

Report on Amb. S.R. Tabatabaei Shafiei, Deputy Secretary-General's participation at the "Ministerial Meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement on Human Rights and Cultural Diversity", held in Tehran on 3-4 September 2007.¹

The Ministerial Meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement (hereinafter referred to as NAM) on Human Rights and Cultural Diversity was held in Tehran, the Islamic Republic of Iran on 3-4 September 2007. On behalf of the Secretary-General of AALCO, Amb. Tabatabaei Shafaei, Deputy Secretary-General participated in the aforementioned meeting as an Observer and presented a statement thereat. Ninety-Seven Member States of NAM attended the meeting, along with Observers from different categories, ten Non-member States, three Organizations and five guest Organizations.

The Hon'able Mr. Felipe Perez Roque, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Cuba, in his capacity of NAM Chairperson at Ministerial level, declared the meeting open. H. E. Dr. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran made the opening statement on behalf of the host country. The President noted, "Irrespective of any ethnicity or culture, human communities are all built around the common human nature that is monotheism and justice. This nature embodies a great unity among humans which results in dynamism and diversity paving the way for cooperation, synergy and directing all humans toward a benign destination".

The President added that local cultures of nations normally had divine roots, and if close attention were paid, it could be noticed that all these cultures were based on monotheism, affection, fraternity, justice, love and human perfection. He underlined that local cultures culminated in the creation of prosperous societies for all humankind. While referring to some of the maladies that the world is grappling with at the present time, the President noted that "Today, maverick and self-based initiatives, economic, cultural and political domination as well as monopolized profiteering have caused an unpleasant and regrettable situation for mankind".

The President emphasized that instead of rejecting human rights or abusing people under the guise of human rights, a new way has to be found, which reconsiders human rights as a project based on spirituality and justice to ensure dignity for all mankind. He had no doubt that the logical and basic dialogue among members of the Non-Aligned Movement could lead to the closeness of different views and approaches to each other. He stressed that this particular meeting was an important step forward in defining the factors necessary for establishing an international system of rights based on spirituality, justice, fairness, human dignity and values, and respect for other cultures. The President invited the member countries of NAM to reconsider the theoretical rudiments of human rights so that certain countries could not define human rights in their own malicious ways shaped by their political and economic objectives.

¹ This Report is based on the Preliminary report of the Rapporteur-General of the Ministerial Meeting of the NAM on Human Rights and Cultural Diversity Tehran, 3-4 September 2007

H.E. Mr. Felipe Perez Roque delivered a statement as NAM Chairperson. He called upon NAM Members to review and assess the performance of the NAM in the light of the current challenges in the field of human rights and cultural diversity. He urged them to work together to turn into action and concrete results the objectives of the UNESCO Convention of the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. In this regard he stressed upon the need to enhance NAM activism within UNESCO, fundamentally after the re-activation of NAM coordinating group in UNESCO. He also proposed that NAM get to work to prevent the powerful from trying to manipulate the Human Rights Council. As part of that effort NAM should work to get the Human Rights Council to proclaim the international recognition of the human rights to cultural diversity. He believed that defending cultural is tantamount to defending our right to preserve the future of human kind and in that endeavor to vindicate the aspirations of the peoples of the South; NAM should be at the forefront.

After adoption of the agenda, and electing the officials and Bureau of the two-day meeting, H.E. Mr Manouchehr Mottaki, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran was elected by acclamation Chairperson of the Ministerial Meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement on Human Rights and Cultural Diversity.

In his opening address H.E. Mr Manouchehr Mottaki, underlined that the relationship between human rights and cultural diversity as one of the fundamental issues, he noted that nations were under pressure of the bi-polar world were trying in different ways to stand up for their rich and independent culture in the light of the opportunity arising from the new era of cultural diversity. He added, that parallel to these efforts, certain thoughts and fantasies of the Cold War era continued to haunt us by using new instruments and opportunities to assert and justify cultural domination through new and complex structures and forms. Mr. Mottaki underlined the importance of the broadest participation in the enrichment of international standard setting, which would result in the universal recognition of human rights norms and standards. He also referred to some deficiencies and failures arising from the lack of participation of all countries in different regions in particular the Islamic countries in the drafting process of international human rights instruments. He stressed the sustainability of the NAM raison d'être, and said that the Movement is unique in its cultural, economic and political diversity and such capacity could be used as a guarantee of peace, justice and security for human beings worldwide.

The meeting took place in six sessions of general debates held between the two days of the Ministerial meeting. 76 speakers participated in the general debate, where there was profound exchange of views on human rights and cultural diversity. Among the issues that were raised at the meeting, the speakers outlined the following:

- Need to promote tolerance, solidarity, mutual understanding and respect for cultural diversity,
- Promotion of respect for cultural diversity as a key element for effective realization of all human rights for all given the existing danger of further division among cultures and religions caused by ill intentions which will have negative impacts on human rights values.

- The religious and cultural diversity is a fact of life and in general human rights is a common value within the human societies. In this regard the necessity of the consideration of all human cultural values in the frame of the global common values.
- The important role of NAM in promoting understanding among different cultures and religions which will lead to promotion of human values and constructive interactions between societies,
- Calling the newly established Human Rights Council for developing suitable frameworks to address challenges facing cultural diversity in promoting and protecting human rights. In this respect the role of education in promoting human rights and cultural tolerance is of vital importance.
- Recognizing various cultures as one of the most significant parts of mankind heritage, which facilitates the sustainable development of different nations and emergence of global peace.
- Preventing from stereotypical norms and beliefs, which always imposed by some states.
- All conflicts must be solved through dialogue.
- Condemning the inhumane measures imposed by the occupying power on the Palestinian people and all the actions designed to change the legal status, geographical nature and demographic composition of the occupied Palestinian Territory and the occupied Syrian Golan and destroy their cultural heritage,
- Other cultures should be embraced in order to adopt their beautiful aspects and enrich our own culture.
- Human rights cannot be preserved without sovereignty. NAM should remain united and actively encourage cultural diversity as a symbol of dynamism among human societies.
- Welcoming establishment of the NAM Center of Human Rights and Cultural Diversity in Tehran and the key role of this Center in enhancing cooperation for the realization of the goals and objectives of Tehran Declaration and Programme of Action on Human Rights and Cultural Diversity.
- Role of States; International Organizations; and Non-Governmental Organizations; in promoting respect for cultural diversity.
- Globalization should be oriented in the line of promoting respect for cultural diversity not cultural dominance.
- Supporting the annual resolution to the United Nations General Assembly presented by the Islamic Republic of Iran on cultural diversity.
- Urging all participants to support the transmission of the outcome of the Meeting to ongoing Geneva preparatory processes for the 2009 Durban Review Process, as substantive contribution.
- The recent increase in the focus on human rights at the UN level requires resolute actions by the Non-Aligned Movement to correspondingly match this trend. The visibility of the NAM within the international human rights system is imperative
- The importance of the contents of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (1993) and its follow up.

At the end of the two-day Ministerial Meeting an outcome document “Tehran Declaration and Programme of Action on Human Rights and Cultural Diversity” was adopted along with the Report of the Rapporteur-General.

Tehran Declaration and Programme of Action On Human Rights and Cultural Diversity Adopted by the Non-Aligned Movement Ministerial Meeting on Human Rights and Cultural Diversity, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran, 3-4 September 2007

The Ministers and other Head of Delegations from Member countries of the Non-Aligned Movement agreed to recommend to Heads of States and Governments of the Non-Aligned Movement that the issue of human rights and cultural diversity be integrated into the mainstream programmes and activities of the NAM. It was decided to establish a "NAM Center for Human Rights and Cultural Diversity" in Tehran. The Center would serve as a focal point to enhance cooperation and dialogue among Non-Aligned Movement member states as well as between these States and other United Nations member states with the purpose of *inter alia*, the realization of the goals and objectives contained in the Tehran Declaration and Programme of Action.

Tehran Declaration, adopted by the Ministers and other Heads of Delegation from Member States, among others, renewed their commitment to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms including the right to preserve cultural identity which is a defining characteristic of humanity and forms a common heritage of humanity. The Declaration also recognized that cultural diversity and the pursuit of cultural development by all peoples and nations are a source of mutual enrichment for the cultural life of humankind. While reaffirming that tolerance is not only a moral duty but also a political and legal requirement, that makes peace possible through the respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world's culture and our forms of expression and ways of being human, it also denounced the attempts to identify any culture with terrorism, violence and human rights violations.

While highlighting the international commitment to respect cultural diversity, the Programme of Action, affirmed the importance for all peoples and nations to hold, develop and preserve their cultural heritage in a national and international atmosphere of peace, tolerance and mutual respect. It also reaffirmed the importance of dialogue and cooperation essential for enriching the universality of human rights. Also, it reaffirmed the commitment of international community to promoting international cooperation, as set forth in the Charter of the United Nations, in particular Article 1, paragraph 3, as well as relevant provisions of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights on 25 June 1993 for enhancing genuine cooperation among Member States in the field of human rights. While highlighting the importance of raising awareness and understanding of the benefits of cultural diversity, the Ministers and other Heads of Delegation, agreed that education is the best tool to raise understanding of cultural differences and to foster respect for cultural diversity. Further, they reaffirmed the importance of human rights education as an important tool for the promotion and teaching of the values of tolerance and respect for cultural diversity. In

this regard, they recognized the importance of the elaboration by the United Nations of an international instrument on human rights education and training.

The Ministers and other Heads of Delegation, emphasized that the media should act as a mechanism to universalize ideas on tolerance, respect for cultural diversity and the right to cultural development, and to spread human values rather than serve as a tool to accentuate the disparities and imbalances prevailing in the fields of information and communication. In this context, they called upon the international community to exert all its efforts to bridge the digital gap between developed and developing countries. They highlighted the role of relevant governmental and non governmental organizations and institutions in promoting the principles of tolerance and respect for cultural diversity through organizing appropriate cultural initiatives and activities with due respect to their capacities. Also, emphasized the role of the academia in promoting awareness of the positive value of different cultures and respect for cultural diversity and encouraged all relevant United Nations bodies to undertake appropriate initiatives for the promotion of intercultural dialogue on human rights.

Programme of Action, further invited the Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to support the initiatives of different actors to promote intercultural dialogue on human rights and to mainstream the question of human rights and cultural diversity within the United Nations human rights mechanisms and machinery. It also urged relevant international organizations to conduct studies on how the respect for cultural diversity contributes to fostering international solidarity and cooperation between all nations.