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Report – Webinar

“Pakistan and the United Nations at 75: Past, Present and Future”

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The Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) organized a webinar titled “*Pakistan and the United Nations at 75: Past, Present and Future*” on August 31, 2020. Former Senator and federal minister, Mr. Javed Jabbar was the Chief Guest at the occasion. Dr. Maleeha Lodhi, former ambassador and Pakistan’s Representative to the United Nations was the keynote speaker. Other speakers at the occasion included: former Senator and minister, Mr. Nisar Memon and Dr. Tughral Yamin, Associate Dean, Centre for International Peace and Stability (CIPS) at NUST. The UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, Mr. Julian Harneis also expressed his views via a video message.

The webinar was moderated by Mr. Najam Rafique, Director Research at the ISSI, who stated that the UN gave new hope for peace to the future generations following the disastrous Second World War - the most savage and destructive war in the history of mankind which consumed half of the world. Even though the UN has helped end conflicts and foster reconciliation by conducting successful humanitarian and peacekeeping operations in dozens of countries, the world has seen countless wars, some of them still ongoing. These conflicts continue to fester under the watch of the UN and include the dispute in Kashmir, Palestine, Middle East and Africa. These conflicts continue to plague the organization, not because it has failed, but mostly because of the right to veto at the disposal of the permanent five members out of the member states of 193. As a result, millions have been killed and displaced and the world continues to be mired in conflict. The COVID-19 pandemic has made these challenges even bigger. He also stated that in order to face the upcoming difficulties like the expected global financial crises, which are likely to worsen in 2020, the organization must re-imagine effective multilateralism to fight the challenges of the current time.

In his message, the UN resident and humanitarian coordinator, Mr. Julian Harneis said that Pakistan is an important contributor to the UN, especially to its peacekeeping activities. He said that with the recent assumption of the leadership of the Economic and Social Council, Pakistan can also make a significant difference. He further stated that the UN is a combination of strong nations and has facilitated in the success of decolonization and also the dismantling of imperialism. Mr. Harneis said that there are many challenges that we need to take on together and there is a baseline against which we are measuring the purposes of the United Nations. While summarizing the aims of the United Nations, he said that the UN Charter aims at

maintaining international peace and security through collective measures, to develop friendly relations amongst nations based on the respectful principles of equal rights and self-determination of peoples. It seeks to achieve international cooperation in solving economic, social, cultural and humanitarian causes. Finally, the aim of the United Nations is to be a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations in the attainment of these common aims.

In his introductory remarks, the Director General ISSI, Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry stated that a hundred years ago, in the 1920s, the world was going through a difficult time as economies were struggling to come out of the effects of the World War, the Spanish Flu was present and the communist revolution in Russia had taken place and Europe had started experiencing nationalist movements which saw multilateralism being shunned, particularly the League of Nations. Autocrats had started emerging and Hitler rose to power in Germany. A hundred years down the line, we are observing similar trends, with the world going through a difficult phase with ultranationalist leaders undermining multilateralism and globalism which are on the decline and this could be a recipe for conflict. He said that the concept of respecting sovereignty remains relevant in the present world and we still believe in the relevance of the UN. He warned that this time it would not be a war, but total annihilation of everything so therefore, multilateralism, globalism and pluralism must prevail over unilateralism and autocracy. Ambassador Chaudhry also stated that after the Second World War, the concept of UN was built on a set of certain principles that guided interstate relations and the baseline were the solid principles that kept peace, protected the weak and vulnerable from the strong and high-headed. Moreover, the respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, the commitment not to intervene or interfere in others affairs and also the right of self-defence remain valid in the present world and must be protected; the world needs them today, more than it did in 1945.

Dr. Maleeha Lodhi, while talking about UN and challenges to multilateralism stated that the UN is marking a milestone at an unprecedented time, with the COVID-19 posing a unique challenge with countries turning inward and the divisions becoming sharper between an increasingly interconnected world. She also touched upon the trends which are impacting the world, which include: diffusing multipolarity, the erosion of a rules based system, the anti-globalization movement, intensification of trade wars and the rise of hyper nationalism. She stated that new trends will make addressing global problems that much more difficult in the future. The world is

in fact passing through one of history's most unsettled periods with a number of trends reconfiguring the international landscape. Ambassador Lodhi stated that there is little predictability with rising international pressures in an increasingly atomized and fragmented global system. She said that these trends form the environment or context in which the UN has to operate and which will also shape the UN's responses and also influence what it can and cannot do.

She marked a few characteristics, which may be the most important in terms of influencing the overall environment in which the UN operates. Among the five, she first flagged the obvious, which is increasing multipolarity as global power is being diffused and redistributed in a very complex and complicated world where the very notion and currency of power has been undergoing a change. One of the defining features of the contemporary world also worth noting about this multipolarity is that formal alliances seem to matter much less now and instead networks or ad hoc coalitions have become the preferred choice of alignment by countries, at times, single issue groups among like-minded countries are formed.

The second feature she highlighted was that threats to multilateralism and the erosion of a rules-based international order is the renunciation of existing agreements treaties or previously agreed arrangements and the examples include the withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement, rejection of the Iran Nuclear Agreement, the renunciation of the INF treaty, the US withdrawal from the Human Rights Council and from the WHO and now of course it is also threatening to leave the WTO. The principal challenge to multilateralism has come from Trump's America but other countries too have joined in or have operated in the same way just as in the neighborhood we see Prime Minister Modi flouting Security Council resolutions on occupied Kashmir; Russia by its action in Crimea and of course other countries too have acted in a way that have defied international norms. The net result is that the post-World War II multilateral system is now under unprecedented stress.

The third feature of the international environment is the resurgence in East-West tensions and the intensification of competition between the major powers widely described as the start of a new Cold War confrontation between the United States and China which has been triggered for the

most part by Washington's strategy to contain China's rise. It is not just trade and tech wars that are central in this new Cold War, but the clash of geopolitical ambitions and interests.

The fourth feature is the emergence of anti-globalization sentiment and resort primarily by the US to protectionist policies that can further undermine globalization. The fifth defining feature has been the resurgence of right wing populists who continue to undermine the system.

Speaking about the evolving nature of UN peacekeeping, Dr. Tughral Yamin said that Pakistan's role in UN peacekeeping operations has helped in improving the country's soft image. He said that Pakistan's participation in these operations have helped showcase the professionalism of its military in the world. While talking about the UN peacekeeping and the role of Pakistan, he stated that our peacekeepers have done well and over the decades, it has become a tenet of our foreign policy to send peacekeepers all over the globe. He further explained that Pakistan's participation in UN peacekeeping operations are motivated by the promotion of Jinnah's vision of a peaceful nation shouldering international responsibilities as a member state of the UN. Secondly, to build national prestige and to provide influence in international relations and above all, showcase the country's professionalism and also gain experience in humanitarian operations. Dr. Yamin also mentioned the three cardinal principles of UN peacekeeping, mainly: consent of parties, neutrality, and use of force in self defence. He stated that over the years, UN peacekeeping has evolved but neutrality for peacekeepers still remains the guiding principle.

Senator Nisar Memon talked about Pakistan's progress on the SDGs and stated that Pakistan has made some progress in achieving the SDGs which shows that there is willingness on the part of the government to move forward in the right direction. He said that the ten years that are left to achieve the Agenda 2030 are very critical and that the SDGs are one of the finest achievements of the UN. Mr. Memon stressed that commitment by the leadership is important and the parliament must also play its role in the achievement of the SDGs. He said that the UN must strive for peace and justice because when there will be justice, there will be security. He explained that it is not a military diplomacy but the humanitarian contribution of Pakistan to the world and there cannot be a better picture of Pakistan then to talk about the contribution we have made to the Sustainable Development Goals that were adopted by the 193 countries of the UN in

2015 in order to achieve the Agenda 2030. Unfortunately, Pakistan was not able to achieve much success in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the predecessor of the SDGs.

However, there were two aspects where Pakistan did well and we achieved the objectives which was the climate change policy as well as the establishment of the environment, water and forest policies during the fifteen years of the MDGs. Pakistan has also been quite successful in combating diseases like polio, malaria, HIV Aids and dengue, but there have been partial successes and failures. He also stated that Pakistan is on the way to achieving the SDGs if it continues to strive in taking the right measures as Pakistan has been showing moderate improvements. In some of the goals, Pakistan is really behind in achieving progress. Pakistan distinguishes itself being one of the 30 countries of the world out of the 193 which has submitted the Voluntary National Review of the SDGs which is a very positive development.

Senator Javed Jabbar spoke on the relevance of the UN to the world of 2020 and beyond. He stated that generations born in the last five or six decades are very lucky as they have witnessed the significant transformations that the world has undergone. He said that the UN Human Rights Charter is very significant as it transcends all divisions and accommodates all the diversity. He further stated that outside the UN, the panorama of change, life expectancy, China's lifting of millions out of poverty, trade and connectivity; all these achievements have partially been spearheaded by the UN.

Mr. Jabbar questioned whether the current UN system is in a position to correct the historic asymmetries? He further explained that while the permanency of the P5 at the UNSC may be de facto, India and Israel also hold sway. He stated that we have respectively highlighted issues that are very germane to the consideration of this milestone. Mr. Jabbar said that we have been witness to the construction of the most comprehensive network of interstate relations that the world has ever known and we tend to of course look at its failures and its flaws. However, if truly looked at, one could have experienced the codification of the basic norms and edicts that have never before been accepted and ratified by virtually all of humanity and the most significant facet is that text called the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. States are instrumental in ensuring that those rights are enforced. The document transcends all divisions of continents, religions and ideologies and accepts the irreducible dignity of each human being. Never before

have so many diverse countries agreed that this is irreducible. It's another matter whether that is practiced or reinforced.

He further stated that the arbitrariness that exists was something that existed soon after the creation of the UN. While mentioning the evolution of the present system, he said that through the United Nations and its specialized agencies and the panorama of change, never before in human history have there been such significant advances in healthcare, life expectancy, literacy, education, access to basic services and the escape from poverty led by that glorious Chinese achievement of lifting 800 million people out of poverty in about 30 to 40 years. Similarly, mass travel, trade, connectivity, participation and governance for the first time at the grassroots and at higher levels, are truly a spectacular aspect of achievements partly spearheaded by the United Nations.

On the sobering side, he mentioned that out of five veto powers, four continue on their hegemonistic impulses. While talking about Kashmir, he said that Pakistan must strive to improve its image in the world and also work overtime to change for the better perceptions about Pakistan and also tell the world regularly daily, weekly, minute by minute, what is happening in Kashmir. This he said needs to be said in modulated tones not advocating violence, not advocating merger with Pakistan, not looking at it as a territorial dispute, but simply as a process of human rights and self-determination. He concluded by saying that we must invest in building up the image of Pakistan, an investment truly useful and necessary.

In his concluding remarks, Chairman Board of Governors, ISSI, Ambassador Khalid Mahmood stated that the United Nations has played a central role in forging a normative framework and people around the globe 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 security. He said that occasion has provided an opportunity to recall the main drivers behind the establishment of this universal body, its performance over the years and prospects it holds for the future. Ambassador Mahmood concluded by saying that the organization's performance in the security field has been rather patchy and it may not have been able to prevent intermittent conflicts of various intensity around the world. He further said that the UN can rightly take credit for accelerating the process

of decolonization and its increasing role in peacekeeping and post-conflict peace building. However, at the same time the festering wounds of unresolved Palestine and Kashmir disputes underscore that the UN must assert its role in conflict resolution and the settlement of these and other outstanding disputes. The UN has done an outstanding job in institution building and the hope is for a better and stronger resolve to overcome the present challenges.

Pictures of the Event

