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Peace, Democracy and Development

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Quest and yearning for peace have always been assiduously pursued and voiced by people all over the globe from times immemorial. In the contemporary world, democracy- as an inalienable right- has been recognized as quintessence for building strong, dynamic, just and sustainable societal systems. Peace and democratic order together are *sine qua non* for realizing development for humankind.

The societies which provide necessary mechanisms for inclusive articulation and strengthening of people's voice invariably promote rights-based approach, encourage the participation of all groups in the democratic process and pave the way for sustainable and equitable human development. The extent of achievement of development results indeed depends upon the existence of a secure and peaceful environment for the people to exercise and expand their choices and share the fruits of progress. This, a priori, makes it incumbent for the government to safeguard and advance peace and stability, strengthen democracy, respect and protect human rights, establish rule of law and adopt equity-based people-centered paradigm for achieving the national development goals.

For the nascent democracies, one of the major challenges is that attainment of democratic growth and maturity should not be perceived as a linear process nor irreversible. The hard-won gains may be thwarted by the reckless politicians in their avarice to retain power, governance dysfunction, the aberration in the institutional power-structure and deeply entrenched design of the army to influence and regulate the political and democratic process under the garb of territorial security and sovereignty. The threat to democracy and peace is generally manifested by overt confrontational measures like harassment of the civil society activists; intimidation and imprisonment of champions of civil rights; denial of fundamental rights through draconian legislation; and, excessive regulatory measures to control media. At times, the constitutional order is subverted by the overthrow of democratically elected regimes or *coup detat*. These setbacks and backsliding lead to instability, injustice, alienation, exclusion and development inertia.

It is, therefore, necessary to consolidate democracy by achieving political consensus based on transparency, accountability, rule of law and responsive governance. A vibrant civil society, popular participation, free access to information and robust oversight are crucial hallmarks of democracy.

Democracy, peace and development are inextricably correlated. Democratization (including good governance) promotes peace, prevents and resolves conflicts and tensions; socio-economic

development directly and positively supports the democratic process; and, development constitutes the basis for a strong and robust economy which in turn serves as a catalyst for democratization and development

More specifically in the case of Pakistan, the following issues need to be addressed to harmonize and maximize the correlation and synergy between this troika in the pursuit of sustainable human development:

- How to strengthen peace and security and rid the country of aberrations caused by well-entrenched ethnolinguistic-religious and narrow spatial fractionalized interests?
- How to establish rule of law given the fact that necessary legal, statutory and regulatory frameworks along with the institutional and organizational arrangements are already available? Is it lack of, adequacy of monitoring and accountability mechanisms or larger governance function malaise?
- What needs to be done to reform and strengthen the political system in the true spirit of democratic tradition- a transformation of myopia of narrow political interest of the leadership to strategic political gains, democratizing the party system, constitutionally ordained balance of power among the organs of the state with an in-built system of checks and balances?
- How to continually ensure induction of democratic government through competitive, free and transparent elections, improving the electoral process and making elections more accessible to all citizens?
- What adjustments in the existing policy and institutional frameworks are required to prevent and better mediate inter-provincial and federal-provincial disputes and conflicts?
- How to provide for regulatory arrangement (including self-regulation) and promote free and responsible media to contribute to the sustainable establishment of democracy; create forums for open public debates and expression of different points of view and disseminate reliable information for people to make informed choices.
- How to develop a broader political consensus on the overall national development vision and strategy for elimination of poverty, hunger, disease, violence and social exclusion - the main impediments to democracy even at the local or community levels?
- What institutional and pluralist arrangements need to be established to effect state-citizen synergy and enable citizens to participate in decisions that concern them, to bring about attitudinal transformation for inculcating a spirit of tolerance and respect for others, and accepting divergences of opinion? The development of a genuinely democratic culture is a fundamental imperative for strengthening political, social, economic and democratic order.