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Report- Public Talk

“Successful Experiences of the Colombian Peace Process”

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Pictures of the Event



The Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) organized a Public Talk under its Distinguished Lecture Series on October 24, 2017 on “*Successful Experiences of the Colombian Peace Process.*” The talk was hosted as a part of Colombian Week Celebrations in collaboration with the non-resident Embassy of Colombia to Pakistan in Ankara and the Externado University of Colombia. The guest speaker at the occasion was Dr. Marcelo Macedo Rizo, Diplomat in charge of Political & Cooperation Affairs at the Embassy of Colombia in Turkey.

Other speakers at the occasion included: H.E. Mr. Juan Alfredo Pinto Saavedra, Non-Resident Ambassador of Colombia to Pakistan and Prof. Dr. Soraya Caro Vargas, Director, Centre for Research on Contemporary India and South Asia (CESICAM) at the Externado University of Colombia.

Before the talk, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was also signed between the ISSI and the Externado University of Colombia to initiate academic and research exchange between the two institutions.

Ambassador Khalid Mahmood, Chairman ISSI in his welcome remarks, expressed full support for the promotion of friendship and mutual understanding between Pakistan and Colombia. Referring to the Colombian Week Celebrations, he called this occasion as a matter of double happiness since the ISSI not only signed a general agreement of cooperation, but also began its immediate implementation by organizing the Public Talk. This agreement, he said, will provide an institutional framework of promoting and reinforcing the mutual exchange of information and development of research and academic programs besides encouraging exchange of experts and researchers. Admiring its exotic beauty, he called Colombia a land of a thousand rhythms.

Reflecting on the history of bilateral relations between Pakistan and Colombia, he said that ever since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1980, there has existed enormous goodwill between the two countries. However, unfortunately this has not been translated into meaningful diplomatic and economic relations. The relations remained hostage to the twin barriers of distance and language, but now in the contemporary age of globalization and technological revolution, this does not matter. The two governments and their respective business communities will be well-advised to take advantage of bilateral trade and investment opportunities. Pakistan,

he opined, can help Colombia in reviving its textile industry. Furthermore, people-to-people exchange will also act as the catalytic agent of change.

Deliberating on the significance and relevance of the Colombian peace process to Pakistan, he said that both countries are victims of prolonged instability, terrorism, drug trafficking and insurgencies of various intensities. Colombia has been victim to one of the longest running insurgency spanning almost 52 years that left 220,000 dead, 70,000 missing and up to 7-8 million displaced. Since the fighting erupted in the 1960s between the government and leftist rebel groups, various ceasefires were agreed and numerous negotiations failed. The peace negotiations initiated by President Juan Manuel Santos in 2012 resulted into a historic peace accord in September 2016. It was initially rejected in popular referendum, but after some changes, it was signed by the Parliament in November 2016. Colombia is a great example of defeating terrorism, controlling drug trafficking and successful conflict resolution for the conflict ridden countries of the world.

Emphasizing on the significance of the Colombian peace agreement, H.E. Mr. Juan Alfredo Pinto Saavedra, Non-Resident Ambassador of Colombia to Pakistan said that in this world there is no perfect peace, but Colombia is committed to achieving lasting peace in the era of conflict transformation. The people not only discovered but also enjoying an entirely different Colombia after its conflict resolution. Colombia is known as world's richest country with respect to biodiversity and best tourism destination. The Amazon basin of Colombia has huge forests which are rich in flora and fauna that largely remained unexplored because of the conflict. He informed the audience that researchers have found 22 new species in the last one year and there are hundreds more still waiting to be discovered. He also highlighted the various cultural aspects of his country including architecture, music, dance, language, literature, cinema, and encouraged the audience to participate in all the workshops that were being arranged under the celebrations of the Colombian Week in Pakistan. He also praised the culture and food of Pakistan. In his view, this exchange of cultural knowledge will develop a better understanding and both countries will move ahead in enhancing their bilateral relations. In addition, the knowledge sharing between the intelligentsia will also act as a unifying force. He advocated that both countries enjoy close friendship with each other and Colombia is looking forward to more opportunities to enhance its bilateral relations with Pakistan, especially economic. He was of the opinion that the

MoU between ISSI and the Externado University of Colombia was a very significant development, because this type of cooperation ensures the continuity and systematic stimulation of bilateral relations.

Prof. Dr. Soraya Caro Vargas, Director Centre of Research on Contemporary India and South Asia (CESICAM) at the Externado University of Colombia. On behalf of Mr. Juan Carlos Henao, Vice Chancellor of the Externado University of Colombia, she expressed her gratitude to the ISSI and its team of experts for their interest and commitment to strengthen relations with Colombia. She said that the Externado University was the first liberal and secular university founded in 1886 during a critical period of democratic history of Colombia. It was based on the principles of freedom of ideas, tolerance and respect for religious diversity. Currently, 14,000 students are enrolled in various academic programs. It offers 18 undergraduate, 179 post-graduate, 22 Master`s and 4 Doctoral degrees. There are 24 research centres in the different areas of social sciences like International Relations, Law, and Economics. In 2013, the Centre of Research on Contemporary India and South Asia was established at the University. The University, she said, has signed numerous international agreements with various institutions in Europe, North America, South America and the Caribbean. In South Asia, besides the ISSI, it has signed agreements with NDTV and Delhi University. She also proposed various areas for joint research between ISSI and the University.

Speaking on the Colombian Peace Process, Dr. Marcelo Macedo Rizo, traced the different stages of the process to build a stable and durable peace in Colombia, and to end the armed conflict that began in 1964. Highlighting the significance of the Colombian peace agreement, he said that it is like a puzzle in which every single piece is fundamental to complete the vision. The objectives of the process were to end the armed conflict, avoid more victims and solve the circumstances that had made war permanent, but above all, to build a stable and lasting peace. He identified 6 themes of the peace agreement: End of conflict; Solution to the problem of illicit drugs; Comprehensive rural reforms; Political participation; Agreement regarding the victims of the conflict; and Implementation, verification, and public vote.

The agreement recognizes that the conflict has affected millions of people. So, it seeks to protect the rights of the victims, and ensure accountability and punishment for the criminals. It will guarantee the peaceful coexistence and reconciliation with Revolutionary Armed Forces of

Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – FARC) through five mechanisms: Commission for the Acknowledge of the Truth; Special Unity for Searching of People Missing; Special Court for Peace; Integral Reparation Measures; and No-Repetition Guarantees System. Under these mechanisms, former guerrilla members will submit to Special Justice for Peace (JEP) and will also provide finances to compensate their victims. Within the clear timetable of 180 days, FARC has turned in 100% of their weapons and have now become a political party. The UN plans to build 3 monuments from the recovered arms. The entire process was monitored and verified by the United Nations (UN). It was also the end of kidnapping, blackmail, and attacks against the police and military forces. He informed the audience that since the peace agreement there has been zero casualties. Their re-incorporation into the society from social and economic point of view was done through establishment of 22 Provisional Rural Zones of Normalization (ZVTN). For their political inclusion, 16 special electoral zones will be created in the most affected areas which will have special representatives in the Parliament for 8 years.

Dr. Rizo pointed out that to achieve a real peace, it is necessary to destroy the illegal economies based on illicit plants and illicit drugs consumption. Under the agreement, there will be a National Program for Substitution of Illicit Plants Agriculture, and the drugs consumption will be treated as a public health affair. A new Criminal Policy against criminal organizations involved in money laundering and drug trafficking will be developed. The next significant step under the agreement is the reconstruction and development of the countryside zones. To avoid conditions for a new conflict, it is necessary that displaced people must return to their lands. This will be achieved through creation of better opportunities and decreasing the differences between rural and urban areas in terms of education, health, and work. The government of Colombia has introduced Formalization System of Land Property to ensure access, good use and redistribution of land.

The final component of the agreement was to ensure transparent verification. To achieve this objective, the original agreement was submitted for public vote. Unfortunately, it was rejected in a referendum held in September 2016. However, after amendments by the government, it was finally approved by the Parliament on November 30, 2017. For a robust monitoring system, a commission will be established in collaboration with the UN. The society of Colombia realized that the long period of war must end and to start the period of peace it is essential to forgive. The

government believes in breaking the cycles of violence and to avoid the creation of new cycle of violence through equality and justice.

The presentation was followed by an interactive question/answer session. On a question regarding readiness of Colombian urban elite to sacrifice and sharing wealth with poor, Dr. Marcelo said that Colombia had a long history of drugs and crimes. The Colombians are conscious of the reasons behind the conflict and they are working for the humanity. They are ready to decrease the inequality and to give entirely different life to the affected. The Colombian people are also aware of the fact that complete transformation is a gradual process. The first task is to heal the people, which will take time and Colombia requires one more generation to move towards total forgiveness.

In reply to another question on the agreement, he mentioned that the recent initiative of the Parliament made it binding on the later governments of Colombia not to terminate the agreement for at least the next 12 years.

To a question on the capacity of the Colombian government which is already financially burdened, to grant reparations of \$10 million to the victims, Dr. Rizo replied that the illegal money recovered from FARC and the criminals will be used to pay for the damages.

Another question was raised on the transparency of verification mechanism for criminal justice. Dr. Rizo said that criticism was raised on the punishments given to FARC. The government of Colombia believes that in order to achieve peace, it is necessary to look at the bigger picture. Hard punishments for FARC member will endanger the entire peace process.

Responding to the request to suggest a solution for the ongoing insurgencies in Pakistan, he said that the contemporary situation in various parts of Pakistan is much better. Colombia will always suggest that the only and best way to achieve reconciliation is through peaceful negotiations. Colombia tried the use of military power for many years that resulted in many deaths and massive internal displacements. There are 8 million victims of this displacement in the country with a total population of 48 million. Colombia is convinced that dialogue is the only approach to solve the issues. H.E. Mr. Juan Alfredo Pinto Saavedra also agreed with Dr. Rizo, and added that no matter how much military power a state will use, in the end, it is indispensable to achieve a political solution. He said that the conflict in Colombia created three types of

armies: army of widows, army of handicaps and army of criminals. Echoing Dr. Rizo, he also mentioned that the hardest part of keeping peace is to forgive.

Concluding the Public Talk, Ambassador Mr. Khalid Mahmood, Chairman ISSI expressed his appreciation to Dr. Marcelo Macedo Rizo for his informative presentation. He said that it was a great learning experience regarding the fight of the Colombian people against the violence and drug trafficking. He added that at times, use of force might be necessary but it is not an end in itself when the objective is to attain lasting peace. Negotiation is the best approach for reconciliation and it is effectively used in different parts of the world. He gave the example of Nelson Mandela's principle of "truth and reconciliation" in South Africa. One can continue using force, but constant fighting is not a way out and at a certain point one has to forgive and forget in order to achieve reconciliation. The most essential component of the Colombian approach, he said, is not the peace agreement but its faithful implementation. He praised the dynamism and stability of the Colombian people and government for post-conflict strategy to control the illegal activities. He said that the Colombian experience is of great relevance to Pakistan and believed that the government of Pakistan is also considering the use of soft power instead of hard power to achieve political settlement, peace and stability in the region. He also welcomed the suggestion of starting a Spanish language program in Pakistan under the MoU signed with the Externado University. He was confident that the ISSI agreement of cooperation with the University will open new avenues of cooperation between the two countries.