

Statement

by

Ambassador Rajiv K. Bhatia

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at

Asian Relations Conference (ARC-VI)

on

'Non-Traditional Themes in Asian Foreign Policies'

at

Sapru House, New Delhi

23 March 2015

On behalf of the Indian Council of World Affairs, I am happy to extend a warm and friendly welcome to all of you. We specially appreciate the presence amidst us of eight scholars who have come from different Asian countries and regions in order to participate in this international conference.

As you know, this is the sixth edition of our flagship project, an annual conference series. Started in 2009, it celebrates the vision of Asian unity and solidarity articulated at the historic Asian Relations Conference (ARC), which was held in March-April 1947, just a few months before India's independence. Speaking there, India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, referred to "an expression of that deeper urge to the mind and spirit of Asia which has persisted in spite of isolationism which grew during the years of European domination." Michael Brecher depicted the ARC as "one of the most significant phenomena of the century, the re-entry of Asia into world politics." Prime Minister Narendra Modi has often alluded to his favorite concept of 21st century as the 'Asian century' that should be the goal of all who are dedicated to promoting peace, security and prosperity in our continent.



Ambassador Rajiv K. Bhatia, DG, ICWA delivering Welcome Remarks at the Inaugural Session of ARC-VI.

In course of the past five conferences devoted to the study and exploration of issues pertaining to China; the Gulf, Iran and Iraq; South Asia; Indo-Pacific Region; and Transitions and Interdependence in India's neighbourhood, we discovered that the focus of research in International Relations and diplomatic discourse has been steadily shifting to non-traditional themes. If traditionally international politics was about inter-state relationships, issues of war and peace, balance of power, geopolitics and military strategy, today we seem to devote more and more time and resources to exploration of a whole range of new subjects: economy, energy, water, food, health, pandemics, natural disasters, climate change, migration, trans-national crime, security in global 'commons' like the oceans, space and cyber space.

Human security has emerged as an important concern, which focuses on the welfare of weaker sections of the society – women, children, and the disadvantaged. There is even talk now of a 'feminist foreign policy' that relates to ensuring the end of discrimination, exclusion and violence to which unfortunately women are subjected today. The role of non-state actors as well as state agencies in promotion of terrorism - be that on land, sea or in cyber space – has gained tremendous salience.

Finally, all of us remain deeply interested in the inextricable linkage between security and development, having been convinced that one is not possible without the other. 'Diplomacy for Development' is another idea whose time has come. Our argument at this conference is that the entire range of subjects transcends 'Non-Traditional Security Threats', and that it may aptly be considered as 'Non-Traditional Themes' in the context of foreign policies of Asian nations.

Our study of developments, particularly in the present century, in regions as varied as West Asia, Central Asia, South Asia and East Asia demonstrates that our challenges are at three levels – within our societies, at the national level, and also at the trans-national or global level. This stems from the phenomenon of globalization and the all-pervasive impact of technology. The concept paper of the conference has raised some very pertinent questions. I am sure you will have many more questions. I trust that our distinguished

chairs and panelists will do everything possible to provide the answers that we seek collectively.

It is our sincere hope that our dialogue will establish the fundamental and intrinsic commonality of challenges and opportunities we face today. From there, the next step would be forging a common, convergent Asian path of cooperative solutions to Asian concerns. Let us do it together.

In the end, may I also express my happiness that, following the Inaugural Address, we shall launch today our latest publication – ‘India’s Asia-Pacific Engagement: Impulses and Imperatives.’ It forms part of a rich series of publications produced by ICWA in the recent years. This book will hopefully make a significant contribution to the on-going debate on key issues facing a vital segment of Asia today.

I thank you all for your attention.
