

Statement by Amb. Dr. Wafik Z. Kamil, Secretary General at the AALCO's Legal Advisers Meeting, New York, 20th November 2001

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, distinguished representatives of AALCO Member States and Observers,

It is indeed a great pleasure for me to welcome you today on behalf of the AALCO and my own behalf to the AALCO's Legal Advisers Meeting. I would have very much liked to be in New York to organize this meeting. However, due to prearranged meetings and these dates coincide with the celebration of our Constitution Day as well as our 45th Anniversary, I have to be in New Delhi. I am confident that our Chairman, known for his skills and competence will steer the deliberations in this Meeting in an excellent manner.

Mr. Chairman and distinguished participants, as you know, the AALCO's Legal Advisers Meeting is the top specialized forum which provides the opportunity to exchange views on AALCO's activities and its work programme. The outcome of this meeting has always provided useful guidance to orient our work programme accordingly. Today's Meeting assumes great importance as it is being held in difficult circumstances. However, I am sure, we have the experience and enough wisdom to meet this critical situation and to make the world safer and sane when only the rule of law can afford that.

Let me congratulate on behalf of AALCO and on my own behalf H.E.Mr.Kofi Annan, the distinguished Secretary General of the United Nations and his able team for the honour conferred on the United Nations for this year's Nobel prize for peace. While it is a testimony for the excellent work the United Nations has fulfilled in the past five decades, it also entrusts new responsibilities and challenges and reposes greater confidence of the humanity so that the United Nations could play a more meaningful role in alleviating the sufferings of mankind at the dawn of the twenty-first century. I would like to pledge AALCO's full support and co-operation to the United Nations in meeting these challenges.

Mr. Chairman and distinguished participants, the AALCO's 40th Session organized by the Secretariat at the AALCO's Headquarters in New Delhi in June this year was a historic one. Besides largest participation in the history of AALCO, it took some important decisions. The first and foremost was changing its name from Asian African Legal Consultative Committee (AALCC) to the Asian African Legal consultative Organization (AALCO). The unanimous approval of this proposal by the Member Governments at the New Delhi Session and the scores of congratulatory messages, which I received subsequently, signifies AALCO's growing role and its contribution in promoting co-operation in the development of "International Law".

Another important decision was the adoption of the Revised text of the AALCO's 1966 Bangkok Principles on the Status and Treatment of Refugees. These Principles, although declaratory in nature have been widely used as a guide to deal with the refugee situations on the national and regional levels.

The AALCO's current agenda includes a wide range of items of great relevance. Among them, the work of the International Law Commission, issues concerning Law of the Sea,

Jurisdictional Immunities, Environment, Establishment of International Criminal Court, Migration Challenges, the preparation of a draft Model Agreement in the field of “Migrant workers” and International Trade Law matters have been discussed at the New Delhi Session. In addition, two new items, namely International Terrorism and the Establishment of co-operation against Trafficking in Women and Children were extensively discussed.

As I had reported in my statement at the last year’s meeting of this forum, a co-operation Agreement had been signed between AALCO and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The immediate outcome of this Agreement was organization of a Special Meeting on “Some Legal Aspects of Migration” jointly by AALCO and IOM in conjunction with the New Delhi Session. The Meeting evoked a good deal of interest and a substantive follow-up work has already begun.

Issues concerning human rights are of great concern. Only a week ago i.e. on 12th November this year a Memorandum of Understanding has been signed between the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and AALCO. The visit of the High Commissioner Excellency Madam Marry Robinson to New Delhi and the exchange of views with her about strategies to implement this MOU had been very fruitful and opened new vistas for co-operation between the two organizations in this very vital field which gains more and more importance every day due to the growing curve of violations in quantity and quality.

Apart from expanding the AALCO’s work programme on issues of current importance, new initiatives are underway to strengthen its research and legal activities. The strengthening of co-operation with the United Nations, its Agencies and other Inter-governmental Organizations is our prime consideration. The preparation of a ‘roster’ of legal experts in the Asian-African States is an initiative which would help AALCO to utilize expertise available in its Member States and organise meetings and seminars in co-operation with other concerned organizations.

The AALCO Data Collection Unit has been renamed as “Centre for Research and Training” by a decision taken at the 40th Session with a view to expand its role and functions. The organization of training courses jointly with UNITAR, IAEA, WIPO, UNCTAD and some others is being planned. The planning to sign a co-operation Agreement with the United Nations University in February 2002 will give further momentum to this programme activity.

With a view to disseminate information on recent developments in international law, AALCO plans to bring out “Asian-African Yearbook on International Law”. On the occasion of its 45th Anniversary, a publication entitled “Essays on International Law” was released on 16th November.

I have taken time to elaborate the recent activities of AALCO. At the risk of being personal, since I assumed the office of the Secretary General of AALCO in May 2000, it has been my constant endeavor to make the AALCO more efficient and effective. That is the way, I believe, it can provide useful service to its member States and earn their confidence. I am convinced about its growing role and capacity to grow further. The task may be difficult. The vision is clear. However, with the co-operation and assistance from the Member Governments and other well-wishers the AALCO could achieve its objectives.

As you are aware, the agenda of the AALCO's Legal Advisers Meeting is always flexible. We hear the views of our distinguished guests and focus on some selected key issues of current relevance.

It may be recalled that at the last year's Legal Advisers Meeting, I had submitted a document concerning "Rationalization of the work programme of the AALCO". I had invited comments from the Member States on my proposals elaborated in that Document. The feedback to my proposals would help me immensely in the preparation of the Agenda of the AALCO's 41st Session which will be held in Abuja (Nigeria) in March 2002. Therefore, I request all my colleagues present here to speed up the matter with concerned authorities in the capitals.

As you may be aware, it has become a practice to hold a one-day special meeting in conjunction with the AALCO's annual session. It has been suggested that during the Abuja Session, consideration may be given to take up any special topic related to the work of the International Law Commission. Another topic for consideration could be matters related to human rights. The signing of MOU between the AALCO and the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights last week have opened new vistas of co-operation between the two organizations. The Special meeting could focus its discussion on certain aspects on Human Rights issues. I will appreciate if your views can be given to me in this regard.

Let me now turn to the specific items on the agenda of today's meeting.

AALCO's long and established relation with the International Law Commission has been a matter of pride for us. The work of the ILC always finds a place on the agenda of the AALCO. I highlighted this aspect in my statement at the 53rd Session of the ILC in August this year. We will continue our efforts to strengthen our co-operation with the ILC.

Issues concerning combating international terrorism have dominated the deliberations during the current session of the General Assembly. The horror caused due to this growing cancer, which erupted on 11th September this year in this very city, other parts of the United States and in some other regions of the world is a reminder to us to deal with this dreaded disease urgently in a concerted manner. The response of the international community has been very encouraging. The momentum generated in the wake of this crisis needs to be pushed to the logical end. The existing international regime of the international Conventions to deal with specific aspects of international terrorism will be greatly strengthened with the successful conclusion of the comprehensive international convention to combat terrorism.

Environment issues have been on the agenda of AALCO for over three decades. Conscious of the importance of the world summit on Environment and sustainable development scheduled to be held in Johannesburg next September, it would be useful to consider a concrete work programme for the AALCO. I would appreciate very much if participants could give their views on this matter. AALCO Secretariat is ready to assist Member Governments in their preparation and effective participation at the Johannesburg World Summit.

I understand that a copy of the Notes and Comments on selected items on the Agenda of the 56th Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations prepared by the AALCO Secretariat has been distributed earlier. That Document contains elaborate reports on the work of the International Law Commission at its 53rd Session and UNCITRAL'S 34TH session. Brief Notes and comments on other items included in the Secretariat study highlight the progress on those items. I hope the participants will find it useful.

AALCO Secretariat would welcome any suggestion from this august forum of eminent jurists for priorities in the field of topics of great importance or means to tackle them.

Before I close, I would like to express my gratitude to His Excellency Mr. Hans Corell, the Under Secretary General and the Legal Counsel of the United Nations and his staff for providing the AALCO the facilities to hold this Meeting at the Headquarters of the United Nations.

I thank you all for finding time from your other engagements to come to this Meeting.