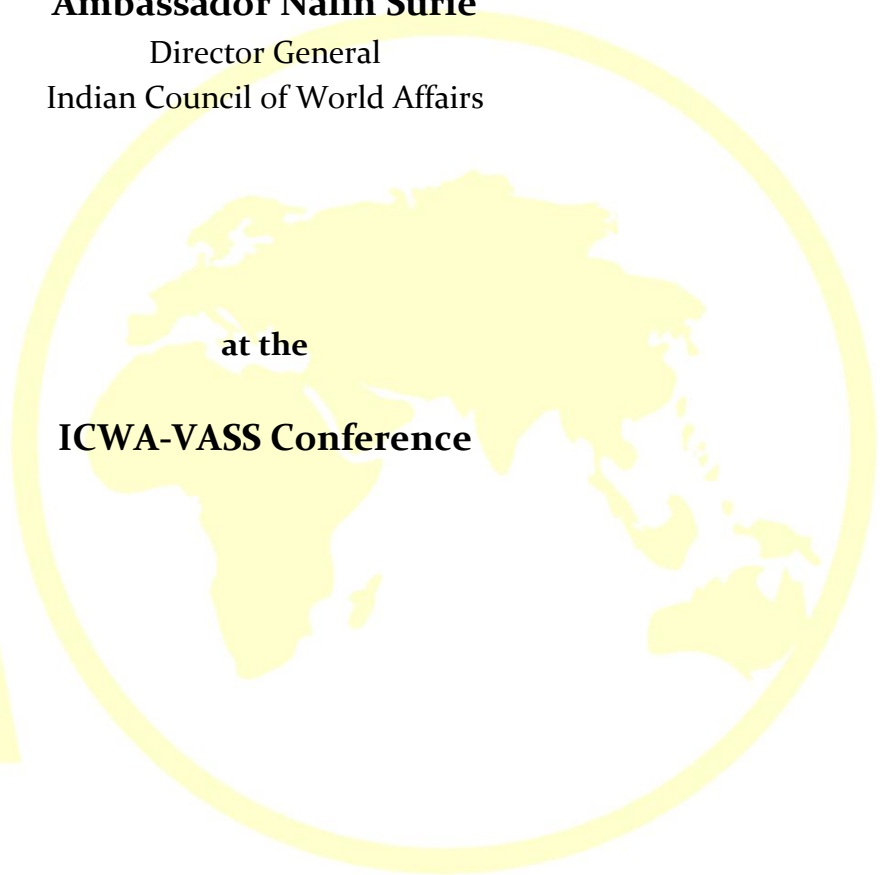
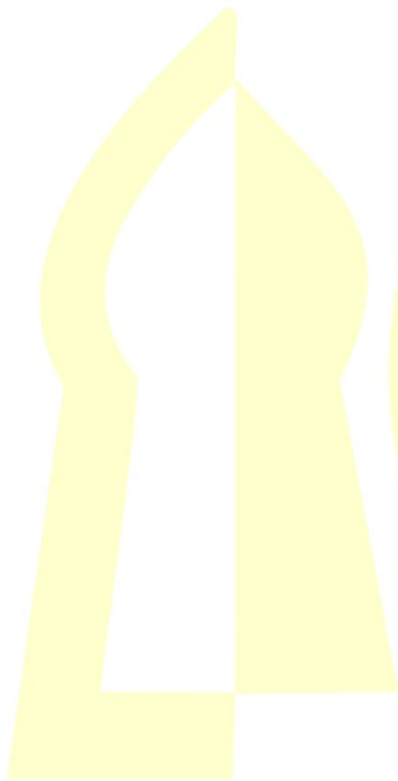


Opening Remarks

by

Ambassador Nalin Surie
Director General
Indian Council of World Affairs



at the

ICWA-VASS Conference

at

Hanoi, Vietnam
10 November 2017

Prof. Dr. Nguyen Quang Thuan, President, Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences (VASS),
Distinguished members of both the Vietnamese and Indian delegations

We are delighted to be in Hanoi for this inaugural dialogue between our two Think Tanks based on the MOU signed on 3 September 2016 during Prime Minister Modi's official visit to Vietnam.

We are grateful for the very warm reception that we have received since our arrival and the meetings arranged for us since yesterday.

Our meeting today is taking place in the context of important developments in Asia that have a bearing on our respective and common core concerns. China has just concluded its 19th Party Conference and put out an ambitious and continuing diplomatic, military, economic and geopolitical agenda. President Trump has last August announced a policy for South Asia and US Secretary of State Tillerson has spoken in mid October of US-India relations, especially in the Indo-Pacific for the next century. President Trump has also been on his Asia tour where he has already covered Japan, ROK and China. He will be in Vietnam today and tomorrow. The outlines of a possible US policy on Asia are becoming clearer. We will discuss these and related issues while discussing global and regional issues after this inaugural session. We look forward to receiving your assessment of the impact of these policy announcements, and those by President Trump during his current Asia tour, on our cooperation.

Since our MOU was signed in September 2016, we have had more than one interaction with our Vietnamese friends. I was delighted to receive Prof. Nguyen Quang Thuan at ICWA in New Delhi on 10 April 2017 and prior to that an ICWA delegation had participated in the international conference on Vietnam -India 45 years of Diplomatic Relations and 10 years of Strategic Partnership' held in Hanoi on 21-22 March 2017. ICWA had also co-sponsored a major international conference on 'Emerging Horizons in India-Vietnam Relations' held in New Delhi on 3 July 2017 organized by Zakir Husain Delhi College with Nehru Memorial Museum and Library and others.

This is as it should be for it is important that we continue to find ways and means of adding substance to our comprehensive bilateral strategic partnership.

Vietnam is also a core partner of India in ASEAN and a vital component of our Look East and Act East Policy. This is consistent with our historical relationship and our support to Vietnam during the last century in its efforts towards unification and complete independence.

Our partnership with Vietnam is being developed in a comprehensive manner taking into account our historical connections, mutually beneficial complementarities, common regional and international objectives and the need to intensify collaboration in the broader Indo-Pacific and, of course, in ASEAN. We are marking this year, the 25th Anniversary of India-ASEAN relations and 10 years of the Strategic Partnership between India and ASEAN. Vietnam has played a significant role in the development of India's relations with ASEAN and we are particularly happy that the Prime Minister of Vietnam will be attending India's Republic Day Parade on 26 January next year along with other ASEAN Heads of State and Government.

Excellency, ladies and gentlemen

Vietnam's economy is doing well. The EIU estimates that your economy will grow on an average at 6.4% during 2017-19. India's economy too is on a sustained high growth path and once the impact of recent major economic reforms kicks in, we expect to sustain an even higher growth rate than at present. Growth in both our countries provides an opportunity for mutual investment, greater trade, greater tourism and development of better connectivity between our two countries. Vietnam already has a FTA in place with the Eurasian Economic Union. India is in the process of negotiating such an arrangement and it would be useful at some point of time to see how we can benefit from each other's FTAs with the Eurasian Economic Union.

Vietnam is also in the process of privatization of some state-owned enterprises and it would be of some advantage if Indian business could be made aware of opportunities in this context.

Vietnam offers other opportunities for Indian FDI in its fast growing market. It would be useful to understand in which areas Vietnam seeks such FDI so that Indian business can be acquainted with such opportunities.

In effect, we see serious opportunities for Indian business in the Vietnamese economy which is expected to be one of the fastest growing emerging markets in the region.

I hope, we will have an opportunity to discuss these issues under the fourth agenda item.

The agenda before us for this inaugural dialogue is largely geo-political. This is eminently appropriate given the agreement at the highest political level during Prime Minister Modi's visit to Vietnam in September 2016 of the need to strengthen cooperation particularly at the UN, in WTO, ASEAN and its related forums as well as other sub-regional cooperation mechanisms. In this context, it is important to recall that Vietnam is the ASEAN coordinator for India for the period 2015-2018.

The importance of Vietnam in the Asia-Pacific is underlined by the fact that Vietnam is hosting the APEC Summit today. India has conveyed a clear interest in APEC membership and we are highly appreciative of Vietnam's support in this endeavour.

Our defence relations are progressing steadily and both our countries are engaged, inter-alia, in enhancing our respective maritime defence capabilities and resources. This partnership is expected to strengthen further in the years ahead including in the context of the Indo-Pacific and the development of an open, transparent inclusive & balanced architecture in the region that among other features ensures equal security for all.

ASEAN has entered a new and more significant integrative phase in its evolution. We would like to understand from our Vietnamese friends how they see this process evolving? Further, how will ASEAN continue to ensure its centrality in the evolving Indo-Pacific architecture?

My colleagues and I are looking forward to a very productive exchange between our two delegations. It is our expectation that our dialogue henceforth will be held on a regular basis and we look forward to receiving a VASS delegation in India next year on mutually convenient dates.
