



Speech of:

H.E. Hamid Karzai

Honorable President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
at the Inaugural Session of
THE SIXTEENTH SAARC SUMMIT

Thimphu, Bhutan
April 28-29, Bhutan



**In the name of Allah, Most Merciful and Compassionate,
Honorable Prime Minister Jigmi Y. Thinley,
Excellencies Heads of State and Government,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is a great pleasure for me and my delegation to be among you today in beautiful Bhutan, a country known for the protection of its environment.

In echoing the sentiments of previous speakers, may I express my gratitude to His Majesty King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck and the people of Bhutan for their warm and generous hospitality.

Excellency Jigmi Y. Thinley, I congratulate you on your election as the chairperson of the 16th Summit of SAARC. I am confident that under your wise leadership, our Summit will become another milestone towards accomplishing the ideals of SAARC.

Allow me, Mr. Chairman, to take the opportunity to thank His Excellency President Mahinda Rajapaksa for his astute and enlightened leadership of our Association since 2008.

I also wish to thank His Excellency Dr. Sheel Kant Sharma for his efforts to make SAARC a more effective and efficient instrument for cooperation among us.

Over the past few days, our officials and ministerial delegations have worked on decisions to provide direction for our collective response to our region's existing and emerging challenges.

The most challenging threats we all face are that of terrorism, extremism, narcotics, and organized crime. I believe that SAARC is a platform for us to join our forces to combat these threats together. Our collaboration under SAARC can yield tangible and concrete solutions to the problems of poverty, human suffering and deprivation in our region.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The terrorist attacks over the past two years in Kabul, Islamabad, Mumbai and elsewhere were yet again gruesome reminders that terrorism

continues to find place in our region. It has escalated in reach and become audacious in its attempts to destabilize our societies. It is not confined to one place. We are all increasingly vulnerable to the destruction and suffering that it causes.

In previous addresses to this august assembly, I have called attention to the fact that extremism and terrorism are the biggest threats to peace and prosperity in our region. I have urged that we set aside our differences so that we may decisively defeat terrorism. So long as we are unable to do so, the well-being, stability, and the future of our societies will remain hostage to its attacks.

Consequently, I urge that we show greater collective resolve to combat all forms and manifestations of terrorism in our region. I believe the SAARC Regional Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism and its Additional Protocol offer an excellent platform for practical regional cooperation to eliminate this scourge from our midst. However, we will not succeed in achieving this goal until all members of SAARC, without exception or reservation, commit not to allow their territories to be used directly or indirectly to shelter, arm or train terrorist

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networks. I have cautioned on numerous occasions that the wild fire of terrorism will not discriminate in choosing its target.

Defeating terrorism cannot be achieved by military means alone. We must also address conditions that are conducive to exploitation by terrorists. We must restrict the pool of individuals who, because of grievances or a sense of alienation and marginalization become easy prey for terrorist indoctrination.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Having suffered three decades the destructive

consequences of war and international terrorism, the people of Afghanistan crave for peace and security. To fulfill these desires, my government is pursuing an agenda for peace and reconciliation aimed at encouraging the armed opposition to lay down their arms, accept Afghanistan's Constitution, return to civilian life and contribute to the rebuilding of their war-scarred country.

To this end, we will convene a Consultative Jirga on Peace. The event will bring together Afghans from all over the country and from all walks of life. The counsel and support of these important stakeholders will give momentum to our action for peace and reconciliation.

Peace, security and prosperity of each one of us provides opportunities to the rest of us. A peaceful and secure Afghanistan is to the benefit of the entire region. In this regard, we look forward to the support of our neighbors and regional partners for our peace and security agenda.

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Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Regional cooperation continues to be a major pillar in our efforts towards peace and stability in our region. Afghanistan is determined to share its favorable location, as a regional land-bridge to help unlock the tremendous economic potentials and opportunities that exist in our region. Over the past eight years, we have rebuilt our network of roads and highways. We plan not only to expand and improve this network, but also to construct rail links that will connect us to our neighbors and beyond. We are positioned to be a



transport hub for trade between South and Central Asia. However, so long as bottlenecks exist for the expeditious overland movement of goods, the full benefit of these and other transport infrastructure improvements for regional connectivity will not be felt.

I am confident that the implementation of SAFTA and signing of the SAARC Agreement on Trade in Services will significantly help us move forward towards trade facilitation and cooperation in our region.

Afghanistan recently ratified a number of SAARC instruments, among them the SAARC's Development Fund Charter. We are delighted that SDF has become fully operational. Afghanistan supports the Secretary General's efforts towards "project-based regional cooperation".

We welcome the fact that the SAARC Food Bank will be fully operational in the near future. Whilst the establishment of the Food Bank represents a step in the right direction, only increased agricultural productivity will help us overcome food shortages and hunger in our region. Afghanistan wishes to see wider and more rigorous cooperation and exchange of know-how on irrigation, agricultural methods, and related cost-effective technologies.

The involvement of the private sector is important to our ability to achieve regional economic prosperity. We welcome the establishment of SAARC Arbitration Council, which will enhance private-sector confidence and promote investment in our economies.

Mr. Chairman,

I want to thank you and the Royal Government of Bhutan for making Climate Change the theme of this summit. Today, an ever important challenge to South Asia and the world at large is how to deal with the impact of climate change on the habitat and livelihoods of our peoples. Addressing the multifaceted challenges of climate change is an imperative.

We welcome the signing of the SAARC Convention on Cooperation on Environment and look forward to the finalization of other related SAARC documents including the SAARC Agreement on Rapid Response to

Natural Disasters. These documents can provide the foundations for our collective effort to combat the effects of Climate Change.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Some countries in our region have become energy deficient while others have enormous untapped energy resources. Though our Association has repeatedly recognized that energy security is important for sustained growth in our region, we have made slow progress in power transfer, grid connectivity, and the construction of gas and oil pipelines. Afghanistan believes that the time has come for the much discussed regional energy projects to become realities. We also believe that it is time that we collaborate more effectively to tap renewable sources of energy, which our region has in abundance.

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Mr. Chairman,

A notable success of our Association is the people-to-people contact that has flourished under its auspices. More and more of our professionals are interacting with their counterparts in our region. This exchange promotes the spirit of community and fraternity among our peoples. It brings together their imagination, ingenuity and enterprise for solutions to our common problems.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Peace, security, and commitment to the greater good are prerequisites for unlocking the enormous potential of our region's human and natural resources. Let the Bhutan Summit be remembered as the occasion on which we rose more united in our commitment to peace, happiness and well-being for our peoples.

Thank you. ■