

Workshop on Peace and Security in the Indo-Pacific Region: Charting a Path Toward Stability

By Anupam Kumari

On September 27, 2024, New Delhi hosted a dynamic and thought-provoking workshop on "Peace and Security in the Indo-Pacific Region." Organized collaboratively by the Indo-Pacific Peace Forum, Global Peace Foundation, India (GPF, India), and Antar-Rashtriya Sahyog Parishad (ARSP), the event aimed to address the evolving security and development challenges faced by countries in the Indo-Pacific. Against the backdrop of growing geopolitical tensions and environmental concerns, the workshop brought together global leaders, diplomats, scholars, and defense experts to discuss solutions that promote regional stability and prosperity.

The Indo-Pacific region, with its complex mix of cultures, economies, and political interests, has increasingly become a focal point of international dialogue. The region, a strategically important zone for trade, security, and international diplomacy, faces unique challenges due to its geopolitical complexity and environmental vulnerabilities. The workshop explored how nations in the region can navigate these complexities through cooperative efforts and shared values. The core theme of the event revolved around the idea that peace and security are not the responsibility of governments alone but must be built through collective efforts involving all sectors of society.

In his opening address, Dr. Markandey Rai, Chairman of GPF India, introduced the Indo-Pacific Region and provided context on the GPLC 2023, drawing upon Prime Minister Narendra Modi's MAITRI (Maritime Initiative for Training in the Indo-Pacific) initiative. Also underscored the importance of dialogue in preventing conflicts in the region and the leading role India can play in shaping the way forward. "The Indo-Pacific region holds tremendous potential, but only through mutual understanding and collaboration we can realize this potential," he said. Dr. Rai emphasized the role of diplomacy, development, and sustainable practices in forging a peaceful future. Shri Shyam Parande, Secretary General of ARSP, stressed upon Indian Diaspora's role in promoting peace and security.

Everyone's statement echoed the need for a balanced approach to security and called for nations to focus not only on military preparedness but also on building economic resilience and cultural integration. "Security is not just about defense; it's about ensuring that our economies are stable, our societies are cohesive, and our people are empowered to build peaceful futures,".

The workshop witnessed the presence of eminent people from almost all sectors i.e. diplomacy, academics, navy, army, students to private stakeholders. The key focus of the workshop was on addressing non-traditional security threats in the region, such as climate change, cyber threats, and piracy followed by tremendous opportunities the Indo-Pacific region provides. Experts emphasized the need for comprehensive strategies that go beyond conventional military alliances. Ambassador Deepak Vohra drew on the historical lessons of *Arthashastra* and the wisdom of *Chanakya's principles* on state security. He underlined that peace is sequential, with security as its foundation, leading to eventual prosperity. He highlighted the interconnectedness of security and peace and how peace cannot be achieved without mutual acceptance among states and suggested that "Security is the foundation for peace. Without addressing fundamental security concerns, we cannot expect long-term stability,".

In addition to security, the workshop placed significant emphasis on sustainable development, recognizing that economic disparities and environmental degradation are major drivers of conflict. Ambassador Gurjit Singh highlighted the disconnect between policy formulation and on-the-ground implementation, calling for increased engagement from civil society to bridge this gap. He introduced Impact Investing as a powerful mechanism to drive progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through strategic investments. Additionally, he emphasized the importance of accelerating the execution of policies by fostering stronger public-private partnerships while Ambassador Shashank shared his experiences from Southeast Asia, where he had a direct view of the region's challenging security landscape. He highlighted the critical need for engaging the younger generation in peacebuilding efforts, advocating for student exchange programs to promote cultural and educational ties.

The workshop concluded with a call for a renewed commitment to cooperation and peacebuilding in the Indo-Pacific. In his closing remarks, Dr. Shri Narayan Kumar, Honorary Director of ARSP, suggested enhancing collaborations with Indian ministries and translating the texts of the Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam Book into regional languages to promote a deeper understanding. The event served as a crucial platform for dialogue, reaffirming the belief that peace and security in the Indo-Pacific can only be achieved through collaborative efforts, shared values, and sustainable development. While facing numerous challenges, the Indo-Pacific can transform these into opportunities through effective strategies and planning. As the region evolves, promoting connections and collaboration among its diverse nations and stakeholders is critical for fostering a secure and peaceful future.