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Report – Webinar

“Celebrating Africa Day”

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The Centre for Middle East & Africa (CMEA) at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) hosted a WebCelebration to commemorate Africa Day on May 20, 2020. The celebrations were held in advance because Africa Day (May 25) will be during Eid break this year.

The Keynote address was given by H.E. Prof. Julius Kibet Bitok, High Commissioner of the Republic of Kenya & Dean of African Countries’ Ambassadors in Pakistan, while the Chief Guest on the occasion was Mr. Ali Javed, Additional Secretary Africa, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Pakistan. Other speakers included Ambassador Imran Yawer, Former Ambassador to the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Algeria and Permanent Representative to the African Union (AU) and Dr Rukhsana Siddiqui, Former HoD, IR Department, Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad & African Expert.

The webinar was moderated by Ms. Amina Khan, Director CMEA, ISSI.

Introducing the subject of the webinar, Ms. Amina Khan said that today we celebrate not only a special day for Africa but also for our newly established Centre since it is our first event. This especially indicates the great importance that Pakistan attaches to its relationship with Africa. ‘Africa Day’ is a day of commemoration, of celebration and of unwavering determination of the people of the African continent who fought courageously for their freedom. Pakistan’s relations with Africa are steeped in a history of common challenges. It is due to these deep-rooted ties that we have decided to observe this day; the ‘Africa Day’ to remember our mutual ties, to celebrate our history, to pay homage to the sacrifices of both our forefathers and to look towards a prosperous future partnership.

From being a member of the UN Commission supporting Eritrea’s independence from Italian rule to backing movements against racial discrimination in South Africa; extending moral support to liberation struggles in Morocco, Zimbabwe and Namibia, Pakistan has remained a steadfast friend to Africa. Pakistan is also a regular contributor to the UN peacekeeping missions to Ghana, Somalia, Eritrea, Congo and many others. African soldiers and officers of Defence forces are frequently trained in Pakistan. Celebrated African leaders have visited Pakistan; visionaries like the late Nelson Mandela visited Pakistan twice, and was awarded the highest

honours of our country (Nishan-e-Pakistan) and ISSI has had the distinct honour of hosting Mr. Mandela during his visit to Pakistan in 1992.

However, despite this engagement, unfortunately the volume of interaction between Pakistan and the African continent has not been as great as it should be, and there remain immense untapped opportunities particularly, on the economic front. However, this is changing under the vision of Prime Minister Imran Khan’s new ‘Engage Africa’ policy where the government is focusing on economic diplomacy as well as adopting tangible measures to establish a robust bilateral economic partnership with the African countries. Under this policy, Pakistan has decided to open up new missions in different African countries while exploring opportunities for more in the future.

On our part, CMEA at ISSI under the visionary guidance of DG Ambassador Aizaz Ahmed Chaudhry aims to fortify relations between Pakistan and Africa as well as assist the government in chalking out a roadmap for future cooperation with the African continent. She believed that for Pakistan-Africa ties; a better tomorrow awaits and ended her speech with words of Mr. Nelson Mandela describing Pakistan’s relations with Africa: “Our nations are joined, not only by cultural and religious bonds, but also by common experiences and challenges.”

Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry, Director General Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad talked about the importance of Africa, calling it the ‘continent of the future’. The original name of Africa is Alkebulan (mother of mankind). It is known as the ancient continent, which has African ancestors going back as far as 5 million years ago. The day is special for ISSI, because the Centre of Middle East & Africa has now officially been set up, starting with this substantive event. The setting up of CMEA was a desire of the Foreign Minister, Shah Mahmood Qureshi.

Not only is Africa rich in resources (mineral resources and agricultural resources), but it also enjoys a prime strategic location. The strength of Africa is also in numbers; the immense human capital that constitutes a huge labour force and can become part of several industrialization projects which is why organizations are looking towards Africa. Africa has always been an important region for Pakistan. Pakistan has helped the African countries in their struggle against apartheid and colonialism. Pakistan’s contribution through UN peacekeeping missions in Africa is paramount. We hope that Pakistan's government’s policy to develop commercial linkages with

African countries will come to fruition. He said that ‘A prosperous Africa, based on inclusive growth and sustainable development’ is the theme for this year’s Africa Day. The idea is equitable growth premised on equitable opportunities and equitable benefits going to every segment of society which is exactly what Pakistan wants to achieve itself, he said.

Ms. Fatima Raza, Research Associate CMEA, ISSI gave a presentation on the occasion highlighting Pakistan and Africa long standing relationship. She highlighted the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’, Pakistan 2-day Envoys Conference held in 2019 titled ‘Engage Africa’ to facilitate cooperation between both sides. She mentioned that ISSI had also held a Roundtable dialogue to commemorate Africa day last year. She then elaborated how the ‘Engage Africa’ policy is being implemented by Pakistan. An example is the Pakistan-Africa Trade Development Conference was held in January 2020 in Nairobi, Kenya to enhance trade and increase outreach to African countries.

Under the Engage Africa policy, Economic diplomacy will be deployed to carve out further prospects and potentials for cooperation such as: diplomatic & economic outreach, explore new markets, diversify exports, strengthen institutional linkages with the AU preferential Trade Agreements with regional trade, linking with the African development bank. A well-rounded policy of engagement will require all sectors to play their respective roles; such as the civil society, think-tank cooperation, establishing Africa study centres in Pakistan, arranging scholarships and student exchange programs, building on the existing defence cooperation through training programs and joint military exercises. Thus, tapping the untapped potential in all areas for a wholesome future partnership, she said.

Ambassador Yawer said that if I have ever seen magic anywhere it was in Africa. May 25th is a momentous day for the people of Africa. On this day in 1963, the leaders came together to form the African Union to eliminate the remaining vestiges of colonialism and apartheid. While Africa has succeeded in gaining its political freedom, through its hard struggle for self-determination, the continent is still hostage to a number of challenges that require a concerted and sustainable effort to overcome. Challenges include the elimination of poverty and hunger, terrorism, civil wars and post-migrations, ecological issues and climate change. There is an urgent need for a real economic uplift in the region to create sustainable job opportunities for the people, he said.

In the past decade alone; the continent has seen notable improvements in governance, conflict management and in overcoming social challenges. African economic prospects are amongst the brightest in the world as six of the world’s fastest growing countries are in Africa. We should not forget Africa’s youth population which constitutes a formidable market particularly for labour intensive industrialisation .

There is no doubt that Pakistan was at the forefront of the liberation movements of the countries in Africa. While our contributions of the past have been plentiful, recent relations are scattered in lost opportunity. Nonetheless it seems there is a revival of interest in Pakistan. There is no doubt that the ‘Engage Africa’ policy is a good omen. However, success of this policy will depend upon, adjusting our priorities with those of Africa. We need to see what Africa wants, not what we can give to Africa. To exhibit our seriousness and commitment to developing relations with Africa, Pakistan must boost its official presence in Africa. There is also a need to reinvigorate high-level, bilateral contacts with African leadership. We need to know African people. Africans love personalised relations. However, from Pakistan there have only been 4 visits to Africa since 2014. Since 2014, there were 28 visits from India to Africa. We need to increase our interactions and establish a regular bilateral mechanism.

During her remarks, Dr Siddiqui lay emphasis on how to an average Pakistani Africa means a faraway land. Pakistani media in general gives little coverage to Africa which is a true impediment. Pakistani scholars talk about lack of engagement with the continent in Africa. Africa has produced visionaries for the world such as Nelson Mandela. South Africa alone has produced nine Nobel laureates. Pakistan must continue to engage with Africa in several dimensions. It is very important that Pakistan has to engage at an academic level as well. Primary objective for researchers is to find mutual ground with Africa in all spheres and contribute to the discipline of Afro-Asia studies.

Pakistani scholars of Africa should articulate and defend the suffering and deprivation in all continents especially Afro-Asia region. She stated that research in Africa provides the opportunity to test different academic theories in both regions. Hence, courses in Africa should be offered in all Pakistani universities and training institutes. Moreover, Afro-Asian studies should replace the Euro-American centre approach, and funds should be enhanced for African

specific research. The National University of Modern Languages should initiate instruction in African language. There should be linkage programmes with universities, should promote student faculty exchanges, Pakistani libraries should subscribe to African study journals and there should be enhanced cooperation in fields such as journalism, music and countless other disciplines in social sciences.

In his address, Ambassador Bitok said that the African group of ambassadors and high commissioners in Pakistan are happy with steps the government of Pakistan and people of Pakistan have taken to engage with Africa. He highlighted the notable efforts by the government of Pakistan to boost engagement with African countries. He called the recently held Pakistan- Africa Trade and Development Conference held in Nairobi in January 2020, a landmark development in the ‘Engage Africa’ policy of Pakistan. The conference hosted over a hundred businessmen and women from Pakistan. The conference was indeed the beginning of a new chapter in Pakistan Africa engagement. He said he looked forward to more such interaction and visits at the highest levels of government. These he said were engines of effective engagement. He confirmed that plans are underway of high level visits between Kenya and Pakistan.

Africa and Pakistan are good friends and have been collaborating in different fields of development. He said that there was no better time to forge better and deeper partnership especially in the backdrop of Pakistan’s ‘Engage Africa’ policy coupled together with the new African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement. The Free Trade Area seeks to ease the free movement of goods and people, transforming the 1.2 billion African population into a single investment and growth hub platform to promote shared prosperity. The African group recognises the significant contribution of trade and investment as vehicles of accelerated economic growth. A fission of African natural resources and Pakistan tech can bring enormous benefits to both sides. It is important to develop a common agenda with institutional support between Africa and Pakistan. At a multilateral level, the African Union has endorsed Kenya as its candidate for the non-permanent seat of the United Nations Security Council for 2021. We look forward to Pakistani support in this important election, scheduled for June 2020.

During his remarks, Mr. Ali Javed said Pakistan and Africa have a lot of gaps to cover bilaterally. Case in point being how over 25 years, Pakistan and Zimbabwe have not convened the joint commission. The relations otherwise are phenomenal. With Kenya the gap is 16 years and with Morocco the gap is 12 years. In 15 years, there has only been one bilateral visit with Morocco. He said even arranging high level visits with various countries across the African continent will be a huge task; given the vast expanse of the continent and the limited presence of Pakistan. Nonetheless, we should derive strength from our core convergences. He stated that Pakistan has a similar history of struggle as the African continent. Therefore, since the day Pakistan achieved its own independence, it has always raised its voice for suppressed and oppressed nations. This, he said, is the strongest point which binds the Pakistani nation with Africa.

There are no contentious issues between the two entities while there are numerous points of convergence. Pakistan itself has been having a difficult time for the past 41 years. First, we were faced by the aggression in Afghanistan by the USSR. The new war started in 2001, which is still ongoing. Nevertheless, its commitment to peacekeeping never came down, Pakistan has always maintained its commitment to the UN Charter. A large diplomatic presence in Africa is not sufficient to cover the gaps in its relationship with Africa. The gaps which are lacking by the government can be filled by social media platforms. He went to point out how social media platforms must be effectively utilised to bring about greater awareness. Think Tanks can also contribute in this regard. Friendships forums need to be established at all levels of state. In fact, the entire Pakistani nation as a whole, should all come together every year to celebrate what he called, ‘Pakistan-Africa day’. This will help raise awareness of the depth and the diversity of the Pakistan- Africa relationship, he said.

In his concluding remarks, Ambassador Khalid Mahmood, Chairman BOG, ISSI, said that there is no denying the importance of the African continent. One cannot but recall Pakistan’s deep engagement with the continent, since the days of decolonisation. Pakistan after becoming the member of the UN spearheaded the fight against colonialism and apartheid. The leadership of various countries which included Algeria , Tunisia, Morocco and Libya did not have any locus standi at the UN so in fact, Pakistan’s mission to the United Nations was the modus operandi for many African countries for several years. In the field of peacekeeping, ever since 1960 Pakistan

has always been participating in various peacekeeping operations in Africa. There are many Pakistanis who have had the honour of serving in African governments after these countries gained independence. He said that it was a pity that Pakistan has not been able to benefit from the historical linkages it shares with African countries. He also talked about how Pakistan should also particularly try to gain from the rich experience of Africa in the field of tourism.