

**Closing remarks by the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Central Asia, Head of UNRCCA, Natalia Gherman
at the international conference
“Central Asian Connectivity: Challenges and New Opportunities”
(Tashkent, 20 February 2019)**

Your Excellency, Minister Kamilov,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear Mr. Minister,

It was my honour as head of the United Nations Mission for the region to join with the Government of Uzbekistan in organizing and hosting this event.

Allow me to join you in congratulating and offering my gratitude to all of you for your active and energetic participation in our international conference on Central Asian Connectivity over the course of the past two days.

Throughout the conference, I have been deeply impressed by the contributions you have all made. The “Spirit of Samarkand” continues to be an impressive force.

I would like to sum up our deliberations in a few words – regional cooperation is the key to long-term peace, stability and sustainable development.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Regional cooperation depends on trust. Let me commend the leadership of each country for manifesting trust and political will to pursue the path of regional cooperation.

The United Nations and the rest of the international community can encourage and support you. But the core work will have to be done by the Central Asian states themselves.

Let me reiterate a suggestion that most of the speakers made. You may wish to consider an approach that is at a higher, more structured level. Convening the summit of

Central Asian Heads of State, already in its second year, is an important step in this direction. But even more can be done to create a durable mechanism for regional cooperation for the long-term.

Regular, ongoing meetings at all levels, including at the level of Government, Parliament, civil society and academia can become permanent. This could help to make the current positive dynamics in Central Asia irreversible.

This region has a great advantage over many other regions around the world. Sometimes the countries of other regions disagree or cannot even identify the key problems they face, let alone ways to address them.

Here, in this region, the problems are well known. All of the key stakeholders agree on the major issues that must be on the regional agenda. While solutions may sometimes remain elusive, there is often broad agreement on the general way forward. Further, there is great potential for increasing stability thanks to the fact that the people of Central Asia know how to cherish peace.

More attention, work and resources are needed, but you should be proud of what you have already accomplished. Thanks to your efforts, your region is already emerging as a model for the rest of the world in many different aspects.

The ongoing development of regional cooperation throughout Central Asia – including with Afghanistan and other neighbouring states – stands as a positive example in a world that is otherwise at an increasingly confusing and conflicting point in time.

We are all watching events unfolding in this region with great interest. UN Secretary-General Guterres visited the region in June 2017 within six months of taking office, in large part to recognize and encourage the ongoing positive regional dynamics. The governing structures of the United Nations, including the UN Security Council, are committed to your countries' continued success.

In this context, allow me to highlight the resolution of the General Assembly of the United Nations from June 2018 on “Strengthening regional and international cooperation to ensure peace, stability and sustainable development in the Central Asian region.”

This resolution stands as clear affirmation from the rest of the world that this region is on the right track.

It praises the efforts of the countries of Central Asia towards regional cooperation, strengthening regional security and stability and fostering sustainable development.

It calls for “closer and more coordinated cooperation between the States of Central Asia, as well as between them and international and regional organizations.”

Our conference is a useful contribution towards fulfilling the vision put forward in the resolution.

But our work is not done.

In my opening remarks to this conference, I invited you all to join in a coalition to provide ongoing support and stimulate regional cooperation to a new level in Central Asia.

Our results over the past two days clearly demonstrate the value such a coalition could have going forward. I sincerely hope that you will all maintain your commitment to this region and to the further development of regional cooperation in all of the spheres of your expertise.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

As Mr. Minister mentioned, when the Presidents of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan meet here in Tashkent at their summit in a few weeks' time, our work will be brought to the attention of the highest levels.

The preparatory process conceived and led by Uzbekistan for this summit has offered an extraordinary opportunity for all of us to positively contribute to shaping the agenda and providing a range of innovative, new approaches to some of the most pressing – and long-standing – challenges throughout Central Asia.

I hope that the host of the 2020 summit will continue on the basis of the precedents set this year.

Our conference today has met with great interest and generated important discussions and a range of innovative proposals across the entire spectrum of key regional issues.

Importantly, we have brought models of regional cooperation and international experiences that have much to share with stakeholders in Central Asia. By learning these

lessons, this region can avoid certain mistakes and build on a range of initiatives and efforts that have come before. Together we are stronger! – this is the best lesson learnt!

I was impressed by the spirit in the room in each of our plenary sessions, and even more so in the break-out sessions, where smaller groups were able to conduct sharply focused discussions in their respective areas. Thank you to the rapporteurs for your eloquent summary of each session.

Dear participants,

You have played an important role here in helping Central Asia, and we thank you sincerely. But, as I mentioned yesterday, you still have a role to play. I encourage you to bring the experiences of Central Asia to the wider world.

The benefits the five countries and the people of the region are reaping from increased connectivity and cooperation plainly show what other regions can also achieve if they work together.

In Central Asia, we are witnessing a rebirth of regional connectivity, an openness to engaging with neighbouring states and neighbouring regions and vital political will at the highest levels to maintain positive regional dynamics.

I would like to address the Central Asian Member States to do all that you can to keep the momentum going. If you agree that a more structured multilateral process is desirable, you will pursue that avenue.

But regardless of what you choose, the United Nations and the international community as a whole will proudly stand with you and do what we can to support your efforts.

Regional cooperation is not only possible, but it holds the key to resolving many seemingly intractable problems around the world.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I thank you all for your participation, your enthusiasm, your creativity and imagination, and, most of all, your commitment to peace, security and sustainable development in Central Asia.

I hope that this region can count on your continuing support.

Thank you.