



**INSTITUTE OF  
STRATEGIC STUDIES**

**web:** [www.issi.org.pk](http://www.issi.org.pk)  
**phone:** +92-920-4423, 24  
**fax:** +92-920-4658

Conference Report

# **Pakistan-Africa Relations: Potential and Challenges**

May 23, 2014

**MahwishHafeez**, Research Fellow, ISSI  
**Nadia Sarwar**, Research Fellow, ISSI

To mark Africa Day, the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) organized a one day seminar on 'Pakistan - Africa Relations: Potential and Challenges'. The Director General ISSI, Dr. Rasul Bakhsh Rais, welcomed the Honourable Chief Guest Mr. Aizaz Ahmed Chaudhry, Foreign Secretary Pakistan, and other keynote speakers that included Dr. Ahmed Beneflis, Ambassador of Algeria to Pakistan and Dean of the Africa Group in Islamabad, Ambassador (retired) Akram Zaki, and Dr. Rukhsana Siddique, Former Chairperson of the Department of International relations, Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad.

While felicitating a large section of High Commissioners from Africa, Dr. Rais lauded the diversity and dynamism of rich tradition and culture enjoyed by the people of Africa. He also highlighted Pakistan's vital role in various UN Peacekeeping mission that have been active in maintaining peace and security of African countries. The enrolment of African students in Pakistani educational institutions that were imparting both technical and vocational knowledge, also served as a vital part of his welcome remark.

Foreign Secretary Aizaz Ahmed Chaudhry, Emphasised on substantive engagement particularly in the fields of trade and economy. Pakistan and African countries are cooperating with each other on many international forums, especially at the UN Security Council. However, he acknowledged that the volume of interaction between the two entities has not been as great as it should be. He said the current Pakistani government is focusing on economic diplomacy with all countries and in this regard has stressed the need for taking tangible measures for promoting trade relations between Pakistan and African countries.

Dr. Beneflis provided a brief historical background of the emancipation struggle that Africa has faced against barbaric colonial rule. Dr. Beneflis stated that Africa has been pursuing its geo-political and economic integration from the foundation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963 and through the creation of the African Union in 1999. He said that the African Union mission is to build an Africa that is integrated, prosperous and at peace. At the same time, the AU is cognizant of the challenges it faces in providing momentum to its mission through Pan-Africanism. He appreciated Pakistan's role as an Observer and its contribution to UN Peace Keeping forces to maintain peace particularly in Central Africa.

Ambassador Akram Zaki shed light on the peace and security issues in Africa and highlighted the role outside powers have played in the continent, both in the past and in the present. Ambassador Zaki noted that following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia had retreated from the region but due to large reserves of oil and minerals, it was once again showing interest in Africa. Armed with the same motives, China and India were also expanding their presence in Africa for economic reasons.

Dr. Rukhsana Siddiqui was of the view that Pakistan had very robust ties with African countries during the colonial era. It was the first country to support Eritrea's independence, and morally supported Kenya, Zimbabwe and many other African countries in their liberation struggles. During these struggles, North African leaders actually travelled on Pakistani diplomatic passports. The Pakistani Diaspora in East and Southern Africa is also active in the areas of education, medicine, information technology, and defence. Over the last 20 years, 27 African countries have sent at least 2,000 students to study in Pakistan. Pakistan has also been a very strong anti-apartheid state. Nelson Mandela's visit in 1993 remains an emotional experience for the Pakistani people who will always remember his official pronouncements on Kashmir, Afghanistan and Iraq.

She made a strong recommendation for making African Studies a discipline in Social Sciences so that it can help fortify relations between Pakistan and Africa. She deplored the fact that Pakistan suffers from

western-centric education, which eclipses its focus on other continents. The media gives little coverage to Africa and scholars often feel isolated due to a lack of international awareness about the African continent. She apprised the audience about four fundamental questions that concern the scholars: (1) What is the cultural and intellectual mission of African Studies? (2) How should Africa be interpreted? (3) What is the role of non-African scholars on Africa? (4) In the wake of the rising challenge of globalisation, the scholars who opposed western centric education have the primary obligation to evaluate their government's foreign policy interests in Africa.

She was of the view that any talk of third world solidarity without Africa is absurd because Africa's contribution in liberation struggles, non-alignment movement, third world literature, art, poetry and music is enormous. She recommended that the government of Pakistan work with Nigeria in formulating a combined methodology to eliminate threats the two countries face, from the Taliban in Pakistan and Boko Haram in Nigeria. Pakistan should also avail South Africa's truth and reconciliation effort and make combined efforts in the field of education for only a high literacy rate can usher in peace in a multi-ethnic society.

All speakers agreed that Pakistan must revise its foreign policy approach and enhance and reinvigorate its relations with the African continent, both politically and economically. To further this, Foreign Secretary, Mr. Aizaz Ahmed Chaudhary stated that the Ministry of Commerce was in the process of formulating economic policies as a response to greater demand for Pakistani products in Africa.

In his concluding remarks, Chairman ISSI, Ambassador (Retd.) Khalid Mahmood talked about the age-old relations between Africa and Pakistan during which Pakistan had often shared knowledge and experience with Africa. The country's participation in UN Peacekeeping missions was an illustration of its deep commitment and great dedication to Africa and its people. He emphasized on a collective effort to built sustainable peace. The Ambassador finally recommended frequent visits of official delegations to promote interaction between Africa and Pakistan.