

**Address by Khalid Aziz, Chairman RIPORT on the occasion of meeting of the AfPak Civil Society Forum - 13 Dec 2011 Islamabad**

I want to compliment the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung and CAMP, PIHRO & the National Centre for Policy Research at Kabul University for organizing this civil society forum that is meeting here today to find ways on how to enlarge collaboration between the civil societies of both the countries.

On behalf of the Pakistani civil society network, I want to give a warm welcome to members of the Afghan Civil Society representatives who are with us today. It is not that we are welcoming people from afar but it is like welcoming our own brothers and sisters who have come on a family visit; thus a very hearty welcome and “Pakhar Raley, Har Kalay Rashai.”

Both Afghanistan and Pakistan are passing through very trying and a troublesome period when the lives of the two people have been engulfed in perpetual tension and sorrow; the Afghans more than us have witnessed greater upheavals and loss of rights and freedoms that began in 1979 and continue into the future.

It is not certain when this period of pain and blighted lives will finally end? In order to transcend the challenges I speak on the role that a partnership based on enlarging human rights and freedoms can have in making the lives of the people of both the countries better. A strong civil society movement can bring positive change to our countries.

You may ask what civil society can do in the face of powerful militaries and equally formidable non state actors for whom humanity and freedom are threats as civil society exposes their inhumanity. I would say that despite such challenges civil societies in Pakistan and Afghanistan have performed well against formidable odds. In Pakistan it was the valor of civil society organizations that:

Led to the establishment of rule of law by supporting the principled stand of the judiciary against the encroachments of the militarized executive under President Musharraf; it is because of that victory that we have a judiciary that has provided relief to the downtrodden and the weak against the state. It is no mean achievement.

The Pakistani civil society launched a collective movement against the disappearance of persons and it forced the intelligence services to modify its behavior and give a rendering.

One must not ignore the effective work that is being done by a combination of civil society organizations in FATA in combination with international organizations like Reprieve that led to a civil suit against the US embassy and the CIA. In this case the station chief of the CIA had to leave Pakistan.

Lately Reprive in collaboration with Foundation For Fundamental Rights, a Pakistani civil organization has issued a notice to the US ambassador in Pakistan asking him to explain the circumstances under which a 16 year tribal youth Tariq Aziz was killed by a drone attack, when 3 days earlier he had visited Islamabad and had volunteered for participation in a program to photograph the collateral damage caused by drone strikes in FATA. I don't want to dramatize, but according to Col Kilkunnen, the ratio of innocent deaths to one notified terrorist is 1:50.

But please remember that the drones are directed by the US an ally of Pakistan and supposedly a believer of human rights. A similar type of violation of Human Rights is taking place when innocent persons are murdered during night raids inside Afghanistan.

Something has gone wrong – it is incomprehensible why the US, a nation that believes in the concept of freedom and human rights and fought for freedom of oppressed colonized nations under President Woodrow Wilson, as well as participation in two World Wars to protect freedom, should be involved in grave violation of human rights?

Returning to the scene in Pakistan, we note that there is much to do in the implementation of Human Rights for instance in Baluchistan, FATA and KP as well as the protection of journalists who are under threat. This was brought home tragically when Zarteef Afridi a human right worker from Khyber Agency was brutally murdered the other day. This then is the challenge that the civil society in Pakistan needs to surmount.

On the other hand, the Afghan civil society operated under even more trying circumstances and they did so heroically, when during the dark days of Taliban rule they provided for the functioning of society; in health care, education and providing sustenance to women who were targeted by the Taliban, particularly widows.

During the recent Bonn Conference, the German Chancellor Angela Merkel said rightly that peace in Afghanistan was dependent on reconciliation and power distribution and not POWER SHARING. I believe that reconciliation will need to be preceded by transitional justice. The German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle added correctly there was no military solution to the conflict in Afghanistan. If this is so then the path for peace building in Afghanistan is clear; begin the process of transitional justice immediately – this is an area where Afghan civil society can take the lead. Thus the way to peace in Afghanistan is clearly laid out.

Looking at the demand of the Afghan civil society representatives aired during the recent Bonn Conference they wanted to be consulted institutionally in any post conflict scheme. They also made a strong case regarding their other priorities through their spokespersons Barry Salam and Selay Ghaffar, they demanded:

Peace, democracy, rule of law and governance by institutions and not war lords.

Secondly, they wanted the inclusion of civil society in all decision making processes preceding the end of hostility in Afghanistan.

They also demanded: Transitional justice and an end to the prevailing culture of impunity for some and criticized the grant of Ministries to rapist & war criminals that was tantamount to being their partner.

Thus the agenda is clear before this conference; we have two neighborly societies working jointly towards deepening Freedom and Human Rights within their countries. Secondly, the experience of societies that are engaged in peace-building show that wars cannot be concluded without protecting and guaranteeing Human Rights and Freedoms of the people.

I hope that in the proceedings to follow, the civil societies of both the countries are able to pool their knowledge and experience to help one another. My prayers and good wishes are with our Afghan visitors, on behalf of the Pakistani civil society organizations, I welcome them once again to Pakistan.