security Council. UNAMA has spearheaded an initiative to leverage the regional dimension of the UN family's work, in close cooperation with the governments of Afghanistan and its six bordering countries, as well as the UN Resident Coordinators. The aim of this initiative is to identify the concrete projects already underway within the UN family which can be leveraged in the service of regional cooperation. I have been gratified by the enthusiastic initial response from our counterparts in all six countries, and look forward to real progress.

Today's gathering therefore comes at a critical moment: here in Geneva and virtually, Afghanistan's international partners will meet over the next two days to discuss the future contours of development assistance to Afghanistan for the final four years of the Transformation Decade. The regional voices of your countries must be added to this discourse.

I am looking forward to today's discussions, and hope that this will be the start of an ongoing conversation for the mutual benefit of Afghanistan and its neighbours.

Thank you.

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