

SPEECH OF THE SPEAKER NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

-
INAUGURAL CEREMONY

-
5th CPA ASIA REGIONAL CONFERENCE – 2019
Islamabad – Pakistan

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**“Envisioning Parliamentary Paths towards a
Diverse and Developed South Asia”**

Bismillah – e – Rahman – e – Raheem

- Honorable President of Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Mr. Arif Alvi *Sahib*,
- Rt. Honorable Rebecca A. Kadaga, Speaker of Parliament of Uganda and CPA President,
- Honorable Emilia Monjowa Lifaka, Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly Cameroon and Chairperson of the CPA Executive Committee,
- Honorable Dr. Dato' Noraini Ahmad, Member of the Federal Parliament of Malaysia and Chairperson, Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP),
- Honorable J. M. Ananda Kumarasiri, M.P., Deputy Speaker from the Parliament of Srilanka,
- Honorable Speakers from Provincial Assemblies of Punjab, KPK, Baluchistan and Sindh,
- Special Guests from Uganda, UK, Malaysia, Gilgit Baltistan and Azad Jammu Kashmir Legislative Assemblies,
- Distinguished delegates,
- Excellencies,
- Ladies and Gentlemen!

Assalam o Alaikum and a very Good Morning to all of you!

1. It is indeed a matter of great honour and delight for me to have the participants, distinguished guests and colleagues from Commonwealth fraternity in our midst today at the 5th CPA Asia Regional Conference – 2019.
2. At the very onset, I place my deepest gratitude to our President of Pakistan Excellency Dr. Arif Alvi for gracing the Inaugural Ceremony of our Conference. Your presence here Sir, speaks of your strong commitment and personal attachment to parliamentary democracy and the role of legislatures in decision-making.
3. I would especially like to thank the parliamentary delegation from Sri Lanka, guests from the UK, Malaysia and Uganda and all the participating branches from the provincial legislatures of Pakistan for coming together for this conference and reaffirming our joint commitment of strengthening democracy and promoting cooperation for common good. It is indeed a matter of deep satisfaction to note that despite being nascent democracies, the regional legislatures recognize, value and support efforts for nurturing and consolidating democracy.

4. I am equally indebted to Honorable Emilia Lifaka, the Chairperson of the CPA Executive Committee, Rt. Honorable Rebecca A. Kadaga, Speaker of Uganda, the President of the CPA and Madame Noraini Ahmad, the Chairperson of Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians for accepting our invitation and joining us here as our Guests of Honour.

5. Pakistan deeply values the common bond which binds us together – the bond of the Commonwealth and it is with utmost conviction that I express the hope of continuing collaborative synergy between the National Legislature of Pakistan and the CPA Asia region branches for deepening democratic linkages, promoting people to people contact and boosting regional cooperation.

Excellencies, Ladies & Gentlemen!

6. Mostly mired with geopolitical constraints, the story of South Asia has seldom been viewed through the glass of the rising democratic consciousness of its citizens. Although the discourse of democratic development faces multiple obstacles, the roots of democracy have begun conditioning people's choices in the region. The manifestation of this can be seen through the increasing awareness and active participation of our people in political dialogues and democratic governance processes. With rising democratic consciousness among the citizens of the region, people of South Asia are investing in their democracies to benefit from a competitive system and to give voice to their interests.

7. It would do us all very proud to acknowledge the fact that South Asian region has been through pressing concerns over time but has come a long way and emerged overall as a successful democratic belt. From avoiding democratic breakdown to resisting democratic erosion; averting repressive, façade democracy to identifying the routes to the slow death a democracy may take, we are finally at a position where we face the symmetrical challenge of democratic completion. Today, issues of democratic quality are more pertinent in our politics than issues of democratic survival.

8. With the progress oriented approach of South Asia since the past decade, we look forward to the promises of democratic deepening and advancement in the region, since the commonality of the commonwealth lies in sharing a common commitment of promoting human rights, democracy and economic development.

9. If democratic stability must be attained and sustained in the Commonwealth of Nations, then collective ingredients for stabilizing democracy must be enshrined, observed, practiced and maintained. Democratic institutions from across the Commonwealth must, therefore, continue to collaborate for democratic peace and stability.

Excellencies, Ladies & Gentlemen!

10. In an age, when foreign policies are being driven by economic agendas, “Parliamentary Diplomacy” can act as a bridge between democracies and bring them closer through common strengths and opportunities. It can be used for not only sharing good practices among legislatures but as the baseline instrument for state to state cooperation and long term strategic partnerships.

11. In today’s globalized world, many of the challenges we face are common in nature and cannot be solely understood or advanced through a national or inter-governmental lens. Thus, it is the need of the hour that, we the parliamentarians, form a united front against the scourges of our time; including but not limited to violent extremism and resulting terrorism, climate change and its driven migration, human rights violation, international peace and security, rule of law, gender equality, freedom of expression and affordable access to basic human needs of health and education.

12. Cooperation between and among the states in its real sense can be achieved when Parliaments build consensus of opinion on matters of interests. In the years ahead, it is the Parliaments which have to lead people in tackling with some of the major and complex issues we face. Decisions resulting from the dialogue and discussion of the Parliaments will have long lasting impact on international political dynamics.

13. In this regard I deem us, the elected representatives, to be best poised to fulfill this task due to our deep connection with our people. I, therefore, stress that Parliaments must play an active role in international affairs not only through inter-parliamentary cooperation and diplomacy, but also by contributing to and monitoring international negotiations, overseeing the enforcement of what is adopted by governments, and ensuring national compliance with international norms and the rule of law.

Excellencies, Ladies & Gentlemen!

14. South Asia is a unique region which offers distinct set of strengths and common opportunities, combined responsibilities and shared risks. Housing one-fifth of the world’s total population, it is also home to the world’s second largest poor population. Being the fastest growing economic region of the world, South Asia is still able to export only one-third of its true potential. Despite political consolidation over the past decade, of the 189 countries ranked on the Human Development Index Chart, most of the South Asian region countries still hover around the 150 mark.

15. However, it is again South Asia which houses the world' largest working-age population, which is the main driver behind the booming services sector of the region. The geopolitical importance of our region, our shared borders with Central Asia and the oil-rich Gulf, our natural resources, and our human capital make our region's potential for growth, enormous. We must open our markets and lower barriers to trade and investment in a conscious effort of graduating; from being regional neighbors to becoming regional partners.

16. With South Asia's rise as the global economic, technological and cultural hub, it has become necessary to promptly address and neutralize the common roadblocks jeopardizing the wellbeing, prosperity and future of millions. What we need now is to build synergies and forge partnerships to deliver effectively and there is no better way to achieve this than engaging Parliaments – the representative institutions of our people.

Excellencies, Ladies & Gentlemen!

17. Pakistan strongly believes in the promise of multilateralism. States can achieve more together than they can individually. The more we cooperate the more the space for unilateral action is reduced.

18. Cooperation does not mean uniformity or conformity. It signifies harmony, tolerance and respect for diversity. We have tried it in our domestic politics and found it holding great promise. We believe it also holds great promise in inter-state relations.

19. Members of parliament are uniquely positioned to act as an interface between the people and state institutions, and to promote and adopt people-centered policies and legislation to ensure that no one is left behind. It is in this backdrop that responsibility rests on our Parliaments to safeguard political liberties, protect fundamental human freedoms and the rule of law.

20. Pakistan is sincerely committed to the Charter of CPA and believes that durable peace and progress in the region are in the interest of all. As the world moves forward to achieve the common agenda of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), we believe that the Parliamentarians have a unique opportunity and constitutional responsibility to play a significant role in supporting and monitoring implementation of the SDGs.

21. Being fully cognizant of this, the Parliament of Pakistan has been making conscious efforts of providing appropriate parliamentary fora to ensure that no voice is left unheard. We attach great importance to the development agenda and sincerely believe that Parliament must lead by example. In this regard, you shall be pleased to know that the Parliament of Pakistan is the first Parliament to boast its own Women's Parliamentary Caucus (WPC),

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Secretariat and Young Parliamentarians' Forum (YPF).

22. After assuming the office of Speaker, one of my prime goals has been to promote inclusivity. Therefore, one of the first things which I have accomplished has been the revival and reconstitution of:

- the Assembly of the Women Parliamentary Caucus,
- the Parliamentary Taskforce on SDGs and
- the Executive Council of the Young Parliamentarians' Forum

23. I strongly believe that lending opportunities to young people and women for meaningful participation in democratic processes shall further strengthen and capacitate us in achieving international development goals.

Ladies & Gentlemen!

24. I am glad to share that this conference shall focus on matters promoting role of member parliaments in ensuring meaningful and participatory democracy in the region. I am hopeful that CPA Asia region is able to capture the imagination of our peoples and contribute to creating mutually beneficial bonds.

25. As I conclude, I must reiterate the hope that this forum brings us closer in respect of promoting inclusive democracy, which offers an attentive ear to the vibrant voices of our youth and replaces political bias towards our women.

26. With these words, I have great pleasure in declaring the 5th CPA Asia region Conference open and wish this forum all the success!

Pakistan *Paindabad!*