

**Transcript of Remarks by Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation
Sergey Lavrov at the Opening of the Special Conference on Afghanistan under
the Aegis of the SCO, Moscow, March 27, 2009**

Esteemed colleagues,

I cordially greet you in Moscow at this conference dedicated to the situation in Afghanistan, primarily from the vantage point of the terrorist and narcotic threat in the region. The conference is being held at the initiative of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization member states, which proceeded from an objective common to us all – to impart extra dynamics to the joint efforts of the international community in combating these threats. We are grateful that our proposal has met with such broad and active support.

First of all, allow me to fulfill the instruction of President of the Russian Federation Dmitry Medvedev and read out his congratulatory message.

“To the participants of the special conference on Afghanistan.

“I greet the conference participants.

“Your forum, convened in the Russian capital under the aegis of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is an important and much-needed event. You are to discuss a whole array of serious problems which directly affect the interests of both Afghanistan and other states of the region and the entire world community. Key ones among them are the struggle against terrorism, the illicit drugs traffic and transfrontier crime.

“Today the efforts of the Afghan people and government are concentrated on state and economic building. But to solve these tasks without ensuring stability and security across the territory of the country is impossible. And here Afghanistan, in our opinion, needs aid and support as never before.

“I am convinced that the outcomes of the conference will be a weighty contribution to efforts of the SCO members and observer countries and other states and international organizations aimed at assisting Afghanistan. For its part, Russia stands ready for joint active moves toward normalizing the situation in that country and ensuring its peaceful and constructive development.

“I wish you fruitful work.

D. Medvedev”

Esteemed colleagues,

Russia is in solidarity with the people and government of Afghanistan in their efforts to ensure security and put an end to terrorist activities and attempts by extremists to control individual areas of the country and create parallel power structures there. Of special significance is the fight against the traffic in drugs, from which the proceeds go to finance terrorist activities.

The people and government of Afghanistan with assistance from the international community are having in difficult conditions to tackle the tasks of state building and socioeconomic reconstruction and of drawing members of the entire spectrum of sociopolitical forces of the country and ethnic and religious groups into this joint work.

For an effective fight against terrorism and the narco-threat the fighting efficiency of the national army of Afghanistan, police and other law enforcement bodies has to be significantly increased along with strengthening their coordination and interaction with the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). Today as never before, it is important for Afghan security structures and the international military presences in accordance with the UN mandate by joint efforts to reverse the negative security situation, paying special attention to the inadmissibility of new civilian casualties.

We are convinced that to stabilize the situation a comprehensive approach is needed which combines the military suppression of terrorists, extremists and drug dealers with a wide-scale program of economic and social rehabilitation.

It is crucial to win the trust and support of the entire Afghan people.

Russia has always championed regional cooperation in the struggle against the threats of terrorism, drug trafficking and organized crime. This position today finds ever greater support in the world community and is confirmed in UN Security Council resolution 1868, adopted a few days ago.

It is only natural that the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which incorporates practically all of Afghanistan's neighbors, could not remain aloof from participation in the collective efforts. For several years now in the framework of the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group the tasks of fostering cooperation in the fight against common threats, including along the perimeter of the Afghan borders, have been considered. In this spirit – through joint work with Kabul, not by creating any “sanitary cordons” – the SCO and CSTO suggest creating antinarcotics, antiterrorist and financial security belts in the region. This proposal has been given a practical tilt in the SCO-Afghanistan Statement and Action Plan, which were endorsed yesterday and circulated today among the participants of our conference. We are inviting all concerned states and international organizations to take part in carrying out the measures set forth in these documents.

Of special significance for the neutralization of the terrorist threat in the region is building up cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan with active support from the international community. We hail the good-neighborly dialogue between Kabul

and Islamabad and hope for the reinvigoration of coordinated military and civilian measures to suppress the subversive activities of extremist groups in the Afghan-Pakistani border area.

The success of these efforts is especially needed in the current pre-election period in Afghanistan. Holding the presidential and provincial elections in conformity with the generally accepted international standards, with effective security and consideration for the interests of the entire polyethnic and multiconfessional Afghan society, would have an immense significance for stabilization in the country and would be the best answer to extremists' attempts to create a power vacuum.

We understand the urgency of achieving national reconciliation in Afghanistan. At the same time we are convinced that we should all firmly support the position of President Hamid Karzai that the indispensable criteria for participation in this process must be renunciation of violent actions, a total rupture of all ties with Al-Qaida, and recognition of the Constitution and laws of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. Of course, the sanctions regime, established by UN Security Council resolutions, should be strictly observed.

Afghan drug trafficking has become a major security threat for the countries of Central Asia and the Russian Federation. Efforts that are being made to combat this evil are so far insufficient. We consider it necessary to substantially enhance the effectiveness of external support for the efforts of the Afghan authorities to combat illegal drug production and smuggling. We count on the practical realization of the decisions to increase ISAF antinarcotics operations, adopted by the NATO countries' defense ministers in Budapest in October last year.

In their turn, the SCO and CSTO member states are taking extra measures to fight the narco-threat. The antinarcotics Operation Kanal being conducted under the aegis of the CSTO is now shifted onto a regular basis. Afghanistan has joined it, along with many NATO and EU countries as observers. The SCO-Afghanistan Action Plan endorsed yesterday envisages a whole set of practical steps in such areas as the exchange of information, joint operations, drugs trade monitoring, counteraction against the legalization of drug trafficking proceeds, and the training of personnel for antinarcotics structures.

We hail the increased world community attention to the task of preventing the supply of precursors to Afghanistan, which Russia has consistently been advocating. We propose that additional steps should be taken to develop public-private partnerships in the antinarcotics sphere, to work out a "code of conduct" for the chemical industry, to shut off the financial channels for the narco-industry and to ensure the inevitable punishment of drug barons. We presented the relevant initiative at the recent session of the United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs.

The holding of the conference precisely today has special significance for our country. Exactly ninety years ago Russia and independent Afghanistan embarked on the official formalization of diplomatic relations. In 1919 Emir Amanullah of Afghanistan

in a message to the head of the Russian Government wrote: “Human relationships for the removal of mutual needs are a natural requirement of the human race, especially in this century, when the boon of civilization, presaging happiness, calls on peoples to unite and establish friendly relationships.” Prophetic words, relevant as never before to this day.

All these years, friendship and cooperation between the Russian and Afghan peoples, despite the heavy ordeals of the last century, were enriched and grew stronger. Enough to recall the more than 140 industrial, energy, health and education projects built in Afghanistan with aid from our country. In August 2007 Russia wrote off more than 10 billion dollars in Afghan debt. We are helping the Afghan people today as well, particularly to cope with food shortages; we are engaged in transport and energy construction in Afghanistan, the restoration of education facilities and the training of Afghan specialists.

We are going to continue to render many-sided friendly support to Afghanistan. Several days ago in Kabul the Afghan Foreign Minister, Rangin Dadfar Spanta, and I signed the Intergovernmental Agreement on Cooperation between Russia and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in Combating the Illicit Trade in Narcotic Drugs. Russian territory is open for transit of nonmilitary cargo for ISAF needs. We are ready to constructively consider other forms of cooperation as well.

We expect the outcomes of the present conference to contribute specifically to more effective and better concerted international efforts, with the coordinating role of the United Nations, in support of the revival of Afghanistan as a democratic and stable state living in peace and harmony with its neighbors and capable to ensure its security on its own. We are convinced that using the capacity of the SCO in close cooperation with all the states and organizations represented in this hall would correspond to the interests of achieving these objectives.