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Report – Public Talk

**“Climate Change, Nuclear
Disarmament and Humane Global
Governance”**

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Pictures of the Event



Climate Change, Nuclear Disarmament and Humane Global Governance

The Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad (ISSI) organised a Public Talk on "*Climate Change, Nuclear Disarmament and Humane Global Governance*" on August 30, 2016 by Professor Dr. Richard Anderson Falk, Professor Emeritus of International Law, Princeton University and Former UNHRC Special Rapporteur on Palestine. The Public Talk was a part of ISSI's Distinguished Lecture Series 2016. Dr. Richard was accompanied by his wife Dr. Hilal Elver who is a Research Professor and global distinguished fellow at the University of California, Santa Barbara LA Law School Resnick Food Law and Policy Center. She also holds a degree in Law.

In his welcome remarks, the Chairman Board of Governors ISSI Ambassador Khalid Mahmood said that our climate and ecosystem is under severe stress, which is evident from frequently occurring natural disasters. In fact, climate change has become a security threat, even resulting in social instability in some cases. Climate change is also intimately linked to the fallout effects from the nuclear weapons. He said that in the 1980s, many studies were made on the effects of climate change due to the use of nuclear weapons. These studies revealed the devastation caused by the nuclear weapon used by the US which created clouds of smoke and dust, termed as "nuclear clouds" blocking so much sunlight that some had said that a "nuclear winter" has begun. Moreover, this will also destroy the protective Ozone layer, and that would in turn effect the ecosystem. In his opinion, these studies underestimated the devastation, as even slightest use of nuclear weapons will devastate our eco-system. So the link between climate change and nuclear disarmament is evident and it requires a global governance system in order to avert any such scenario where nuclear weapons are used.

Dr. Falk, while explaining the topic, said that this subject highlights the short-comings of the international arrangement which cater to the existential threats to humanity. Rather than having a sum of national consensus, these issues demand an over-arching global consensus. Climate change and nuclear weapons are characteristic of this kind of fundamental challenge which is extremely important for future generations and humanity. Moreover, it also highlights the fragmentation of the world order in overcoming these kinds of challenges, specifically overcoming the perceived and objectified reality of these kind of conditions that give different

actors different priorities and incentives with respect to achieving some kind of stability that will meet these challenges.

He said that the problems common to states are solved in one or two basic ways. Firstly, through consensus among states for multilateral cooperation. There had been many efforts with respect to climate change and nuclear weapons to find an adequate formula that will satisfy the concerns of separate interest and yet contribute to a solution that serves humanity at large. The thesis of my remarks is that the international system or global order as it is now structured does not have adequate capabilities to uphold the global interest. The best it can do is what was done in the Paris Agreement (2015), when the cooperative energies of separate states produced an agreement that was better than what was expected and worse than what was needed. In order to address the harms, the governments should take the responsibility of either who generated these problems or who pays for addressing the vulnerability of poor countries who face these problems. One of the problematic area of climate change is that the degree of the harms which are caused by it are disproportionately concentrated and affecting those communities that are not responsible for generating the problem.

Dr. Falk suggested that in this area, reliance has been not on coercion but essentially on cooperation. But then it falls short of what societies of the world would require to meet the challenge.

Dr. Falk went on to say that when people see nuclear weapons, they see a solution from the time when they were first used in 1945, which is a treaty of provision of nuclear disarmament. But this weaponry which is very powerful gave some countries such a formidable power in the world politics that it has made it impossible for them to negotiate on a disarmament agreement. So, there was a Plan B devised on nuclear weapons? It was essentially a very unusual or creative idea from the perspective of geo-politics to allow the existing nuclear states to retain the weaponry, while inducing the non-nuclear states to agree on not acquiring them in exchange of two things. One was access to nuclear energy and peaceful nuclear technology, and the other was good faith commitment by nuclear weapon states to seek nuclear disarmament. What has happened in practice is that the second commitment has not been implemented. So what you have is a kind of pseudo solution which gives the powerful states the right to retain nuclear

weapons and discretionary right to force other states to not acquiring them, as it happened in the case of Iraq.

He stressed, that there was a failure of UN system which emerged after the Second World War to provide a Plan A solution for solving common challenges to humanity. The UN was based on cooperation which fragmented with no enforcement capability of the institution. So a structure of mutually assured destruction appeared only because of the failure of the institutional arrangements, and the world order that has emerged has depended on Plan B types of approach, where norms are established in geo-political sphere as an interaction of separate states. Hopefully, the future will give us the opportunity to see Plan A type solutions and transcend Plan B types.

Dr. Hilal, during her speech, posed a question about the difference between human and humane global governance, where “humane” part has to do with the distinction between Plan A and Plan B. She said that one difference between nuclear disarmament and climate change is the fear factor, which is very important in mobilising the societies to force their governments to make decisions keeping in view the global and national interest. If we view climate change which we are experiencing in an indirect and gradual process, we do not see any vigorous and strong civil society action on this issue.

Dr. Hilal further explained that the global economy, corporate interest and private sector is less important in nuclear disarmament, but it is an important factor in climate change scenario. The geo-politics of climate change and nuclear weapons is different. The geo-politics of climate change is based on those countries which are producing most pollution and are economically more powerful. For example, the US is a top contributor to global pollution, and also at the same time is the most powerful actor in global economics and politics. There is some overlapping of countries that are powerful and important in decision-making on nuclear disarmament and climate change, but there is some space for other less powerful, developing countries to share the decision-making process on issues of climate change.

Over the Cold War period of the 1990s, the concept of security was based on territorial defence, but now it has changed to human security, which is the “humane” part of global governance and security. These issues are getting more complicated, where climate change is more inclusionary

and nuclear disarmament is more exclusionary in terms of geo-politics of decision and policy making.

Question and Answer Session

Multiple questions were raised by people in the audience.

Q: There has been a destruction of nation-states in the name of democracy by the West, especially in the Middle East. What is its relation with humane governance?

Responding to the question, Dr. Falk said that the experience of anti-colonial movements highlighted the weakened capacity of the West to dominate the rest, and this lesson has not been particularly learnt by the US. As a result, we witness failed interventions across the Middle East, motivated by different reasons and interests in a post-colonial world. He also mentioned the rise of the non-state actors and the emergence of transnational terrorism, where the world becomes a battlefield. Hence, we witness the pattern of conflict being altered, and secondly, the development of capacity in weaker states to challenge strong, powerful military states. However, in this process, it is the society that pays the highest price.

Q: How can we converge national interest into global interest which can be pursued through multilateral institutions?

The whole way in which international relations are structured is a play between coercion and cooperation. The UN as a venue has been dominated by geo-political forces. The social forces embedded in the political systems should create a political climate that supports independent international institutions, with autonomy and strong leadership to be able to promote global interest. But this will take a lot of grass root politics. It is the absence of a global community that makes it extremely difficult to empower global institutions.

Q: How do you see the dichotomy of the West when it comes to the use and development of nuclear weapons by others?

The tension between nuclear weapons policy and global governance is what defines and dictates such dichotomies. The world is dominated by geo-political considerations, which is highlighted by the way Iran's nuclear programme is treated and how Israel's programme is treated? The geo-

political orders exercises selectivity based on disparity in power. The basic motivation has been guided by this kind of geo-political thinking about how to arrange economic and political relationships that benefit the most powerful countries.

Q: The nuclear energy is clean energy, and has an important role in sustainable development. However, NPT and NSG are discriminatory and selective in approach, so how do one go about such contradictions?

Climate change has given a new impetus to more reliance on nuclear energy because of its positives. This kind of policy is bound with all kind of ambiguity which relates to development of weapons. Secondly, it is a perilous technology made evident especially by the nuclear accident in Japan. Also, this technology can end up in the hands of non-state actors, hence making it all very risky. I believe that besides expanding nuclear technology, we should be looking into other alternatives.

Q: The same global disorder and geo-political arrangement you have highlighted is trying to find a solution for climate change and nuclear disarmament with the same mind-set which failed to adopt Plan A. How do you think they can be just and sensitive to other weaker states and their interests?

The question itself states the difficulty and tension of this problematic issue that we confront. These issues cannot be solved at the level of nation-states and that's why we need a mechanism at the global level to solve these problems in a Plan A way. The only way of over-coming this difficulty is through a transnational social movement that has enough influence on governments that they tend to modify the way in which they look at national interest and merge it with global interest. Given the unevenness of the global order, it is very hard to state how this change will come about, and we have very little understanding of the political path for this to happen.

Concluding Remarks

In his concluding remarks, Chairman Board of Governors ISSI Ambassador Khalid Mahmood said that the discussion was of very high calibre which underlined the primacy of dangers of nuclear weaponry and climate change as most lethal challenges to the international community. This calls for cooperation at international level. But as Dr. Falk rightly pointed out, the global

order is such that it does not bring forth the ideal solution. Henceforth, compromises are needed which are of not ideal nature. Therefore, it becomes our duty to bridge this gap and it is the collective responsibility of all to take action in this regard. The Ambassador reiterated Dr. Falk's point that it is also a differentiated responsibility, as small nations do not have resources to confront climate change and that the creation of an organisation like the Green Fund has been created which will provide resources to small countries.

Responding to mention of the NPT, he remarked that the Treaty was a "three-legged stool" which included non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, peaceful use of nuclear energy and disarmament. He said there is more emphasis on nuclear proliferation, but less on disarmament and equal significance should be given to other goals of the NPT as well. He agreed with the speakers for accentuating these lethal challenges which are opening wider horizons to us of this debate.