

## **Welcome Address**

by



**Ambassador Nalin Surie**  
Director General, ICWA

at the  
**International Seminar**  
on  
**'Heart of Asia'**

at  
**Sapru House, New Delhi**  
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We at the Indian Council of World Affairs are delighted to host this Seminar on the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process. The seminar is preparatory to the main conference to be held next month in Amritsar. That conference we understand, will be graced by His Excellency the President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

At the outset I would like to extend a very warm welcome to all the delegates who have come from the member States of the Istanbul process including India. We thank you for consenting to participate in this important seminar.

My special thanks to Ambassador Sujata Mehta, Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs for agreeing to deliver the Keynote Address. Her presence reflects the importance that we in India attach to our relations with Afghanistan and our determination to continue to help in establishing peace, stability and to the process of development in that important neighbour. This should not surprise anyone. India's relationship with Afghanistan is of an umbilical nature. It is a civilizational relationship and Afghanistan has had deep seated and long lasting influence on India. The reverse is equally true.

I am also grateful to Ambassador Shaida Mohammad Abdali for agreeing to address this Inaugural Session. Without him this session would be incomplete.

We deeply appreciate the presence here today of representatives of supporting states and organizations, part of the Istanbul Process.

The Ministerial Conference to be held next month at Amritsar is titled "Addressing Challenges and Achieving Prosperity". The effort at Amritsar, at the governmental level, would, we understand, be to remove bottlenecks preventing the effective utilization of potential multilateral cooperation to contribute to a stable and peaceful Afghanistan. And, to achieving regional engagement for shared prosperity.

At this Seminar, our effort will be to address the principal issues facing Afghanistan and the manner in which member States of the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process can help revive Afghanistan, restore hope there, and redefine its future. The objective is to ensure that Afghanistan will once again be the hub of unity with its neighboring region in the peaceful pursuit of prosperity. Hence, we will focus on the role of Heart of Asia members in Afghanistan's development, the status of progress on CBM's already agreed to, promoting connectivity, countering terrorism and promoting regional stability & security.

India's abiding support for a unified, sovereign, democratic, peaceful, stable and prosperous Afghanistan needs no gainsaying. India has consistently matched its professions of friendship and partnership with Afghanistan by undertaking mutually agreed projects and extending other forms of assistance. This is an ongoing and sustained process.

The team that put together this seminar has been most effectively led by Joint Secretary Piyush Srivastava, ably supported by a group of ICWA Research Fellows viz., Drs. Nihar Ranjan Das, Smita Tiwary, Athar Zafar and Omair Anas. My thanks to them and also to the Ministry of External Affairs for asking ICWA to undertake this project.

This Seminar would, of course not have been possible without the contribution of all the participants from the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process countries. To them and to my colleagues who would be chairing the different Sessions my special gratitude.

Thank you all once again for your participation and attendance today. We hope that at the end of two days, we will be able to present a cogent set of recommendations to the Amritsar conference.

It now gives me great pleasure to invite Ambassador Sujata Mehta to deliver her Keynote Address.

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