

Kazan Declaration 2023: Paving a Path for Afghanistan's Future

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Cover Image Attribute: Group photo of the participants at Kazan Declaration 2023/ Source: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation.

On September 29, in a significant display of regional diplomacy and cooperation, special representatives and high-ranking officials from various countries convened in Kazan, Russia, for the fifth meeting of the Moscow format on Afghanistan. The central theme of this

gathering was the pressing need to address the complex situation in Afghanistan, focusing on regional security, economic development, and humanitarian aid. The event marked an opportunity for key players to discuss the way forward for the war-torn nation.

Among the notable attendees was Amir Khan Muttaqi, Afghanistan's Acting Foreign Minister, who actively participated in the discussions. The roster of participants included Russia, India, China, Iran, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, while Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey were invited as special guests.

Agenda of the Moscow Format

During the meeting, participants shared their perspectives on the ongoing challenges in Afghanistan, emphasizing regional security concerns and the nation's role in regional economic initiatives. A key point of consensus emerged - a call for the immediate and unconditional release of Afghan assets by Washington and its allies, who bear primary responsibility for the country's post-conflict reconstruction. Additionally, participants collectively rejected any notion of the return of US and NATO military forces to Afghanistan or neighboring countries, regardless of the pretext.

The need to intensify counter-terrorism and anti-drug efforts was underscored, with all attendees committing to continued humanitarian aid to Afghanistan. The meeting concluded with adopting the *"Kazan Declaration of the Moscow Format Consultations on Afghanistan."*

Paving a Path for Afghanistan's Future

Special representatives and high-level officials expressed profound concern about Afghanistan's challenging security environment, particularly the growing activities of terrorist groups, notably ISIS. They commended the current Afghan authorities for their efforts in combating ISIS. They urged them to persist in their fight against all forms of terrorism, emphasizing the importance of preventing Afghanistan from becoming a hotbed of instability and terrorism threatening regional stability.

Participants also acknowledged reports of reduced poppy cultivation in Afghanistan due to the current Afghan authorities' effective actions. Emphasizing the significance of an authentic and effective anti-drug policy, they called for tackling industrial drug production, recognizing the gravity of this challenge.

Further, attendees called for enhanced cooperation between the current Afghan authorities and regional countries in combating terrorism and drug trafficking stemming from Afghan

territory, firmly opposing any external support for terrorism within Afghanistan.

Unfortunately, limited progress was noted in the formation of an inclusive government in Afghanistan that genuinely represents the interests of its diverse ethnic and political groups. Despite the appointment of individuals from various Afghan backgrounds, political diversity still needs to be improved. The declaration urged the Afghan authorities to engage in constructive dialogues with representatives of alternative ethnic and political groups to facilitate a peaceful resolution and the creation of a more inclusive, accountable, and responsible government.

Building a Better Future for Afghanistan

The Kazan Declaration underscores the call for the Afghan authorities to create conditions that improve the well-being of the Afghan people, deter further migration, and facilitate the return of refugees. It reaffirms the belief in upholding fundamental rights and freedoms in Afghanistan, including equal access to work, education, and justice, irrespective of gender, ethnicity, or religion.

Concerns about restrictions on women's employment and girls' education were raised, with a call for promoting modern education aligned with international standards.

Participants acknowledged the UN Secretary-General's efforts to coordinate actions between international and regional partners in Afghanistan. Cooperation with non-regional actors is possible if the US-led Western coalition, whose actions over the past two decades contributed to Afghanistan's current crisis, acknowledges and assumes responsibility for post-conflict reconstruction. This includes unfreezing Afghan national assets and promptly lifting unilateral sanctions.

In a unified stance, the countries voiced their support for Afghanistan as an independent, united, and peaceful nation while firmly opposing the establishment of military infrastructure facilities by third countries in Afghanistan or its neighboring states under any pretext. They also highlighted the importance of bolstering bilateral and multilateral economic ties and emphasized the need to continue providing humanitarian aid to Afghanistan.

The declaration notably recognized Iran's proposal to enhance regional cooperation on Afghanistan through the establishment of a regional contact group to address shared interests. As these regional powers unite in their pursuit of a more stable and prosperous Afghanistan, the Kazan Declaration stands as a testament to their commitment to shaping a brighter future for the nation and the broader region.

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