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## Transcript: Karzai Addresses Joint Session of Congress

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*Afghan president Hamid Karzai addressed a joint session of Congress this morning. The following is a transcript of his remarks.*

KARZAI: Thank you. Thanks a lot.

Thank you for the great honor.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Vice President, members of Congress, distinguished guests, the great people of the United States of America, it is my distinct honor to speak on behalf of the Afghan people in this august assembly.

I thank you and the people of this great country for your generosity and commitment to our people. You have supported us with your resources, with your leadership in the world community and, most importantly, with the precious lives of your soldiers.

(APPLAUSE)

With your support, Afghanistan has accomplished a number of significant achievements. We have begun to rebuild our schools. Over 5 million children, boys and girls, are attending school today.

(APPLAUSE)

We have also commenced to develop health centers to provide basic services to our people, especially to our women and children who have suffered the most during the decades of war and turmoil.

(APPLAUSE)

We have embarked upon the reconstruction of our roads to encourage traders and businessmen to transport products to markets.

We have started to reconstitute our national army, our national institutions, national police in order to both defend our sovereignty and provide security to our citizens.

Our national army is being trained by American forces, American troops, and wherever we have deployed them, the Afghan people have welcomed them.

We have initiated the fight against narcotics to save our children, to save your children and children across the world from the evil of addiction to drugs.

(APPLAUSE)

KARZAI: The confidence of our citizens in the future of our country is clearly signified by the return of 3 million refugees in the past two years.

Once again, ladies and gentlemen, Afghanistan is the home of all Afghans.

(APPLAUSE)

And to illustrate further, we have today in Afghanistan our former king back in his old home. We have today in Afghanistan the leaders of the former resistance of Afghanistan against the Soviet Union. We have also millions of refugees who left Afghanistan because of tyranny and invasion. They're all back in their country, and more are returning.

Ladies and gentlemen, Afghanistan has emerged from a very dark era, one of oppression and terror.

We have adopted an enlightened constitution establishing a democratic Islamic government. It guarantees equal rights and equal protection for every citizen of our country.

With your support, men and women of Afghanistan have now equal rights before the law and the constitution. The new constitution replaces the Taliban-imposed gender discrimination by assigning 25 percent of the seats in our future parliament for women.

(APPLAUSE)

Together, we have furthered democracy by creating a climate where 35 percent of the voters so far registered for our election are women.

(APPLAUSE)

And as I speak today, ladies and gentlemen, I received a report this morning from the election commission: In the central part of the country, the registrars for voting are more than 50 percent women.

KARZAI: And in the rest of the country they are more than 30 percent.

And as this process continues until September, we will have at least 6 to 7 million people registered, and I'm sure we will reach nearly 50 percent of them to be women.

(APPLAUSE)

We have secured an open and inclusive society, where minority languages are accorded official recognition and where the press enjoys unprecedented freedom.

We, the Afghan people, have once again established ourselves as a proud and sovereign nation.

(APPLAUSE)

And without your support and commitment, and without the partnership between our two nations, none of this would have been achieved.

Ladies and gentlemen, together we have come a long way, but our common journey is far from over.

Many obstacles exist and numerous milestones remain to be reached before we can fully realize our shared vision of a stable, prosperous and democratic Afghanistan. We have to travel further.

Private militias pose a threat to the consolidation of stability and democracy in our country. They continue to oppress people and challenge law, order and government authority.

The Afghan people demand and insist on disarming and demobilizing private militias. Only with your support, and that of the international community, can we achieve this necessary goal.

We are also confronted with the evil of narcotics. Drug profits finance private militias, terrorists and extremists. Drug profits undermine our efforts to build a healthy and legitimate national economy. Drugs threaten the lives and future of children, yours and ours.

We are determined to cleanse Afghanistan from this menace.

(APPLAUSE)

In the economic dimension, despite our achievements over the past two and a half years, we continue to be one of the poorest countries.

KARZAI: We still have the second highest infant and maternal mortality rates in the world. We have one of the highest illiteracy rates. Very few Afghans have access to safe drinking water.

While our country has a rich hydro-electric potential, oil, gas and coal reserves, only 6 percent of the Afghans have reliable access to electricity.

While Afghanistan has great rivers, our farmers, ironically, suffer from a shortage of water.

Even now, our vast mineral resources, such as iron ore, copper and precious stones, remain undeveloped.

Our delicious fruits are not reaching major markets due to the lack of refrigeration and proper marketing.

Ladies and gentlemen, these are significant impediments, yet we are confident that with your continued support and commitment, we the Afghan people will overcome them as we have triumphed over other challenges in the past two years.

To succeed, we ask for your continued investment. Afghanistan is open for business, and American companies are most welcome.

Together, we will make Afghanistan a great success and an enduring example of a prosperous, democratic society.

(APPLAUSE)

Our shared success in Afghanistan is vital to achieving victory over the greatest menace the world faces today: terrorism and extremism.

(APPLAUSE)

Long before the horrific tragedy of September 11, terrorists subjected the people of Afghanistan to unspeakable brutality and oppression. Even though we were among the most pious Muslims in the world, we were the first and foremost victims of Al Qaida.

KARZAI: In the name of Islam, a religion of peace and tolerance, they terrorized and killed the Muslim people of Afghanistan, and deprived us of our basic rights.

These atrocities continued for many years and the world remained unengaged.

The tragedy of September 11 once again tied the destinies of our two nations. You came to Afghanistan to defeat terrorism, and we Afghans welcomed and embraced you for the liberation of our country.

(APPLAUSE)

Together we ended the rule of terrorism.

Ladies and gentlemen, this was not the first time America confronted a great evil and rescued the world.

Two weeks ago, on Memorial Day, you remembered the hundreds of thousands of American soldiers who gave their lives for defending democracy and freedom around the world.

You led the world in eliminating fascism. You stood with the Afghan nation in our heroic fight against the former Soviet Union.

Just last week, we honored one of our great fellow freedom fighters in that struggle, the late President Ronald Reagan.

(APPLAUSE)

Today, the United States is once again leading the global effort to defeat terrorism and extremism.

Afghanistan is a central front in this war against terrorism. The Afghan people are and will remain with you in this struggle.

(APPLAUSE)

Ladies and gentlemen, in this great chamber in the house of the American people, democracy and liberty thrive.

KARZAI: Afghans are honored to have become partners in this noble tradition. The Afghan people will not forget your help, and will always remember and cherish your friendship.

The Afghan people desire to further build on this solid foundation of mutual trust and friendship, by creating a strong partnership between our two nations.

We must build a partnership that will consolidate our achievements and enhance stability, prosperity and democracy in Afghanistan and in the region. This requires sustaining and accelerating the reconstruction of Afghanistan, through long-term commitment, a free trade agreement between the United States and Afghanistan, and providing incentives to the private sector for investing in Afghanistan.

We must enhance our strategic partnership. The security of our two nations are intertwined.

In December of 2001, a U.S. bomb went astray and exploded a few meters from where I was staying. This was the last day of our resistance against the Taliban. This was the day that the Bonn process announced me as the chairman. This was the day the Taliban were to come and surrender.

And this was also the day that a stray bomb came to us and killed more than 20 of my people and also four U.S. soldiers.

And in the middle of all that confusion and pain, an old man walked up to me. I did not know him, I had not seen him before, and I have not seen him since then. He came up to me and said, "Mr. Karzai, go to the Americans, tell them that in a war like this things like that happen. Tell them not to lose heart. Tell them that we shall continue to fight, and we must win."

(APPLAUSE)

KARZAI: And, ladies and gentlemen, upon my arrival in the United States last week, I stopped at Fort Drum in New York to meet with some of your troops who had served in Afghanistan.

Senator Clinton graciously came to receive us. We honored two American soldiers who recently returned from Afghanistan, and who, a few months ago in Kandahar, were travelling in a vehicle.

Somebody, a terrorist, threw a grenade at them. The grenade landed in their vehicle. They took the grenade. Instead of throwing it into the street, where there were people around them, civilians, these heroic men stuck the grenade under their seat. The grenade exploded. Fortunately they survived, but they were badly injured.

To us, this is also the example of heroism and care for humanity, and we are proud of these two American soldiers.

(APPLAUSE)

These stories tell a tale of partnership, tell a tale of joint struggle, tell a tale of care and courage and care for humanity.

Ladies and gentlemen, together we have a long road ahead, but we will move forward to make the world a better place. And for us in Afghanistan, we remember you for every help that you have given us. And we will have that in our books written in golden letters.

In this road, the journey is one of success and victory.

KARZAI: And we both have triumphed and we will continue to triumph and win the war against terrorism, and make the world a better place for us and the rest of the world.

And may God bless America and Afghanistan and our two nations.

Thank you very much.

(APPLAUSE)

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