

Statement by Mr. Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Pakistan at the Second Africa Asia Sub-Regional Organizations Conference (AASROC-II) in Durban, South Africa on August 20, 2004

It is indeed a great privilege and honour for me to represent Pakistan at the Second Africa Asia Sub-Regional Organizations Conference in the beautiful city of Durban. I am over whelmed by the very warm hospitality extended to the Pakistan delegation and for the excellent Conference facilities and arrangements. I must also convey our deep appreciation to both the governments of South Africa and Indonesia for their outstanding leadership as AASROC Co-Chairs in injecting a new direction and vigour to Asia-Africa cooperation.

The AASROC initiative draws inspiration from the 1955 Asia-Africa Conference in Bandung and the ten principles for mutual cooperation enunciated thereof. The principles and ideals of independence, peace, justice and common prosperity are as much relevant today as they were half a century ago.

The AASROC initiative flows from the realization that the objectives that our leaders sought to achieve by joining hands and building an edifice around the ten Bandung principles are as relevant today as they were then. Except that the challenges we face in the 21st century are more complex and threatening. Our struggle against poverty, disease and under development is far from over or perhaps not even started, and yet there are new challenges and threats emerging including terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, new colonialism and unilateralism. The process of Globalization that should have been a source of inspiration and hope for the poor has unfortunately become a part of the problem instead of being a part of the solution. The order is tall and task is uphill. If peace and security was a priority at Bandung 50 years ago for avoiding wars, winning respect and justice and securing freedoms for the colonized, it is as much a priority now for achieving economic growth and development. Strong faith and adherence to multilateralism was as much of a necessity then as it was today.

The initiative to convene Asia-Africa Sub-Regional Organizations Conference could not have come at a more opportune time. The distance that the AASROC platform has already covered since its first meeting in Bandung in July 2003 testifies to the political commitment of the participating states to see this cooperative endeavour grow. Pakistan fully supports the new strategic partnership between Asia and Africa. The problems that our two continents face are complex and daunde. Our common need and desire to effectively address the challenge of development and fighting poverty exacerbated by reduced market access, rising debt burdens, declining development assistance and investment and financial flows. A military centric strategic approach to peace and security is anachronistic for the simple reason that peace without socio-

economic development is unsustainable. Skewed international trade and financial flows and ever increasing unilateralist tendency make global peace more precarious.

The recommendations made by the AASROC Ministerial Working Group meeting in Durban earlier this year provide the necessary institutional framework to build a mechanism for cooperation between Asia and Africa. We are glad that the Working Group, while identifying the need for cooperation in political, economic and social and cultural spheres agreed to primarily focus the new strategic partnership on intensifying cooperation in the area of trade, investment and human resource development. In this regard the Working Group further recognized the pivotal role that the private sector can play. We particularly welcome the recommendation to create an Asia-Africa Business Forum. Pakistan is of the firm view that enhanced trade and economic activity between our two continents and closer contacts between our two business communities would prove to be a critical asset in facilitating wider cooperation in all other areas.

In this regard the proposed Asia-Africa Business Forum could from the Asian side include Businessmen representing the business segment/chambers of commerce and industry of various regional organizations. The proposed Business Forum may also consider creating a loose confederation of all chambers of commerce and industry, representing various sub-regional organizations. Pakistan on its part can volunteer to host the first meeting of the Asia-Africa Business Forum, as and when it is established to finalize the modalities for cooperation. (Before formally proposing, we may clear this proposal with the EPB and the Ministry of Commerce).

Regional trading blocks and preferential trading arrangements are on the rise. Open regionalism is becoming a norm rather than an exception, particularly in view of the slow progress in the multilateral trade negotiations, which were until recently stalled completely. We should devise these mechanisms in a manner so that they act as the building blocks for multilateral trade liberalization. The bilateral and regional trading arrangements between Asia and Africa are unfortunately non-existent, while the number of such arrangements elsewhere is on the rise. We may, therefore, through the AASROC Working Group seriously examine the various possibilities that may exist to stimulate trade and commercial cooperation by creating such arrangements. We would support the setting up of a Sub-Working Group to undertake an in-depth examination of the subject and submit a report to the next Ministerial Working Group. In this regard we feel that the study paper to be presented by the South Africa, Indonesia, Morocco and other volunteer countries, as agreed during the Ministerial Working Group in March, could provide a good basis to further work on this idea.

Another area where our two continents perhaps lag behind is the absence/lack of opportunity for people to people interaction. Lack of information about each other, high cost of

travel and other linguistic and cultural barriers have stood in the way of building people to people contacts. We strongly feel that this is the other most important area where AASROC should be working to devise mechanisms that would facilitate closer interaction at all levels.

Pakistan has always been pro-active in supporting initiatives that seek to address the problems and crises faced by the countries of Africa. We have also been a strong supporter of the effective and early implementation of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). Similarly, Pakistan has consistently supported the political and economic aspirations of Africa. We are proud of our participation in several UN peacekeeping operations in Africa. Our military and civilian personnel have been part of UN Operations in Somalia, Namibia, Liberia, Western Sahara, and, latterly, Sierra Leone. Pakistan will continue to lend its moral and material support to the African countries.

At the national level the Government of Pakistan has been successfully running a special technical assistance programme for Africa since 1986. Hundreds of young African professionals in various fields have benefited from this ongoing programme. We are ready to share our experiences with other willing partners from Asia and would also welcome ideas on making the programme more effective from our African friends who have participated in the programme.

We have been focused for too long on North-South Cooperation without achieving the desired results. It is, therefore, time to enhance and reinforce South-South Cooperation for the common good of the people of our two continents. We should not see the South-South Cooperation as a substitute; instead it should be viewed as supplementing the other multilateral and interregional efforts underway including the North-South Cooperation. We are of the view that technological advancement and human resource development level achieved by some of the countries in Asia and Africa can be shared and replicated elsewhere in Asia and Africa. The absence of a forum for Asia-Africa Dialogue in a way contributed to the lack of action in this area. I am confident that the second round of our deliberations here at Durban would enable us to frame the modalities and parameters for Afro-Asian Cooperation to be approved by our leaders during the Bandung Summit in 2005. Pakistan on its part would continue with its endeavors to make a positive contribution to the process.