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Report – Public Talk

Role and Relevance of United Nations in the Contemporary Global Order

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PICTURES OF THE EVENT



The Institute of Strategic Studies organized a Public Talk, titled "*Role and Relevance of United Nations in the Contemporary Global Order*", under its Distinguished Lecture Series on January 22, 2019. The guest speaker at the occasion was H.E. María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés, President of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). The event was attended by members of the diplomatic corps, academics, students and researchers.

Welcoming the speaker and the guests, the Director General ISSI, Ambassador Aizaz Ahmed Chaudhry said that the world today has changed in several ways. The United Nations (UN) has played a central role in forging a normative framework. Since 9/11 however, narrow nationalism is raising its head and the strategic landscape has undergone an enormous change as several conflicts have also festered. There is now an increasing trend to marginalize the UN altogether. For Pakistan, the UN has a special place, given that the organization has promised to resolve the Kashmir dispute, but unfortunately, it has yet to deliver on this promise. The Director General also said that Pakistan has played a special and important role in UN Peacekeeping operations.

In her remarks, UNGA President, H.E. Maria Fernanda Espinosa Garcés said that global challenges require global solutions. In fact, multilateralism offers the only way to address the complex challenges that no country can overcome alone. Ms. Garcés said that presently, the situation in the global order is convoluted to say the least. There are various challenges to peace and stability. Protracted conflicts continue to detract resources from important issues as the UN refugee agency reported 68.5 million people as displaced, citing developing countries as most affected by this. Another major challenge which defines the present world is rising inequalities - mobility which was taken for granted decades ago has virtually stalled for millions of people. She said that addressing issues of inequalities and structural gaps is important, especially the challenge to provide jobs for the young people. She appreciated efforts by Pakistan to broaden its tax base, create more jobs and eliminate inequalities at all levels. She opined that this is a win-win cycle which empowers women, men and youth. One way to further this cycle can be by leveraging new technologies to create new jobs she said.

Ms. Garcés said that the international community faces several challenges, like migration and climate change and the populace is affected by it. Pakistan is not exempt from extreme weathers and as the world struggles with the issues of pollution and displacement, we see many global

resources are at stake. The challenges to the international community in the current global context, the challenges to the UN and to the multilateralism system as a whole are several. In 2017 alone, South Asia recorded 2.8 million people who have suffered because of these. Unfortunately, Pakistan is not exempt from extreme weather conditions and is prone to heavy monsoons and droughts. Conflicts have also been triggered and exacerbated by climate change. In 2018-2019 fiscal year, the UN approved a peacekeeping operations budget for 6.7 billion dollars to be raised by member states. The UN refugee agency states that for the year 2017, 68.5 million people were forcibly displaced. It may be noted that 80 per cent of the global refugees are hosted by countries in the developing world. This has led to significant humanitarian needs. The UN office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has stated that in 2019 over 132 million people in 42 countries will require humanitarian assistance and global humanitarian funding of 22 billion dollars. One of the main challenges is rising inequalities where a large majority struggles to make ends meet. She cited a recent report by OXFAM on inequality, which states that the world's richest 26 persons own the same wealth as the world's poorest half. This is a very touching and disturbing inequality situation around the world. The cost of exclusion is not limited to countries. She went on to say that at a time when the international community should be pulling together, we are instead seeing a fragmented order.

The institutions which have carried the international community since the Second World War are being questioned, or worse still, sidelined for a 'go in it alone' approach. It is clear that addressing issues as a united group of nations is important because geopolitical tensions and growing inequality cannot be solved by any single country alone. Global threats are shared so must the solution to them. Ms. Garcés said that during her presidency, she is fully committed to help strengthen global efforts to global peace and security. People expect the UN to protect them and be there in their time of need. The best way to respond to this feeling of futile rejection of an ever independent world requires multilateralism and cooperation which includes promoting inclusivity and promoting security she said.

She reiterated that the world is better when nations work together and that authoritarian populists ride on the back of messages of anger, hatred and exclusion to scapegoat the very multilateral system and institutions that hold the world together. Institutions like the UN, which were born out of the ashes of the World War II have allowed our societies to flourish through shared

responsibility and accountability, shared burdens and costs, we have helped to reduce, if not eliminate or abolish interstate wars and have seen significant reductions in famine and poverty coupled with massive gains in development and the protection of human rights. This does not mean that things are perfect nor that the UN has an impeccable record. Far from it, but it is clear that addressing these issues as a group of nations can ensure much more promise of change and sustainability. The option of isolationism is not on the table anymore as technology, globalization and trade have altered the world. Security at home cannot be separated from events beyond our borders. Geopolitical tensions, growing inequalities, terrorism, cyber security, nuclear weapons, climate change and humanitarian and migratory crises cannot be solved by any single country alone, nor can they be ignored and left for others to solve.

Speaking about the role of the United Nations in multilateralism in supporting peace and security, Ms. Garcés said the single best way to mitigate rising threats is to pursue dialogue and strengthen multilateralism. The international community must be fully committed to the principles of engagement and cooperation. This is what multilateralism stands for. Multilateralism through dialogue and negotiation and international cooperation provides the most suitable platform to discuss and reach agreements in search of a common understanding. The founders of the UN knew this. Horrified by the atrocities of the Second World War, they codified the critical role of multilateralism in the Charter of the United Nations. The international community through concerted efforts and dialogue has made significant contribution in peacekeeping, peace building, human rights, women peace and security, youth peace and security and climate action. Both the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals stand as a testament to what the world can deliver when called upon to do so. We need more of this not less. There are many instances of the UN struggling to deliver on its instances and objectives, we have learned from the challenges and continue to improve on how we work and how we support those in needs. It is due to these reasons that during my Presidency, I am fully committed to preserve multilateralism in all its forms and at all levels.

Stressing on how she intended to support multilateralism and strengthen global efforts to address peace and security. Ms. Garcés said that above all, the people of the world expect the UN to deliver and to work for them, to protect them and to be there in their time of need. It is obvious

that the world today is undergoing tremendous transformations, changing the nature of work, trade and finance, social security and our relationship with technology and information, as well as what it means to be a citizen of the world in the 21st century. The world requires more multilateralism and global cooperation to address every facet of our modern life. It requires greater efforts to eliminate exclusion, promote inclusion, tolerance, and cooperation. The priorities that I have outlined for the 73rd session of the General Assembly are the empowerment of women, youth, and decent work, working with persons with disabilities, and youth peace and security. The need for the inclusion of women and youth are one of the key objectives of multilateralism which is critical for the success of the peace and security agenda and the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals. The UN aspires to respond to global challenges and we must promote international cooperation to address inequality. She went on to say that no entity is more emblematic for global cooperation than the United Nations. The coordinated efforts for more cooperation between the organs of the United Nations are also very necessary. All the organs of the United Nations play complementary roles within the UN system and in fostering international peace and security. It may be noted that multilateralism does not pose a threat to sovereignty or to national interests of member states. Multilateralism helps address challenges that no country alone can deal with and it goes hand in hand with the interests of nation states.

The talk by H.E Maria Fernanda Espinosa Garcés was followed by an interactive question and answer session moderated by the Director General Institute of Strategic Studies, Ambassador Aizaz Ahmed Chaudhry.

A question was raised that when we look at the dying children of Sudan, Yemen, Palestine, and Kashmir, does the UN role need to be re-imagined? With super powers like the US dominating, justice does not seem to come across. Therefore, after the Second World War, it seems like the UN is lacking relevance in today's world.

A comment was made that even after 70 years, the UN still says it will resolve the Kashmir conflict, but it still has not been resolved.

Another question was raised regarding the what role does the UN have in ensuring environmental justice?

Ms. Garcés, while responding to the questions and comments stated that like many young people here, I also once thought that the UN had a magic wand to solve issues. The UN is a huge architecture with the political will of 193 states, but the UN does not have solutions for everything. The General Assembly is the norm setting body for international law and it does have a normative role for international law, a policy recommendation role. It is able to bring together the priorities, agendas, and the political will of 193 states who agree on some resolutions. The United Nations does not have super powers at all and its power is formed by member states. The burden is put on the UN as if it were a separate entity operating by itself. UN is reflection of the complexities of the crossroads and of the paradox of our times. It also hurts as we cannot do magic and resolve all issues. In Yemen, 80, 000 children below the age of 5 have died due to hunger. The UN has played a facilitating role and we have seen some positive developments in Yemen take place and the UN has been playing a proactive role. Ms. Garcés said that she sees that the UN is ensuring that the ceasefire leads to more meaningful peace. A long conflict like the one in Yemen requires a lot of political will from the parties that are involved. We must share a common narrative about what are the boundaries of the magic that the United Nations can do.

Regarding the role of the UN in resolving conflicts, Ms. Garcés said that the United Nations needs to deliver more and better and that she was particularly taking a lot of interest in the revitalization of the General Assembly. The UN is suffering from an implementation deficit and the six committees meet and agree on some policy decision and we have some 300 resolutions every year and then we forget about them. There is a lot to do in this regard and the revitalization of the General Assembly has been going on for several years. The UN needs to mainstream the work of the resolution making according to the roadmap that we have. Overlapping needs to be avoided as well. The resolutions that are meaningful and responding to global challenges must be taken up. The country teams of the UN are doing some great work and the related agencies are there to support member countries and give technical assistance in different fields. The UN belongs to all of us and cannot do magic to solve all problems.

While talking about the Kashmir dispute and that the UN has not solved it in 70 years, she said it is not about a UN promise, it is about international commitment, but it is also about the players to sit down and have a conversation. The UN stands for dialogue and peaceful solutions for

every country. While talking about climate change and terrorism, she said these are challenges which have to be dealt with collectively. This is why the UN is calling for more multilateralism and equality multilateralism. It is unfortunate that we are going backwards in some respects as we are not reducing carbon emissions as promised in the Paris Agreement. We have a resource gap, especially for climate change. The UN has also agreed to create the green climate fund and a hundred billion dollars are required for the developing world. Pakistan is among the ten countries vulnerable to climate change, therefore working better and working together is the only option.

Another comment cum question was asked that the one UN system does not seem to be as successful as envisaged and since you talked about quality multilateralism, the veto power is still intact. Ms. Garcés was asked that during her tenure as President, will she be able to get on the other side of the Line of Control and also to Gilgit-Baltistan? Pakistan allows UNMOGIP on its side of the border, then why not on the other side? Why are the declarations not binding? This is something that needs to be looked into as the treaties and conventions exist, but are not binding. Also, how can the SDG's be made binding and just as the US goes out of UNRWA and UNESCO, then others will also want to walk out.

While responding to the comments and questions, the UNGA President stated that she appreciates Pakistan's role in UN Peacekeeping. The MDGs have been replaced by the SDGs as the UN did make an effort as when the SDGs were adapted in 2015 and some success was also achieved with the MDGs, and later the SDGs were introduced. She also reiterated that she supports UNSC reform and the IGN process continues as the divisions are huge as there are a lot of countries involved. However, she said that multilateralism is the best we have to solve the challenges we face in the world today.

In his concluding remarks, the Chairman BOG, ISSI, Ambassador Khalid Mahmood stated that that festering wounds from issues such as the Palestinian issue shows that UN must reassert its role in the security dimension. In the field of human rights, the UN has taken important strides which must not be forgotten. Pakistan is proud of its role in the UN peacekeeping and will continue to be part of this cause. He also said that the UN has done a remarkable job in institution building and norm setting to promote global development. The MDGs followed by

SDGs may not have yielded fully satisfactory results, but the world is better off. The UN's success in poverty reduction, gender mainstreaming and youth empowerment is laudable. He concluded by saying that the effectiveness of the UN has varied, depending upon the political commitment of its member states and the resilience and responsiveness of its structures.