

Afghanistan Reconnected: 'Businesses Take Action to Unlock Trade in the Region'

NEW DELHI, 11 June 2015: In partnership with the Observer Research Foundation (ORF) and the EastWest Institute (EWI), FICCI will host a meeting in New Delhi on June 14-16, 2015 to engage with business leaders and parliamentarians from Afghanistan, Central Asia, Pakistan and India in a bid to promote political and economic cooperation in the region.

EWI's President-elect, Mr. Cameron Munter, former U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan, will lead the discussions at the meeting. The launch of 'Afghanistan Reconnected' will take place on June 15 at FICCI Federation House, in the presence of representatives from diplomatic missions to India and other distinguished guests. The keynote speakers would include Ambassador Jayant Prasad, former Ambassador of India to Afghanistan and Nepal and Mr. Vikram Sood, Adviser at the Observer Research Foundation (ORF).

The discussions will build upon the conclusions of previous high-level consultations held by EWI in 2013-14, which addressed the region's need for reforms and cross-border cooperation in the fields of energy, trade and infrastructure. New Delhi participants will include representatives from the private sector and parliamentarians from the region, who will meet and exchange recommendations with officials from various Indian Ministries.

"The 'Afghanistan Reconnected Process' is spurred by the conviction that security and economic development are interdependent. Afghanistan's future is indeed not only dependent on its own transformation, but also on reforms among and cooperation with its neighbors, which could unlock the economic potential of the region," said EWI's Vice President for Regional Security, Mr. Martin Fleischer.

"EWI's Advocacy and Outreach Missions have the goal of fostering such a demand-driven reform process. India is a crucial partner in this process, from which Afghanistan, the countries of the region and particularly India could greatly benefit," Mr. Fleischer added.

Highlighting the importance of regional cooperation toward rebuilding Afghanistan, Ms. Ambika Sharma, Joint Director General, FICCI, said, "We firmly believe that regional cooperation and integration are critical elements to the economic and social future of Afghanistan and its neighbours. Engaging the private sector in this process would act as a catalyst to create a new dynamism for peace and socioeconomic progress across the region and has the potential to serve as a game changer."

She added that FICCI has been working pro-actively with Afghanistan both bilaterally and multilaterally under the umbrella of SAARC and the Heart of Asia Process to harness Afghanistan's potential as a possible driver of economic growth in the region.

"Afghanistan has faced war and disaster for more than three decades. There does not seem to be any end in sight to the country's problems without coordinated efforts by the rest of the world, including in large measure by the corporate sector," said Mr. Vikram Sood.

"This also requires a paradigm shift in the manner of assistance for Afghanistan's security and economic development. The two are interconnected and the assistance has to be the kind that Afghanistan needs and not what others may want to impose", stated Mr. Sood and added, "The priorities need to change and the rest of the world, including India, will need to show generosity in abundance and quickly."

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