

**Statement by H.E. Noor Rahman Akhlaqi, Minister of Refugees and Repatriation of the Islamic
Republic of Afghanistan**
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(5-9 October 2020)

*Mr. Chairperson, Marc PECSTEEN,
Mr. High Commissioner, Filippo Grandi
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

It is a great honor for me to address you today, for the first time, representing the Government and the people of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

Excellencies,

As you may know, the long-awaited intra-Afghan peace talks were formally opened on 12 September. These first ever direct negotiations between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Taliban — to end four decades of devastating war - offer a historic window of opportunity, ushering in renewed hope for peace and stability among Afghan people, including refugees.

The Afghan government is - more than ever before- committed to ending violence, ensuring lasting peace, and expanding the hard-won gains and progress Afghanistan has achieved in the past 19 years. We hope for an immediate, comprehensive and nationwide ceasefire that benefits all Afghans and contributes to regional stability and global security. The people of Afghanistan, through this process, sincerely hope for the realization of their long sought-after aspiration for a peaceful Afghanistan.

Decades of forced displacement from Afghanistan, internally and externally, primarily to neighboring countries, have made our region host to one of the largest and most protracted displaced populations in the world. I would like to thank Pakistan and Iran for their generosity and underline that voluntary and dignified return remains our most preferred solution. Our vision for the road ahead is clear. A peaceful, prosperous and secure Afghanistan will bring new opportunities for all and put a real end to the protracted displacement of Afghans which has by now entered its fifth decade. We have long held the belief that the solution for Afghan refugees lies with their voluntary, safe and dignified return to Afghanistan.

Afghan refugees indeed hold a long-lasting desire to return home whenever conditions are conducive. The return of some 5.3 million Afghan refugees since 2002 speaks to that reality. Their sense of belonging and compassion for their country is unwavering and transcends the boundaries of time, despite decades of displacement abroad. This desire to return must be supported; and solutions inside Afghanistan — notably robust support for sustainable reintegration - must remain at the center of our joint and targeted efforts. Return and reintegration of Afghan citizens is therefore one of our highest national priorities.

Mr. Chair,

Despite the many formidable challenges including Covid19 confronting Afghanistan today, there are also critical opportunities such as the upcoming 2020 Conference on Afghanistan. We have made sustained efforts to firmly embed the needs and the imperative of solutions for returnees and IDPs into the national development strategies and plans, including the Second Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework for 2021-2025 (ANPDF II) as well as relevant National Priority Programmes (NPPs).

ANPDFII, a five-year framework that defines the development priorities of our country, recognizes and reaffirms our commitment to solutions for millions of displaced Afghans and includes key components to enable sustainable return and reintegration.

Mr. Chair,

Let me assure you that the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan is staunchly committed to ensuring voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration of all displaced Afghans. With your support, over the years we have implemented a solutions-oriented response that has tangibly improved conditions for returning refugees and internally displaced Afghans.

In line with the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees, and more recently the SSAR Support Platform we have identified and prioritized 20 priority areas of return and reintegration (PARRs) where and targeted humanitarian-development-peace investments can enhance the absorption capacity and bolster the reintegration prospects with significant and immediate impact on the lives of entire communities, including returning refugees, IDPs and local communities.

As we take firm steps to pursue peace and stability in Afghanistan, the reinvigorated support of the international community is needed more than ever before. We are truly heartened that ten States and other stakeholders have already joined the Core Group of the SSAR Support Platform, in a clear demonstration of continued solidarity and support for Afghan refugees and their host communities.

Excellencies,

Before I conclude, I would like to recall once more the role that our donor and neighboring countries have played over the years to provide continued support and a temporary home for Afghan refugees. We owe them a huge debt of gratitude.