Remarks By Hon Mohammadmian Soomro Chairman, Senate of Pakistan

CONVOCATION OF THE 2006 PARLIAMENTARY HEARING

Theme: Conflict Prevention and Peace-building:
Reinforcing the key role of the United Nations

1. Let me felicitate the Inter-Parliamentary Union for the choice of the theme for this year’s hearing. One year into the implementation phase of the 2005 World Summit Outcome, it is opportune to discuss, what has been regarded as the core activity and the central mission of the United Nations, i.e. conflict prevention.

2. The 2005 World Summit sanctified the inter-linkage between peace, development and human rights. On these pillars, stand the edifice of collective security, the whole concept of conflict prevention, and social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom. We have since strengthened the institutional base of the United Nations system. The newly established Peace-building Commission embodies the comprehensive approach to conflict prevention, peacekeeping and peace-building. The Human Rights Council, hopefully through a fresh, non-politicized approach for protection and promotion of human rights, will also contribute to the conflict prevention efforts in its own way. We must also move quickly with regard to our leaders’ commitments towards the development objectives and the revitalization of the role of the Economic and Social Council to complement these achievements.

3. The report of the Secretary General presents an absorbing analysis of the progress made over the years with regard to the prevention of armed conflict. Formidable challenges remain nevertheless. The Secretary General has pointed out an unacceptable gap between rhetoric and reality in the area of conflict prevention. The report also contains wide ranging recommendations for promoting conflict prevention at operational, structural and systemic levels. I believe these will be discussed in detail by our representatives in the coming weeks. Let me offer here a few comments from the larger political perspective.

4. First, we agree that to enable the United Nations to carry out its core activity of conflict prevention, it must be provided with commensurate capacity and resources. It is a matter of concern, however, that all these years the organization had been working without these resources, and that it took so long to realize and point out the deficit.

5. Second, we need to critically review where we stand with regard to implementation. Resources aside, implementation depends largely on the political will. There have been important recommendations in the past. Also, a basic normative, political and institutional framework for conflict prevention has always been there, but not fully utilized, for example, the provisions for pacific settlement of disputes in Chapter VI of the UN Charter.
6. The 2005 World Summit re-emphasized the obligation of states to settle their disputes by peaceful means and renewed the commitment to promote a culture of prevention of armed conflict. Sadly, however, the resort to threat or use of force is dangerously proliferating. Blatant aggression and foreign occupation continues in many theatres and is paradoxically being justified as a war against terror. International law and international humanitarian law are being flouted with impunity. One cannot promote the culture of “prevention of armed conflict” when the culture of “pre-emptive action” is gaining ground.

7. We consider, it may be worthwhile to revert to the basics—the Charter of the United Nations wherein are imbibed the elements and tools for conflict prevention. Only if we can truly commit ourselves to the “purposes and principles” of the UN, the culture of prevention would have been inculcated. These two Articles of the Charter, written six decades ago, effectively capture the spirit of what is contained in the report of the Secretary General.

8. Conflict prevention, as is clear from the report, can only be achieved through a comprehensive and holistic approach involving wide ranging means and tools in security, political and economic spheres and a broad array of actors at local, national and international levels. Top priority has to be accorded to addressing the underlying causes of conflict and primary sources of tension in conflict vulnerable and potentially volatile regions.

9. The significant deficit in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals remains a major impediment for conflict prevention worldwide. Most of the current conflicts are situated in the developing world. Many are complex internal crises driven by the politics of poverty and scarcity. There is increasing realization of the need to address underdevelopment; political, social and economic exclusion; ethnic and tribal rivalries; governance, inequitable power sharing, illegal exploitation of natural resources, weapons proliferation and use of mercenaries that characterize such conflicts. It is encouraging that some of the recent successes of the UN have been in addressing complex crises especially in Africa. We can achieve more by using development as a means of preventing conflict.

10. The Secretary General’s report seems to focus mostly on internal conflicts. But we must not lose sight of the traditional inter-state conflicts that continue to endanger international peace and security. It is imperative to address their underlying political problems, territorial disputes and issues of self-determination, among others. We are surprised that these are not mentioned along with other root causes in paragraph 98 of the report.

11. It would also be important to focus on the concept of justice in the prevention and resolution of conflicts. It is clear that only just and lasting solutions to disputes and conflicts can ensure lasting peace and stability and the guarantee against relapse of conflict. We still do not have the culture that would ensure justice for the weak, aggrieved or oppressed parties.
12. Actions at global level can also be complemented by cooperation and confidence building at regional level for conflict prevention. The concept of balance of armaments, for example, can stabilize volatile situations in the regional context, thus also contributing to international peace and security. At the same time, the impasse over global disarmament and non-proliferation objectives needs to be overcome soon. A new consensus is needed. Pakistan has proposed elements for such a consensus at the relevant fora.

13. The imbalance in the global power configuration also has its ramifications. The asymmetrical response including through terrorist acts is one of these. Addressing these concerns should be a part of the comprehensive conflict prevention strategy. At the same time, the transitions from a bi-polar to uni-polar and currently, to a multi-polar world have made it a difficult to manage inter-state relations. The United Nations must play a major role in managing and harmonizing the relations between diverse centers of power to promote world peace and security. This entails a more credible and effective Security Council, a more assertive General Assembly, a revitalized Economic and Social Council, a pro-active role of the Secretary-General, increasingly interacting among themselves and with other parts of the UN system.

14. On their part, the Parliaments can make important contributions to conflict prevention, within and between states and at the global level. Parliaments discuss issues of war and peace. They deliberate and pronounce not only on internal situations but conflicts in other parts of the world. Internally, they take up the whole range of governance, oversight, development, social and cultural issues. Parliaments also deal with peace agreements – internal as well as international. They are the best fora for promoting local solutions to local problems thus ensuring national ownership. They should also serve as the primary sources of early warning to prevent conflicts.

15. The Parliamentarians can thus be instrumental in channeling conflict resolution through dialogue and political accommodation. Interacting among themselves, they can also serve as the prime movers for promoting peaceful co-existence and respect for different beliefs. We believe more can be done to mainstream such concepts as the alliance of civilizations, enlightened moderation, and culture of peace and prevention in the work of the parliaments and in their interaction with each other and the United Nations. In that regard, we support the proposal for a forum for regular dialogue.

16. The enormous cost of conflict – its social, economic, human, psychological and environmental dimensions – makes conflict prevention a moral, political and economic necessity. We, the parliamentarians, realize this imperative and stand ready to play our part in the international efforts to prevent conflict and promote peace and development.
REMARKS BY

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