Mr. Brandon Turner, head of UNITAR’s Hiroshima Office,  
Mr. Haruyuki Shimada of JICA’s Southeast Asian Department,  
Ms. Akiko Kawabe, First Secretary at the Embassy of Japan in Afghanistan,  
My Afghan brothers and sisters participating in UNITAR’s key fellowship program,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honor to address all of you today at this, the 77th Public Session of UNITAR, a group to which great appreciation is deserved for organizing a meaningful fellowship program. I believe that it is highly important for governments and international organizations to connect with the citizens of the world. 

I am therefore delighted to have been invited here, to the great and inspirational city of Hiroshima, to speak on a very important topic to a noble public that I and Afghans hold in the highest regard.

This public session’s theme is “Post-2014 Afghanistan and the Role of Japan.” I would therefore like to begin by establishing the context for our current situation. I will then discuss the goals for 2014 and beyond. Finally, I will share my thoughts on how our strong partnership with Japan, continued beyond 2014, can facilitate further progress.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Afghanistan is a nation that, like Japan, has a long history that has served as inspiration for many profound written works. Largely, the history of Afghanistan was characterized by peace, stability, and increasing prosperity. Our relationship with Japan also figured prominently in our history, becoming ever deeper and warmer since our 1930 signing of a friendship treaty. When Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress, then Their Imperial Highnesses the Crown Prince and Crown Princess, honored our nation with a visit in 1971, the Afghanistan they arrived in was a beautiful, developed country, and a strong trade partner of Japan.

Following the political turmoil of the Saur Revolution in 1978, in December of 1979, a violent reverse of our forward progress began. The military of the Soviet Union entered our territory and began the systematic destruction of our government and our natural and man-made structures, and forced scores of our people to seek refuge in other nations. Estimates place figures of around some 1.5 million killed and one fourth of our population fleeing during the decade of the Soviet invasion. The power vacuum that resulted from this led to continued fighting, more destruction, more bloodshed, and culminated
in the hijacking of our nation by a repressive regime. In short, the Afghanistan that once existed was only a memory.

Then, in 2001, this memory would be reawakened. Together with the support of international allies, the Afghan people rose up to reclaim stewardship over their own lives. On December 22nd of that year, in Bonn, Germany, the foundations for a new chapter of life through democracy were laid. Our citizens were again returned their ability to hope and work towards better lives.

Ladies and gentlemen,

You, the noble people of Hiroshima know very well about rebuilding. Your own achievements have helped nurture our drive as we have moved forward.

Despite the great challenges that we faced, since 2001, much has been accomplished. I would like to share a few examples.

Our people live longer and healthier lives. the maternal mortality ratio has decreased from 1,600 per 100,000 live births in 2001 to 327 per 100,000 live births in 2010, making Afghanistan’s one of the lowest regionally; the child mortality rate has decreased from 165 per 1,000 live births in 2001 to 66 per 1,000 live births in 2010; and the under-five mortality rate has decreased from 257 per 1,000 live births in 2001 to 84 per 1,000 in 2010. Life expectancy has also increased roughly twenty years.

Education is provided to more children than ever. In 2001 less than one million boys and virtually no girls received primary schooling; now around 10.5 million children are enrolled, and around 40% of them are girls.

Our GDP has increased more than tenfold to nearly 33.5 billion dollars.

Women have returned to their rightful place as partners in development, holding 28% of parliamentary seats. There are female ministers; ambassadors; doctors; teachers; members of our National Security Forces, including pilots; and valuable contributors in all sectors.

These heartening strides are the shared accomplishments of the Afghan people and our international friends who have supported and stood by us. It is through this partnership that these levels of improvements were possible. Within this international support, I would like to speak of the importance of our two esteemed hosts today, UNITAR and Japan, invaluable partners in our development.

The United Nations in general has contributed to an array of sectors, from providing humanitarian aid, to assisting in general development, to supporting our democratization, and beyond. UNITAR’s role has been extremely valuable, particularly in terms of capacity building. One of our nation’s potentially most-damaging legacies of conflict was the loss of much of our educated population
and the inability to educate people anew for decades. Rebuilding our nation as an Afghan-led process would therefore be a challenge. We did not lack, however, motivated young people capable of learning; we simply needed a way to unlock their potential. UNITAR has provided support in this regard, helping to empower many of our brightest and those who have the greatest capability to achieve.

Already many fellows from this program are actively working towards the betterment of our nation. With each new group, our nation becomes more one that is by the people and for the people. We look forward to seeing the results of this great current group.

Japan has been a leader among nations. A major contributor to an inclusive range of sectors, the effects of this partnership have been apparent and life-bettering. Japan has not only helped to fix problems, it has invested in our future. Japanese-built schools educated the leaders of tomorrow; Japanese hospitals and generous support to National Health Programmes such as polio eradication, TB and malaria control and immunization, have extended lives, allowing people to contribute more to society and to their families; and Japan has been a leader in helping with important projects such as the creation of the master plan of the new Kabul city.

Japan has also been a leader in terms of bringing other nations into our partnership, having hosted several key international conferences, most recently last summer. At last July’s Tokyo Conference on Afghanistan, over $16 billion was pledged through 2015 to help the Afghan people to fulfill the objective of filling the projected fiscal gap. Conference participants also committed to provide additional financial assistance to Afghanistan beyond 2016 at or near the levels provided in the past decade.

The connections are not only at the national level, but are warm and friendly at the local level as well. Hiroshima has been an active partner, hosting UNITAR and delegations, as well as offering knowhow and hope.

We are eternally grateful to these generous partners and to all internationally who have shown their friendship.

Ladies and gentlemen,

2014 is a significant year as Afghanistan moves into a new era in its history. In April of next year, in the latest display of the power of our people, there will be an election to choose a successor to H.E. President Hamid Karzai. Building upon his sage leadership, the Afghan people will chose who will steer the next 5 years.

2014 also begins the decade of transformation. This period is marked by our moves to become more self-reliant, particularly in terms of security and in relation to our economic needs.
In security, our goal is for our National Security Forces to be able to provide full security on their own: a goal that has required steady recruitment, capacity building, and equipping. Already we have progressed far in this area, as this year our security forces have taken over leadership of missions in all areas of the nation.

In terms of economic development, it is our goal by the end of the decade to be able to finance our own needs to the extent that other developing nations are able. Here too there is hope. As I mentioned before, we have shown promising economic growth since 2001.

In order to succeed in the decade of transformation, the strong commitments of our international partners, particularly including Japan, is vital.

Firstly, Japan can continue to support our capacity development. Hiroshima’s enduring partnership in this fellowship program, the extension and expansion of the PEACE scholarship program, and support of other trainings and exchanges at the national level and local levels will do much to bring further empowerment.

Secondly, Japan should remain a committed partner in our development in the long-term. Japan’s involvement has proven to be inspirational for our people because of your legacy of resilience, but also inspirational for the international community, securing other nations’ prolonged support. Japan can also help by creating a situation where Japanese private investment can increase. Our nation possesses a vast amount of natural resources, including energy resources, rare earths, precious metals, gems, and more. H.E. President Karzai personally declared last year that Japan, as a favored partner, would receive preferential treatment in investments and these reasonable, high-quality resources can help to give Japanese industry a competitive advantage globally.

Our resources and our domestic industry will be crucial in providing the economic boost necessary.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In closing, I would like to state that a continued partnership is a rewarding prospect for both Afghanistan and Japan, for the region, and for the world. Ensuring peace and stability in our nation facilitates greater peace and stability for all other nations and peoples. We all stand to benefit.

Allow me here to once again express my great appreciation to the hosts of this great public session, Mr. Turner and UNITAR and the leadership of Hiroshima, as well as to all of you who have joined us tonight.

Thank you and God Bless.