

Translation of Dr Spanta's Speech at "Herat Security Dialogue 2"

5/10/2013

Governor Wahidy, Dr. Moradian, My dear friend Kai Eide, Ambassador Jayant Prasad, Members of Parliament, Dear Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure meeting you all in my hometown, Herat, Afghanistan; the primeval and cultural capital of Afghanistan. Welcome to Herat.

Herat is considered to be one of the last eastern centres of the great Islamic civilization. Painters, poets, miniaturists, calligraphers, architects, scholars and many wise thinkers came together to found Herat's Islamic civilization. The legacies of Herat's great heritage and civilization can still be found and seen in places such as Samarkand, Bukhara, Esfahan, Taj Mahal's structure and many more places in the region.

So, Dr. Davood Moradian, the director of Afghanistan Institute for Strategic Studies (AISS), has invited you not only for having an academic dialogue on fundamental issues pertaining to the region, but also invited you to remember the cultural and civilizational legacy of Herat. Regional countries including central Asia, Indian sub-continent, China and Iran are all the heir of this common civilization. The civilization emanating from Herat's historical places, from its ruined minarets, its mystic Sufi places to its majestic mosques invite us for solidarity, and contemplation. My main audiences, today, are mainly the posterities of this common civilization.

Few years ago, in an exchange with my Iranian counterpart, Mr Muttakhi, then the Iranian Foreign Minister, I told him of the suppressed reality that we all are the heir of a common civilization. As responsible heirs do not shatter the family's precious painting for gaining their own parts, hence it is our responsibility to celebrate and protect our shared and common civilization, while respecting and securing our respected national sovereignty, independence and different political ways. We must seek and strengthen our unity based on political and cultural pluralism embedded in the countries of our region.

For example, numerically the Pashtu speakers in Pakistan are far more than those in Afghanistan, which is the provenance of this language. The ceiling of the Indian's great presidential palace is covered by the Persian poetry. We are familiar and in love with classic poets such as Rudaki, Hafiz, Saadi, Maulana Jalal-Aldin Mohammad- Balkhi, Bedil, Saahib, Ahmad Shaamlo, Akhwan- E Sales, Rahman Baba, Khushal Khan Khatak as much as with the contemporary poets such as great Wasif Bakhtari and others. Reza Mohammadi, an Afghan writer, commenting on a "Pashtu poetry festival" in Jalalabad, characterised Afghans, as the "nation of poem", and poetry and literature as integral and intrinsic to our political and cultural identities, regardless the language, be Pashtu, Farsi, Uzbek, Baluchi or Uzbek. These languages belong to our common civilization in the region. While ago, I was listening to a poem of Hafiz Shirazi in a music concert in Warzab, Tajikistan, telling my Tajik counterpart and good friend, Hamra khan that we are one nation in two states.

Sadly and despite sharing such a common civilization and cultural abode and heritage, we are confronted by a multitude of challenges and failures in mutual understanding and constant dialogue, to the point of not being aware of our common language. It was truly heartbreaking when I was asked by an Iranian professor at Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Institute for Political and International Studies in Tehran, who asked me, "Dr Spanta, where did you learn to speak Farsi so beautifully?"

We are struggling with the challenges of the post-Colonial Era, the threat of Al-Qaheda and Talibanism. The collapse of nation-states and/or their receding and weakening power; war economies aligned with and

sustained by organized crime and drug trafficking; and ethnic division and sectarian violence are our other contemporary & formidable and collective threats.

We should know our success to deal and transform these threats is only possible through cooperation and collective efforts. Terrorism is neither Afghanistan's produced phenomenon, nor a civil war as some Western think tanks disseminate such terminology. Contemporary terrorism is indeed an international phenomenon which indiscriminately threatens the entire world. From Al Qaeda, the Punjabi Taliban, Lashkar Janghavi, Chechen terrorist groups, the East Turkistan Islamist Movement to the Afghan Taliban are all terrorists; sharing a common objective. By resorting to inhuman, uncivilized and anti-democratic means and ways, they are determined to reverse human progress and create a backward and dogmatic world.

The common objective of these fanatical movements is their enmity with and hatred towards modern human civilization. Taliban's ideology, mindset and strategies, as well as other like-minded groups are a revolt against democracy, pluralism, freedom and rationalism. By utilizing modern tools and approaches such as electronic technology and modern weaponry, they pursue medieval objectives. On regular basis, they lash and behead women in public squares, not for their dissident thought, but for trivial matter such as displaying their hairs in the public. Resentment and hatred against cultural pluralism, tolerance and open-mindedness are the essential parts of the Taliban and their allied groups' ideology. These deeds are indeed totally against Islamic values, norms and our culture.

In an increasingly globalising world, where information and communication technology facilitate closeness of countries, not only we should learn to pursue cultural coexistence and interactions but more importantly, we should be proactive, generous and embracing of different cultures and approaches and to celebrate cultural plurality. The globalized world not only acknowledges local and national values but also requires consideration of universal values. These are the values we rely on and seek a common ground through them. Peaceful co-existence, non-violent acts in international relations, respecting human rights, democracy, tolerance and respecting sovereignty of nations are not local values. All human beings must be protected from torture, illegal and unjust imprisonment and discrimination. Such values are fundamental and precious to a Herati as much as to any citizen of Paris and Berlin. In the pretext of cultural pluralism, neither it must be allowed to violate rights of certain individuals, nor under western or Euro-centric perspectives the imposition of local values over entire world or resorting to dual standard are justifiable.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In our region, we are losing much of the precious opportunities for cooperation and integration, despite our abundant natural and human resources. Our transportation links are not well -connected. Our ports are either underused or are used for geo-strategic and geo-economic isolation, containment and market capture.

Our political and economic isolation have been compounded by weak civic, academic and media interactions, unlike terrorists' well-connected and synergized efforts and their adverse, inhuman and negative universalistic terror campaign and mindset. In contrast with terrorists and organized crimes' well-coordinated and trans-border networks of connection, the nation-states lag behinds in coordination and integration. More importantly and worryingly, terrorism continues to be seen as an asset and leverage by outdated, militaristic and the 1970's era's mindset of certain regional countries and military establishment.

A very essential paradox related to terrorism in our region is that some still think and treat terrorism as a means to take back the countries to the medieval era while the second thinking wishes to protect itself from terrorism while using it against its rivals. Such wishful thinking and policy resemble Nero, the fool Emperor of the ancient Rome, who deliberately set alight Rome, hoping to become an eternal personality and well-

known poet. On similar thinking, some ignited fire at our home but nowadays their own home is being destroyed.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

My message as well as the war-weary Afghan nation to the countries of our region is amity and cooperation. I hope the respected and academic participants who are gathered in this historic city can commence a political, emancipatory and inclusive discourse, rather than resorting to instrumental reasoning and hegemonic policy. We also hope the Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies to contribute to strengthening and institutionalizing exchanges and dialogue among and between different concerned stakeholders on regular and annual basis in Herat. Undoubtedly, it will be an important step towards creating a humane and cosmopolitan world as was described by Maulana Jalal-Al-Din Mohammad Balkhi,

Some Turks and Indians though might speak the same,

While fellow Turks are strangers but in the name,

The tongue of intimacy is set apart,

Beyond mere words, it's being one at heart,

I wish you a fruitful conference in the next two days & thank the organizers, particularly provincial authorities, Afghan National Security Forces, Herat Civil Society, Media and more importantly the people of Herat for hosting us here.