



**WELCOME ADDRESS BY PROF. DR. RAHMAT MOHAMAD,
SECRETARY-GENERAL, AALCO AT
AALCO-ICRC WORKSHOP ON IHL, 7 MAY 2014**

Her Excellency Ms. Mary Werntz, Head of Regional Delegation,
International Committee of the Red Cross - ICRC;

His Excellencies Ambassadors and High Commissioners of AALCO Member
States in Missions in New Delhi;

Distinguished Dignitaries, Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen;

Good Morning! On behalf of the Asian-African Legal Consultative Organization (AALCO), may I take this opportunity to welcome each one of you, to this Workshop jointly organised with the ICRC Regional Delegation in New Delhi, on International Humanitarian Law (IHL). It is of great honour and privilege to have amongst us, Her Excellency Ms. Mary Werntz, Head of Regional Delegation of the ICRC in New Delhi, who would be delivering an opening remark for this two-day Workshop on International Humanitarian Law. On behalf of the Member States of AALCO and my own behalf, I welcome you Madam to this Workshop. We are confident, that your opening remarks would set the tone for productive deliberations during the course of this workshop.

The response received from Member States of AALCO, by deputing their officials to participate at this Workshop, has been very encouraging. I take this opportunity to warmly welcome, each one of the representatives of AALCO Member States, and participants who are here with us today, and I am confident that you all will greatly benefit from the proceedings of this Workshop. I also welcome other representatives from Intergovernmental Organizations, delegates, legal experts, academia and research scholars, some of whom have travelled long distances, to participate at this Workshop. It is commendable and reaffirms that even after 150 years of humanitarian action by the ICRC and its partners, there is a desperate need to address new challenges, due to changing nature of armed conflicts, be it subjects or objects of armed conflicts.

Distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen;

The Organization has come a long way, since its establishment in 1956, from its initial small but vibrant group of seven founding countries, to a strong coalition of forty-seven countries today. The Basic Purpose of AALCO, is to coordinate the viewpoints of the Asian and African States, on important issues in international law, that are of common concern to both the continents. The Organization gained its status as a permanent body in 1981, and in 2001, was renamed as Asian-African Legal Consultative Organization (AALCO) in recognition of its growing stature. It enjoys the status of an Inter-Governmental Organization among the international legal fraternity and has been accorded Observer status by the United Nations. Deliberations in the Organization and the resolutions adopted by it greatly assist the Governments of the Member States to put forward an agreed view of Asian-African States on international legal questions.

The consultative nature of the Organization, beholds transparency within the AALCO, and also ensures that the voice of Asia and Africa, is heard in various international fora. Its close working relationship, with various other international organizations, is the evidentiary fact of AALCO's contribution towards progressive development and codification of international law. Allow me to recall that, AALCO is mandated by its Member States, to work in close cooperation with United Nations and other International Organizations/Agencies. AALCO attaches great importance, to the concerns of its Member States, in relation to issues of human rights, and international humanitarian law. In order to solidify the relationship with the ICRC, a formal cooperation was initialized through cooperation agreement between AALCO and the ICRC in December 2002 and later, was signed in July 2003 in Geneva. The key objective of the Cooperation agreement is promotion and development of international humanitarian law. Recognizing the significant contribution of ICRC in the field of IHL, AALCO has ventured into jointly convening various inter-sessional meetings, special day meetings during AALCO annual sessions, and training programmes on IHL for the officials of its Member States.

Having said about the AALCO Annual Session, it is pertinent to highlight, the deliberations at the Annual Sessions of AALCO, which raises various concerns of member States, especially focusing on challenges faced by developing countries, in the field of IHL and its implementation at domestic level. In furtherance of which, AALCO has biennially convened Special-Day Meetings jointly with ICRC since 2006 at its Plenary Meetings in conjunction with its Annual Sessions. These topics have been very instrumental in disseminating IHL, and addressing its challenges to the Member States of AALCO, which were on the:

- (i) Relevance of IHL in Today's Armed Conflicts during Seoul Annual Session in 2003;
- (ii) Universal Jurisdiction and its role in the Enforcement of IHL at 2006 Annual Session,
- (iii) Contemporary Issues in IHL during 2008 Annual Session wherein New Delhi Resolution on Aspects of IHL was also adopted in conjunction with AALCO's Forty-Seventh Annual Session; and
- (iv) International Criminal Court and its Recent Developments at its 2010 Annual Session.

Distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen;

AALCO attaches great importance to the work of the ICRC. To substantiate, I would like to recall that AALCO and ICRC had partnered to convene a Conference in December 2005 to mark the Publication of the ICRC Study on "Customary International Humanitarian Law", which witnessed eminent speakers including Judge C G Weeramantry as its key speakers. In a very recent event hosted by ICRC, the Fifth South Asian Regional Conference on IHL in April 2014, in Nepal, AALCO was invited deliver the Keynote Address on the topic "Sexual Violence and Armed Ocnflict". In the event, it was emphasised that the legal regime on IHL as well as the jurisprudence evolved out of the indictments of ICTY and ICTR manifests two important paradigm shifts in relation to IHL: *firstly*, the legal language giving importance to prohibiting sexual violence during armed conflict alongside protecting the victims of such violence; and *secondly*, the inclusiveness of both the genders within the reach of law.

Among other contemporary challenges faced while implementing IHL are relating to the mordernization of weapons due to advanced

technological developments, the changing nature of conflicts and the battlefields have been worrisome. It is equally intriguing to decipher the changing - nature of armed conflicts, 'place' of armed conflicts, offences during armed conflict, methods and means of warfare, and last but not the least blurring line of distinction of subjects of armed conflicts. Such paradigm shifts, have not only transcended borders and contours of legality, but also challenges human imaginations to counter their adversities.

Distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen;

It is worth reiterating that the conflicts and internal disturbances within the South Asian and African region, evidentially requires the issue to be addressed by the international community. AALCO appreciates the efforts of the ICRC in promoting awareness and disseminating IHL. It is with objective that AALCO has partnered with the ICRC to address the contemporary challenges faced by the IHL during armed conflicts, which I am sure, would be of immense assistance to not only AALCO Member States but also to international legal fraternity at large.

Once again, I welcome each one of you to this Workshop, and look forward for an in-depth discussion, which would form part of database for future initiatives of the ICRC and its partner Organizations. On behalf of the Secretariat of AALCO, I am extremely grateful for the support extended by the ICRC Regional Delegation in New Delhi and the ICRC team towards conducting this Workshop in close cooperation with AALCO Secretariat.

With that note, I would like to Invite Her Excellency Ms. Mary Wertz to deliver the Opening Remarks. Thank you.