

Remarks by
HE Mohammad Khan Rahmani,
First Deputy Chief Executive,
The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
at the
WTO Tenth Ministerial Conference
Nairobi, Kenya
December 17, 2015

Your Excellency, Amina Mohamed, Chair of the WTO Tenth
Ministerial Conference,

Your Excellency, Director General, Roberto Azevêdo

Your Excellency Chair of the General Council, Ambassador Fernando
De Mateo

Distinguished Ministers, Ambassadors, and Heads of Delegations

Delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Firstly, I extend my profound gratitude to President Uhuru Kenyatta for hosting this conference here in Nairobi, and for the very warm welcome and hospitality exhibited by the Kenyan people.

As the First Deputy to Chief Executive Dr. Abdullah Abdullah of the National Unity government, it is a great honor for me to sign on behalf of our President, His Excellency Dr. Mohammad Ashraf Ghani, the Protocol of Accession of Afghanistan to the WTO pursuant to Article Twelve of the Marrakesh Agreement Establishing the World Trade Organization.

Today is indeed a historic day for the people of Afghanistan who have embraced democratic values and market economy principles. Our membership in the WTO will cement our long-standing commitment to open economy, transparency, rule of law, good governance, non-discrimination, and market instruments for the development of our

economy and private sector, and for the alleviation of poverty in Afghanistan.

WTO membership has always been an integral part of our overall strategic objectives to achieve economic stability, improve regional security and cooperation, and achieve everlasting peace.

We intend to maximize the benefits of WTO membership to support key aspects of our self-reliance strategy presented by our President and Chief Executive during the London Conference in December 2014.

Our President views the WTO process as an engine for achieving sound structural reforms and strengthening market instruments.

Our accession process lasted about eleven years. It was a learning experience for our country where significant capacity was built within our governmental institutions, private sector, academic institutions, and civil society organizations.

The reforms accomplished through this process have been enormous.

Allow me to start by thanking those who helped and accompanied us on this long journey. We are deeply appreciative of His Excellency Director General Roberto Azevêdo in making the accession of Least Developed Countries a priority and for supporting the completion of our accession by this ministerial conference.

We are very grateful to the esteemed Chairperson of our Working Party, His Excellency Mr. Roderick van Schreven, Ambassador of The Netherlands, for creating the conditions for constructive and productive negotiations with our trading partners, members of the WTO, and for helping us overcome accession bottlenecks.

We could not have been here today without the support, constructive approach, and the understanding of WTO Members of our development needs as a post-conflict, landlocked, and least developed economy. We deeply appreciate WTO Members for the dedication and flexibility that they exhibited during a very challenging negotiation process.

We are very thankful for the WTO Division of Accessions led by Mr. Chiedu Osakwe for its cooperative role in substantially facilitating our accession process. We commend the Division for its high degree of professionalism.

My last words of appreciation go to the numerous countries and international organizations for capacity building at various stages of our accession process, including the WTO, UN-ESCAP, International Trade Centre, China, the European Union, India, the Netherlands, and United Kingdom. We are very grateful for the extensive technical assistance and support and capacity building provided throughout the process by the United States Agency for International Development. We look forward to your continuing support in building technical capacity and establishing proper institutional mechanisms for handling post-accession matters.

Our commitment to liberal trade and international cooperation is not new. Afghanistan was at the heart of the old Silk Road. Historically, Afghanistan has been a land bridge in the region connecting East and West and Central Asia, to our north, with South Asia. As a good citizen of the WTO, we will live up to its rules and principles and uphold our traditions of facilitating trade and transit.

During the last fourteen years, our country has been gradually recovering due to the strong will and determination of the Afghan people for a better future and with the invaluable support of our international partners. These partners, along with the Afghan people, have made significant sacrifices toward our main goal of a peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan.

Together, we have made significant progress on multiple fronts in our effort at nation rebuilding and poverty alleviation.

Today, Afghanistan is a democracy with separation of power between three branches of Government: the executive, the legislative, and the

judicial. Strengthening our democracy is one of the principle reasons we sought WTO membership.

We have made women participation in government and business a priority. Many programs are presently underway to develop the capacity of Afghan women on a sustainable basis. *Twenty five* percent of the members of our parliament are women and more than a dozen women presently hold high-ranking positions within our government, *including four cabinet ministers*. The number of women-owned businesses has been constantly increasing. We have today *over 400* registered women-owned businesses, in addition to individual entrepreneurs.

Afghanistan provides equal opportunity to all without any discrimination. Afghanistan's labor law strictly prohibits child labor, and we have taken effective measures to enforce these provisions.

Our armed forces and internal security forces are stronger than ever, and have become very effective. The process of institutional rebuilding is nearing completion. Communal and state services for our citizens

have been improved, although it is true that we still have huge power shortages. Although major road construction projects have been completed linking major cities and key border points, we still have major infrastructure projects awaiting finance and execution, including irrigation systems and rail development.

We have undertaken many steps to curtail corruption and create greater fiscal efficiency in our public procurement system. We trust that the implementation of the WTO rules-based system will contribute to our campaign against corruption.

We have utilized our WTO accession process as an engine to shape our policies, laws, and institutions; to increase transparency; to strengthen the rule of law and legal protection of investors' rights, including property rights; and to guaranty access to administrative appeals as well as judicial and arbitral bodies. Today, we have a very favorable trade and investment regime with effective commercial laws and sound trade policies and laws based on WTO agreements.

We have also joined, and renewed our membership, in numerous international organizations relevant to international trade, We also ratified the Montreal Protocol for protection of the environment.

Developing regional trade has been a high priority for us during the last decade, particularly given our proximity to the most populated region in the world with over three billion consumers.

We are an active member of the South Asian Association for Economic Cooperation and we are signatories to the South Asia Free Trade Agreement with Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. We are also a member of the Economic Cooperation Organization with Azerbaijan, Iran, Pakistan, Turkey and the central Asian republics. In addition, we are a member of the Central Asian Regional Economic Cooperation framework.

We have maintained an open transit policy and facilitated connectivity within our region including major North-South energy transit projects.

We have recently launched the implementation of the Central Asia

South Asia (CASA one thousand) project which will supply South Asia with thousand megawatts of electric power from energy rich Central Asia. Four days ago, we inaugurated the launching of the construction of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) project which is a thousand eight hundred and fourteen kilometer gas pipeline.

Additional similar projects are being negotiated at this stage to increase regional trade and cooperation.

I would like to mention that three transport corridors under the framework of the Central Asian Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) framework cross the territory of Afghanistan and provide links between China, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and beyond these countries.

These corridors provide North-South and East-West transport links.

We are also at advanced stage of concluding negotiations of the Lapis Lazuli Transit and Transport corridor which links Afghanistan,

Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey.

Most of our current trade is with our regional partners. Although WTO membership will help us to diversify, we invite investors to our country to benefit from the access provided through the WTO and regional agreements as well as GSP preferences provided for Afghanistan by key WTO Members, including Canada, China, the Eurasian Economic Community (encompassing Belarus, Kazakhstan, and the Russian Federation), the European Union, Japan, India, South Korea and the United States. Those who trade with and invest in Afghanistan are pleased to find that we have a skilled and educated workforce and a relatively low cost of production, as well as a stable, predictable, and non-discriminatory business environment based on WTO principle and rules.

Indeed, there are tremendous opportunities for investment in Afghanistan, including in exploration, extraction, and processing of natural resources. Our natural resources reserves are estimated to be three trillion US dollars. In addition, we have significant opportunities in value-added industry in areas such as agro-processing, carpets,

construction materials, medical herbs, marble, and gemstones. There also opportunities in the service sphere including financial services, transport, construction, health, education, and logistics services. Our priority is to develop infant industries and grow a large-scale manufacturing and assembly base, which will create a large number of employment opportunities for the growing number of unemployed young persons.

In closing, I would like to stress that today Afghanistan is assuming its natural role in the world economy and will significantly contribute to the strengthening of the rules-based multilateral trading system. There is no doubt that an open economy will facilitate and accelerate development of Afghanistan. WTO membership has helped us create the conditions for attracting foreign investors and enabling economic development and growth.

We welcome investors to help us unlock our economic potential and exploit our comparative advantage to maximize economic growth.

Trade-led growth will create new economic opportunities and jobs, especially for women; it will reduce poverty, and increase prosperity. This will dissuade younger generations from being lured by terrorist organizations. It will certainly contribute in a major way to dramatically reduce extremism and achieve regional peace and security. We place high hopes in our WTO membership to help us in this regard.

WTO membership will strengthen and improve our relations with neighboring WTO countries. We encourage other neighboring countries to accelerate their WTO accession process in order to create a level playing field and maximize harmonization to the mutual benefit of all economies, economic actors, and consumers in the region. We have come a long way to integrate Afghanistan into the multilateral trading system. Our negotiations team, led by Deputy Minister Mozammil Shinwari, has done a phenomenal job in achieving our accession. Our nation is thankful for their hard work, dedication, and

professionalism in engaging all stakeholders in this process in a productive and constructive manner,

I would like to take this opportunity to express our profound gratitude to those countries and international organizations that have been aiding Afghanistan's recovery, reconstruction, development, and security.

We congratulate Liberia on completing its journey to become a WTO Member. Our congratulations also go to Kazakhstan for becoming a WTO Member on November 30, 2015.

Our President His Excellency Dr. Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive His Excellency Dr. Abdullah Abdullah present their compliments to His Excellency WTO Director General, and we all wish you and WTO Members a very successful ministerial conference.

Thank you very much.