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DELEGATION OF AFGHANISTAN

STATEMENT

1184th Meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council

Agenda items 1. and 2.

- Address by the

UNHCR Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, H.E. Volker Türk

- Address by the

IOM Senior Regional Adviser for Europe and Central Asia, Mr. Manfred Profazi

3 May 2018

Mr. Chair,

I thank you very much for expressing your condolences!

In twin bombings in Kabul on 30 April 2018, 29 people got killed and 50 persons were injured. Among those who lost their precious life were ten journalists who will be dearly missed in our capital. They worked for major media outlets such as Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Agence France Presse, BBC, Reuters and TOLO News. The important work done by journalists is critical for the development of Afghanistan and we have to make sure there will be more journalists to carry on with these important tasks.

On the same day, in Kandahar, 11 students were killed by another terrorist, and 16 other persons were wounded, including eight Romanian soldiers on patrolling mission.

Let me quote Ms. Adela Raz, Deputy Foreign Minister of Afghanistan, who stated the following after the attacks: *“My response to our enemies: you may kill me and you may threaten me, but you cannot win and you cannot take away my hope for tomorrow and my generation’s determination for change and prosperity.”*

Mr. Chair,

Let me now join previous speakers in thanking Mr. Volker Türk and Mr. Manfred Profazi for their comprehensive and insightful presentations. I also wish to seize this opportunity to express on behalf of the people and Government of Afghanistan the deepest gratitude to both UNHCR and IOM for their great efforts towards assistance for Afghan citizens in need.

Mr. Chair,

Decades of foreign interventions, wars, conflicts and terrorism in Afghanistan had forced millions of Afghan citizens to leave their homes in order to find safety either in other parts of the country or somewhere across the border, mostly in neighboring countries. Only a fraction of Afghan refugees had made their way into Europe or other places outside Asia.

The unprecedented movements of Afghan refugees into Europe in 2015 and 2016 largely originated in one of our neighboring countries and were primarily the result of maltreatment, lack of basic services and political pressure in this country, in large part related to the conflict in Syria.

At the same time, the ongoing precarious security situation in many areas of Afghanistan keeps driving our fellow Afghans from their homes. This is the result of the perpetual violence used against our people by up to 20 different terrorist groups operating in our country and which are sponsored from abroad.

Mr. Chair,

The Government of Afghanistan remains dedicated to achieve peace and stability in the country, including through proposals of peace. It is our goal to bring about meaningful change so that no Afghan citizen is forced to leave his or her home. We are also committed to establish sufficient absorption capacities and provide adequate post-arrival services in the areas of housing, education, jobs and health care, for all Afghan citizens willing to return. In order to achieve these goals, we kindly request the continuous assistance from our international partners:

1. We need resolute political pressure to stop all those who keep supporting terrorist groups operating on our soil;
2. We require continued training assistance and provision of equipment for our security forces and law enforcement agencies;
3. And we hope for increased levels of trade, investments in our educational system and infrastructure and connectivity, and foreign direct investments to stimulate our economy with a view to providing sustainable opportunities.

We remain optimistic about our future, safe in the knowledge that with the OSCE and a great number of its participating and Partner States on our side we have strong allies standing by us; and the same goes for UNHCR and IOM.

Mr. Chair,

The work of UNHCR in Afghanistan goes back to the 1980s, following the attempted occupation of our country by the Soviet Union. Today, the *“Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees”* to support voluntary repatriation, sustainable reintegration and assistance to host countries, which was developed in 2012 by the Governments of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, with key assistance from UNHCR, aims at supporting voluntary repatriation; providing access to shelter and essential social services for refugees, returnees and host communities; improving and diversifying livelihood opportunities and enhanced food security; securing social and environmental protection of refugees and returnees; providing assistance and support to host communities; as well as facilitating capacity development of national authorities, associations, organizations and communities concerned with refugees, returnees and host communities.

We thank the UNHCR office of the Representative in Kabul as well as the UNHCR sub-offices in Herat and Mazar-e-Sharif for their continued efforts and excellent co-operation in ensuring that returns to Afghanistan take place in a voluntary, safe, gradual and dignified manner; in protecting IDPs; and in providing urgently required relief items and emergency shelter assistance to the most vulnerable groups.

Mr. Chair,

IOM has had a presence in Afghanistan since 1992, with offices in nine of our 34 provinces, and we closely co-operate with IOM to address migration-related challenges and humanitarian emergencies, while improving living conditions for vulnerable groups and persons with specific needs. Since the beginning of this year, IOM helped with co-ordinating the return of more than 200,000 undocumented Afghan refugees from Pakistan and Iran, and IOM is preparing to scale up capacities in light of an anticipated surge in returns in the coming months, and also with a view to implementing the targets of the UN *2018-2021 Humanitarian Response Plan for Afghanistan*. We thank the OSCE participating and Partner States Australia, Denmark, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States for providing funding for IOM activities in Afghanistan. Let me here also highlight our close collaboration with the IOM Country Office in Austria. The IOM *RESTART II project* provides reintegration support for voluntary returnees from Austria to Afghanistan and Iran. The project started on 1st January 2017 and shall run until 31st December 2019.

Mr. Chair,

In October 2016, Afghanistan and the European Union issued the *Joint Way Forward* declaration on migration issues between Afghanistan and the EU. Afghanistan remains fully committed to the terms of the declaration. However, given the current extraordinary tense security situation in Afghanistan, we would like to encourage giving consideration to the idea of suspending forced repatriations until the security situation has improved.

The Afghan Mission in Vienna will continue to actively contribute in managing the situation of Afghan refugees, in close co-ordination with UNHCR, IOM and also the ICMPD, and we appreciate any policy input from all other Vienna-based organizations, including the OSCE.

Finally, Mr. Chair, let me say that it is also in Afghanistan's best interest to prevent our young people from leaving Afghanistan as we need them to rebuild our country.

Thank you, Mr. Chair!