

SPEECH ON RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ASIA AND AFRICA

**MEETING BETWEEN FOREIGN RELATIONS
COMMITTEE AND THE DIPLOMATS FROM AFRICAN
COUNTRIES**

Reference to be provided by Prof. Khurshid

PROF. KHURSHID AHMAD



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Prof. khurshid Ahmad

First of all let me place on record my personal regard and my deep appreciation for all the frank talk that we have had. I compliment the Chairman of the Committee for convening this first meeting between the Foreign Relations Committee and the diplomats from African countries. This represents a very promising beginning.

There is no time to go into history but the fact is that relationships between Asia and Africa go far deeper. In fact the colonial period represents an intervention and an interruption. Otherwise, there have always been close relationships, cultural, religious, educational, economic and political. In the post colonial period a new wave of relationships has emerged. I am happy that Senator Mushahid has given a very good summary of developments in the recent past. But I would like to add at least one more point: I happily recollect that from the 1960's we had a regular flow of students in Karachi University from the African continent, particularly from Nigeria, South Africa, Kenya and Uganda. It was a pleasant experience to meet in 1970's and 1980's some of my students occupying important positions, including ministerial positions, in Nigeria and Kenya. Presently in the International Islamic University, Islamabad we have students from over 20 African countries.

It may also be relevant to recollect the visit of the Quaid-e-Azam to Cairo in 1946, on way back from UK, when he laid the foundations of Pak-African relations for the post independence era. Imam Hassan al-Banna, the founder of Muslim Brotherhood, was also in that meeting. Dr. Said Ramadan has played an important role in building relations between Pakistan and a number of Arab and African countries. In all international conferences held in Pakistan ever since its inception there has been active participation from Africa.

Now a word about the current challenge. While decolonization has taken place at the political level, even though not fully, but the real movement towards total decolonization has been virtually aborted. That lies at the root of our agonizing problems in Asia, Africa and Latin America. We are still living under the shadow of economic, cultural and intellectual domination of the ex-colonial regimes. Now the current phase of globalization is further strengthening this hegemony of the West and represents a new form of colonialism camouflaged in very beautiful phrases and very defective concepts. Yet its designs are very clear and it is here that I think we face a common challenge. This challenge is economic. This challenge is political. It is also cultural and intellectual. We all are confronted with a global infrastructure that is trying to perpetuate the hegemony of a few Western powers, with America as the real player. So, from that view point, I think, there is a serious convergence of interests between all the countries of Asia and Africa and as some of our friends have rightly pointed out earlier, as a group of nations, almost 110 out of 191, who are member countries of the UN we have to play a role to rectify the imbalance of power in the world. But we

lack unity. We also lack institutional support for each other. But more important, we lack, I am blunt to say, full perception of the threats that we face. "We lack the political will.

One of our colleagues has referred to the WTO. It is a sad commentary on our affairs that something that took about four decades to mature, and the treaty was signed in an African country, but I am afraid most of the African and Asian countries did not care to read its smaller print and signed the treaty without realizing all its implications. Now we are suffering for that failure. During the 10 years' transition period, from 1995 to 2005, we did not care to utilize this opportunity to prepare ourselves to face that challenge and build an array of safeguards to protect our interests. Even now there is time to prepare and develop a collective response, but this is possible only if we have clear understanding of the issues and challenges and then coordinate and cooperate sincerely and meaningfully. This South-South Cooperation which was part of the 1974 vision of the New Economic Order, to which Mushahid referred to, has been unfortunately stalled because we didn't do our homework and the world powers have been clever enough to frustrate the initiatives third world countries took to regain their position in world affairs. In 1973 for the first time, the third World people used the oil weapon. In 1974 Henry Kissinger, the then American Secretary of State himself said that the West needs three to five years to recycle the petro-dollars back into the West. And they succeeded in recycling our wealth. So, I think there is a real challenge and for that unless we do our homework well along with some real soul- searching and fresh thinking to explore avenues of cooperation and developing a joint action plan, both at the operational levels as well as diplomatic and political levels, we cannot safeguard our independence and our vital interests. Although time is running fast, we must see how best we can cooperate, not to allow the present power structure to perpetuate itself and marginalize us. The present world order was designed to protect the 1945 power structure. Much water has flown ever since. Yet the global institutions have only perpetuated that power equation and despite our numbers and our resources we have not been able to carve out an appropriate place and role for ourselves. As some talk of UN reform is going on today, we have an opportunity to redress this situation. This is the time to pool our resources and seek a place for ourselves in order to play a rightful role in the future.

Africa is a rich-poor country: rich in resources and potential, but poor because we have not managed our resources correctly and have allowed them to be squandered mercilessly. We lack control on our own resources, and whatever control we have, has been rendered inconsequential because of mismanagement, corruption and bad governance. So I think it is very good that we are meeting and trying to address these issues. I think the challenge at the moment primarily is in the political field and the UN reform that is knocking at our doors, could become a test case. The issue is also economic and financial and if we are not prepared to have our economy in our own hands, if we are not prepared to decide our own priorities as to development and the way to manage our resources, we would face a very serious situation in the future. I am afraid we may even have to cry for every drop of water. And I would add there is also a cultural challenge. Globalization is not on the basis of authentic pluralism. It is hegemonistic and our identity would be dissolved if we are not prepared to protect it. I am pleading for isolation or autarchy. That is not an option. We have to

participate in the affairs of the world community. Globalization is a reality. It is a challenge that has to be faced in such a manner that African and Asian countries play their role and strive for a world that is not hegemonistic, which is genuinely pluralistic, a world in which we have different systems, where different cultures could flourish with dignity. I think that is an objective for which we have to work and work hard. Thank you very much indeed.

PROF KHURSHID AHMAD