

## **Report on the 118<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the International Parliamentary Union, Cape Town, South Africa**

### **Introduction:**

Soon after the swearing in of the new National Assembly and assuming the office of its Speaker, Dr. Fehmida Mirza was informed about the forthcoming session of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. Times were surely odd as this vital international event was being held only a week after the new National Assembly's inaugural session and, what is more, during its first regular sitting. Some even advised to send regrets instead of attending as many of the new Members in the House did not know the Rules of Business of their own Parliament, let alone the agenda, business and topics of the IPU's meeting at Cape Town. It was, therefore, understandably assumed that any delegation, if sent would not be fully prepared. Yet, against all these odds, the Speaker rightly decided to lead a delegation to Cape Town with a mission to let the international community know that a new democratic Pakistan was back in business!

### **The Delegation; Its Composition and Strength:**

The selection of the delegation was very important. It was required to be effective and yet the smallest possible in size. It had to reflect all the political divide and also a fine mix of seasoned parliamentarians and young entrants in the National Assembly. This delicate balance was achieved with the selection of six members, beside the Speaker, who included:

- Farah Naz Isfahani
- Azeem Daultana and
- Syed Ghulam Mustafa Shah from the PPP
- Sardar Ayaz Sadiq from the PML (N)
- Khawaja Sheraz from PML (Q) and
- Bushra Gohar from the ANP.

Imbued with the national spirit, all the members worked like a team to make an effective and impressive representation of Pakistan.

### **4<sup>th</sup> International Meeting of the Women Speakers – April 12, 2008**

The Conference was significant on many accounts. It was scheduled to open on the 13<sup>th</sup> of April but prior to it, on its sidelines, was yet another highly important event, namely the Fourth Annual Meeting of the Women Speakers on April 12. The occasion became quite crucial as Dr. Fehmida Mirza was eagerly awaited in its all sittings as the first women to have ever been elected as Speaker in the entire Muslim World. Her speech was eagerly listened and wildly covered and appreciated by the Media and the delegates.

The theme for this year's Women Speaker's Conference was "Pushing the Frontiers of Poverty Back" and in the regard, an active role for women was sought.

Dr. Mirza dealt with the issue by spelling out schemes for involving women's potential at every tier of the society.

She called for bridging the gaps between the Muslim World and the West by asking the developed countries to support the fragile democracies of the developing Muslim Countries. Basing her arguments on the philosophy of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto, she urged the world powers to invest in the social sector of the poor Muslim nations on the lines of the famous "Marshall Plan". Dr. Mirza called the new scheme "The Benazir Bhutto Plan".

## **The 118<sup>th</sup> Inter Parliamentary Union's Annual Assembly – April 13-?, 2008**

### **Reception of the South African President**

The IPU's 118<sup>th</sup> Annual Assembly was inaugurated by the President of South Africa Mr. Thabo Mbeki. Mr. Mbeki received Dr. Mirza at the President's Reception and congratulated her on her election and the return of democracy in Pakistan. He also condoled the tragic assassination of Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto.

### **One-Minute Silence For Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto**

Dr. Mirza thanked the President for his generous remarks and requested him to help Pakistani delegation for the inclusion of one-minute silence in memory of Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto in the agenda of the Conference. This proposal was duly accepted and at the 1<sup>st</sup> full Plenary Session, the due homage was paid to the departed soul of the great leader of Pakistan.

### **The Full Plenary Session & The Speaker's Address**

After the inaugural session, the IPU held its regular meeting with a Full Plenary Session in which Madam Speaker Dr. Mirza was invited to deliver her address. In her speech to the IPU, Dr. Mirza stressed upon the world community to act swiftly in bridging the gap between the 'haves' and the "have-nots' of the world. She reminded that in order to have a peaceful planet, the world must ensure that the dignity and respect of nations is not compromised by the developed world while curbing extremism. At the same time, it must ensure justice to all oppressed nations, fighting a just war for liberation and freedom. And above all, we must act to open dialogue between civilizations rather than professing a clash between them.

The speech was very well-received by the delegations from around the globe.

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On the sidelines of the 118<sup>th</sup> Assembly, the Speaker National Assembly remained engaged with promoting parliamentary diplomacy and bilateralism. In order to use the platform appropriately in favour of Pakistan after the restoration of democracy and representative government in Pakistan, Madam Speaker met many delegations.

Madam Speaker called on Mr. Saleh Bin Humaid, the Imam of Kabba and apprised him about the situation in Pakistan and also discussed matters of mutual interest. At the end of the meeting, Imam of Kabba praised Shaheed Benazir Bhutto and offered prayers for the departed soul of the great leader and expressed his solidarity with the people of Pakistan.

Among others, the meetings of Madam Speaker with delegations of UK, Iran, China and Afghanistan were also held for exchange of views on matters of mutual interest. Madam Speaker also met the Deputy Secretary General of UN Ms. Asha-Rose Migiro and Secretary General of the IPU Mr. Anders B. Johnsson. These meetings proved productive and meaningful with respect to capacity building process in Pakistan.

# MADAM SPEAKER SPEECH AT 118<sup>TH</sup> IPU CONFERENCE

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF PAKISTAN  
AT THE 118<sup>TH</sup> ASSEMBLY OF THE INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

**Mr. /Madam President/Chair,  
Fellow Parliamentarians,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies & Gentlemen!**

It is my profound privilege to address the Plenary Session of the 118<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union in this beautiful city of Cape Town. Let me also seize this opportunity to express my heartiest gratitude to the Speaker, Parliament and People of South Africa for hosting this Conference.

**Madam President,**

*There are moments in the history of Nations that divide the past from the future;  
There are moments in the history of Nations that define a nation's soul;  
There are moments in the history of Nations that represent cross-roads, a turning point, a new direction and a new beginning.*  
This is the moment for Pakistan.

This occasion also holds a special significance for me as I lead my country's parliamentary delegation for the first time in my capacity as the first woman Speaker of the National Assembly of Pakistan. In my election, the Parliamentarians of Pakistan not only manifested their resolve and commitment to eradicate gender bias, but have also taken a lead by electing me as the first woman Speaker of the entire Muslim World.

I would like to express my gratitude to all the member states of the IPU and its Secretary General for sharing our grief and condemning the tragic assassination of Madam Benazir Bhutto. An ardent supporter of world peace and inter-cultural dialogue, she fell victim to the forces of terrorism and violence. She laid her life for the principles of democracy, inter-faith harmony and freedom.

In many ways, I find her life similar to the great South African leader, Mr. Nelson Mandela. Both had to bear the brunt of tyranny for standing up for the peoples' rights as both shunned the forces of discrimination, oppression and suppression. And yet when the time came, both opted for reconciliation and not revenge.

## **Madam Chair/President**

Mohtarma Benazir's assassination demonstrates a brutal fact that confronts us all --- the international war against terrorism. As a frontline state in this war, we are not only concerned but are also directly affected as Pakistan's innocent men and women frequently fall prey to violence and extremism. The immediate reasons for this menace may differ but the underlying causes are the same --- despotic attitudes, non-representative governments, deprivation and poverty.

It is unfortunate that while the global attention is focused on terrorism, the crisis of poverty is effectively disregarded. In the developing world, particularly in the frontline countries like Pakistan, the average income has been shrinking while the cost of living is rising sharply. This is bound to fan frustration, anger and desperate acts. As more and more youth seeks to act as suicide bombers or are engaged as child soldiers the world over, the problem lies more in exclusion, human rights violations and economic deprivation rather than mere religious fanaticism.

Today, Madam Chair about 80 million people in Pakistan are forced to live below the Poverty line. The disparity between the rich and the poor is growing at an alarming rate. We are facing the reality of food insecurity, unemployment, water and energy crisis and a breakdown of health and education services.

The world community, thus, has to act swiftly in bridging the gap between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'.

1. It must ensure that the dignity and respect of nations is not compromised while combating the challenges of extremism and terrorism.
2. It must strive for social and economic justice and not focus only on economic growth and corporate expansion.
3. It must ensure justice to all oppressed nations, fighting a just war for liberation and freedom.
4. It must stop the deplorable trends of deriding people's values and beliefs by attacking religions in the garb of freedom of speech and expression.
5. And above all it must act to open dialogue between civilizations rather than professing a clash between them.

## **Madam Chair/President!**

Today, we are on the threshold of a new democratic partnership between the established and the emerging democracies of the world. This partnership must be directed to strengthen the forces of democracy and not the old guard of dictatorship. This partnership should create a bond of strong and mutual trust, close and common interests and constant to the values we all share --- values of freedom; values of liberty; values of human dignity.

This is the partnership the new democratic Pakistan wishes to build with the members states of the International Parliamentary Union, and it is through this partnership that we wish to promote peace and freedom all over.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen!**

I come before you today with mandate from a freely and democratically elected National Assembly, a People's House that has ended a generation of dictatorship and oppression. Representing a modern, innovative, future-orientated government – a coalition of progressive forces determined to ensure equality and justice for all, jump-start the economy and rebuild the social fabric of my Nation. We will seek and strengthen good relations with all our neighbours and strive to resolve emerging and long standing issues with our neighbours through sustained dialogue.

This is a heavy responsibility for us, knowing that what lies before Pakistan now – all the hopes and dreams of the people that we carry forth...

Too many have sacrificed, too many have been persecuted, too many have fought and died. We did not come this far to fail...

I therefore, come before you with a clear and simple message:

Pakistan is back!

Pakistan is back to being a parliamentary democracy!

This is the moment for us to create a tomorrow better than any of the yesterdays we have ever known.

We see and dream of a Pakistan of Pakistan where men and women are equal in all respects, as they are guaranteed in our constitution and the Holy Quran; a new Pakistan where the birth of a baby girl is greeted with the same joy, hope and opportunity as the birth of a baby boy.

That is the kind of Pakistan for which Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto died. And that is the Pakistan for which we will live.

I thank you all. ....