North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Opening remarks

by General Hulusi Akar, Turkish Chief of the General Staff
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Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to Turkey. We are delighted to host the NATO Military Committee CHODs' Conference today in Istanbul.

I believe that we have gathered for this conference in the right place and at the right time.

This is the right place because Turkey is the only NATO country neighbouring three major crises affecting NATO, namely the crises in Syria, Iraq and Ukraine.

The challenges emerging from the Southern and Eastern flanks of NATO have implications not just for the region, but also for the global security environment. Therefore, this is the right time to discuss how NATO can ensure the safety and security of Allies in this environment.

The Syrian conflict alone stands out as one of the world's largest humanitarian disasters since the Second War World. In bilateral and multilateral discussions since 2011, the situation in Syria has been discussed among and Allies. But, appropriate precautionary measures could not be taken. Unfortunately, Syria has turned into quagmire. And now the whole world is facing the spill-over effects of the Syrian crisis.

The threat from foreign terrorist fighters has escalated the problem to an alarming level for all of us. Especially, DAESH is the most barbaric terrorist group and a direct threat to regional and global stability. The activities of DAESH close to the Turkish border have been seriously affecting NATO's security. In addition to its national efforts, Turkey is also committed to fight against DAESH alongside with the international coalition.

As for the refugee problem, Turkey has done and will do its part in assisting Syria and the Syrians. Turkey hosts more than 2 million Syrian and Iraqis, and has spent more than 6 billion dollars for their basic needs.

Meanwhile, Turkey has continued to fight against the PKK terrorist organisation, which is also constitutes a threat to the regional security. Exploiting the situation in Syria and Iraq, PKK is trying to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the international community while it is still killing innocent people, including elderly men and women and children, through brutal attacks.

The crises in Syria and Iraq have become more complicated and comprehensive for the neighbouring countries and the few active members of the coalition to handle. If we again fail to act now, we will find ourselves under more severe problems. Greater migration. More refugees. More terrorist attacks. More conflict. And more instability at the expense of our welfare.

On the other hand, the tension between Russia and Ukraine also adversely affects the region and the Alliance.

Mr. Chairman,

Finally, this conference will give all of us an opportunity to exchange insights on how to adapt the Alliance to this changing security environment. And I believe that this conference will produce fruitful and constructive outcomes for NATO.

Thank you,.

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