

SANSAD

Secretary's Report Presented at AGM, June 19, 2005

It is almost exactly a year since our last AGM on June 13, 2004, and it has been a busy and productive year.

We started our year with a public meeting on the situation that had developed in Nepal with the mass agitation for democracy led by the parliamentary parties, titled "Nepal at the Crossroads: Marching to Restore Democracy Under the Shadow of the 'War on Terrorism.'" Our featured speaker for the meeting was Dr. Chitra Tiwari, a journalist and political analyst based in Washington, DC. Hari Sharma, our president, Dr. Mordecai Briemberg, political analyst and member of Stopwar.ca, and Mr. Naresh Koirala, spokesperson for Nepal Concern Group, Canada, also addressed the meeting. The meeting was organized in collaboration with Nepal Concern Group, Canada. Although we had organized educational forums on Nepal in the past, this meeting brought us into a working relationship with the Nepali community in Vancouver. Dr. Tiwari has been keeping us informed regarding developments in Nepal with his excellent articles in Washington Post.

In July we launched our on-line petition against Starbuck's prohibition of nose rings for its servers and received a good deal of support.

On June 22, 2004 we issued a public statement titled "SANSAD Condemns Attacks on Itrath Syed for Defending Human Rights" to support Itrath's right to affirm her identity as a pious Muslim woman while at the same time running as a federal candidate for the NDP which involved the defense of same sex marriage. The issue had been raised because Itrath had come under attack from the mosque she attended for her stand on human rights as enshrined in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms but also engaged us in a vigorous debate regarding the significance of wearing head scarves in the context of the global spread of Wahabism. It brought to our attention the need to hold educational forums on the spread of fundamentalist religions such as Wahabism.

In July 2004 Kim Arora, a student at Simon Fraser University and member of the South Asian Youth Alliance (SAYA) appealed to us for support as she had been accepted in a Canada World Youth HIV/AIDS internship focusing on South Asians. The internship would take her to work in New Delhi for three months and she wanted our help in her fundraising. We supported her by sending her appeal to all our contacts and by making individual contributions.

On August 26, 2004 we issued a news release, “SANSAD Condemns Extremist Attacks in Bangladesh” to protest the culture of impunity for political violence that had led to a bomb attack on a political demonstration, causing many deaths and injuries.

On September 11 we organized a picnic at Trout Lake Park, but as the weather was uncooperative we shifted the venue to Hari’s house. We had a wonderful party despite having to abandon the plans we had made.

On September 19 Chin and Abid wrote a letter on behalf of the SANSAD Board to the Government of India urging that the restrictions that had been imposed on Hari’s visa application be removed.

In September we participated in a demonstration against the introduction of Sharia law in Canada and engaged in a vigorous debate on the issue following this. Although there is majority agreement on the issue, there is a significant minority disagreement that has kept us from taking a public stand on this question. We shall address the question again when it becomes necessary to do so.

Also during September-October we engaged in a debate regarding the status of gays in Pakistan when a gay person from Pakistan seeking refugee status in Canada asked for our support. In this matter, despite differences of opinion we went with the majority decision to support the application.

On October 2 we organized a screening of Rakesh Sharma’s internationally acclaimed but banned-in-India film, *The Final Solution*, tracing the path to the Godhra incident and the state-sponsored massacre of Muslims in Gujarat during February-March 2002. The screening coincided with the showing of the film in various locations in India to protest censorship and was very well attended.

On October 24 we held a showing of Parvez Hoodbhoy’s film, “Kashmir, Pakistan, India: Crossing the Lines of Control.” Dr. Haider Nizamani gave a background of the conflict following the film and initiated a discussion in which everyone participated. A resolution urging a negotiated settlement of the issue involving the governments of Pakistan and India and the various interests in Kashmir was adopted and issued as a news release.

On November 6 we celebrated twelve years of work with a dinner at India Abroad Restaurant. Our guest speaker was Mr. Harsh Mander, a senior officer in Indian administration who had resigned his post following the Gujarat massacre and had been writing and speaking against the genocidal policies of the Hindutva fascists in India. The entertainment, the speech, the emceeing and the food made the evening a total success.

On November 26-27 some members of the Board participated in the World Peace Forum 2006 Preparatory Conference in Vancouver.

On December 31 we issued a statement “SANSAD Condemns the Assassination of Prof. Muhammad Yunus in Bangladesh” to protest the shocking murder of yet another

academic in Bangladesh and demand the establishment of the rule of law and security of life in the country.

On February 4 we issued a statement, “Nepal Takes a Backward Step” condemning the imposition of a State of Emergency in Nepal by King Gyanendra, demanding the release of political prisoners and restoration of democratic rights and civil liberties and the return to parliamentary democracy. Our statement was substantially adopted by a group of Nepalis who held a demonstration in Vancouver demanding democracy. SANSAD was proud to participate in the first demonstration in the world held to protest King Gyanendra’s action.

On February 16 we issued a public statement titled “Should Stopwar Withdraw its Invitation to Walden Bello?” This was in response to a crisis created by Stopwar.ca’s invitation to Walden Bello for its rally and march on March 18-19 against imperialist war occupation and ILPS-Kalayan Center’s demand that the invitation be withdrawn on the ground that Bello had been involved in a conflict with Jose Maria Sison, leader of the Communist Party of the Philippines and ILPS. We spent a great deal of energy in debating this issue before arriving at the compromise position articulated in our statement. The debate required a special meeting mediated by Zahid to reestablish understanding. We touched on a number of important issues that might have to be reopened for discussion. Our relations with ILPS-Kalayan Center are somewhat strained. Our also adopted a critical stance toward Stopwar. We participated in the Stopwar peace march on March 19 but also demanded from Stopwar greater accountability and democratization of decision making. We participated in the Stopwar AGM on April 16 to express our criticism and demand for change. Two of our board members, Harsha and Harjap, are now on the executive of Stopwar.

In December 2004 we had issued a statement, “SANSAD Hails the Joint Indo-Pak Peace and Goodwill Mission” in regard to the mission’s visit to Pakistan and India during Decemeber-January 2004-2005. The statement received a number of positive responses from India and the US. On March 8, 2005 we held a public meeting to celebrate the completion of the mission. Capt. Suleman Mahatab of Maple Ridge and Dr. and Mrs. Pritam Rohilla from Portland, Oregon, who had been with the mission, reported on their experience. Poets from the Indian and Pakistani communities read their poems on the theme of peace between the two countries.

During March Hari, as a representative of SANSAD, was involved in the Coalition Against Genocide that was formed to oppose the visit of Narendra Modi to the US to address the convention of the Indian Hotel Owners’ Association. While opposing Modi’s visit and any honour conferred on him our position was to not participate in any repressive action of the US government. The agitation was successful in getting the US government to deny Modi a visa to travel to the US.

On April 16 we held an educational forum on Balochistan titled, “Crisis in Balochistan: Implications of Military Action Between the Baloch and the Pakistan Army.” The meeting was addressed by Zahid and Haider. There was an excellent discussion following

the presentations, and a resolution presented from the floor was adopted and subsequently released.

On April 28 and 29 we hosted Tariq Ali. Our public meeting with Tariq on April 29, addressing the issues of war and peace on the subcontinent under the domination of the US, was very successful. We ended the event with an excellent dinner prepared by Salma and a very lively recitation of poetry. It was a good way to end a year of intense activity.

We have had a website operational since the beginning of the year. Nawaz has worked very hard to put this up and we owe him many thanks for the time he has put into it. We have not taken as much interest in it as we should but should take an active interest in making it more informative and effective.

We have purchased a coffee pot for use on our larger meetings.

We have acquired a new banner.

Many of our members have been very active in other organizations and we have participated in their activities in a supportive capacity. Kirat has been active on issues of poverty as a part of the Bus Rider's Union. Premrajah has been coordinating Tsunami Relief for the Tamil community: we contributed some modest funds toward this as an organization and offered support through publicity. Imtiaz continues to do take important issues facing our community to the public through his program, Bulland Awaz, on CoOp Radio. Harsha and Harjap work untiringly in the interest of refugees, for civil rights, and against racial profiling through NO ONE IS ILLEGAL (NOII). They have organized many demonstrations and marches in which SANSAD has participated. We are co-sponsoring the conference on "Envisioning Peoples' Struggles" organized by a coalition including NOII at Harbour Center on June 24-26. Hari was invited to speak at a public meeting organized by the Sikh community to commemorate the 1984 massacre of Sikhs in India. Several members of the Board participated in the event.

We are co-sponsors of the Urdu essay writing competition organized by Canada Urdu Association and have contributed a prize toward it.

We have written in support of the Vancouver Peace Forum 2006 to ensure that the City allocated funds for the project. Our joint efforts were successful in persuading the councilors to unanimously support funding the project. Our task now is to get active in planning some events as a part of the Peace Forum since Arundhati Roy, whom we had thought we might invite, is not available.

We have endorsed the BC ALPHA position paper on Redress, Reconciliation and Peace seeking a just closure to the atrocities committed in Asia by the Japanese government and war machine during WW II and are participating in their campaign for redress for the victims and a remembrance of the crimes against humanity in Asia in the same manner that such crimes committed in Europe are remembered.

Two of our Board members who are residing outside Vancouver have been engaged with our work electronically. Taj has been sending us material on Bangladesh and Sharia from Toronto and Nageen keeps us informed about the struggle for women's rights in Pakistan.

Abi has started a great little Nepali-Tibetan restaurant on Commercial Drive called Café Kathmandu, where our literature is on display and where we are welcome to hold meetings. We can say that we have established a base in Vancouver. We wish Abi all success.

Finally, we congratulate Raj for being elected to the legislature of British Columbia. We have no doubt that he will take the struggle for democracy, human rights and social justice to the legislature. We shall miss him on the Board but we are proud to have him carry the principles that we stand for to the provincial level.