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Syria’s ‘flame of hope’ must not be extinguished

A flame of hope burns bright today in Syria – but if it’s not carefully managed by both Syrians themselves and the international community, it risks being extinguished, UN Secretary-General António Guterres warned Thursday.

Speaking to reporters in New York, he said there is “a real risk that progress could unravel,” without an “inclusive, credible and peaceful” political transition that is Syrian led, on behalf of all its citizens. “The people of Syria stand at a moment of history – and a moment of opportunity. That opportunity cannot be missed,” Mr. Guterres said, following five decades of brutal, dictatorial rule.

The UN stands with the Syrian people, recognizing that this is their long-sought change to realize the peaceful movement for change that began with the impassioned protests of 2011.

“But nothing is guaranteed,” he added, calling for all communities to be fully integrated into a new Syria.

“The rights of women and girls must be fully respected. And the process must be guided by the underlying principles of Security Council resolution 2254. We are focused on facilitating just such a process.”

Meanwhile, the country is still mired in humanitarian crisis with the UN and partners mobilizing to assess the needs and respond to “rapidly shifting” conditions, he said.

“Adequate funding for humanitarian and recovery response is critical. And that funding is not yet available. And I make a strong appeal to the international community to show the generosity the Syrian people deserve in this moment – and to massively support the humanitarian response.”

The UN chief also pledge support to those who continue to live with the agony of uncertainty over missing loved ones, announcing the appointment of Karla Quintana of Mexico, to head up the General Assembly-mandated Independent Institution on Missing Persons in Syria. He called for all the international mechanisms advancing the protection of human rights and accountability for the crimes of the Assad regime, to be provided the tools needed “to carry out their vital work.”

The task of documenting Syria’s disappeared – who are believed to number more than 130,000 – is carried out principally by three bodies at the UN:

- The Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic – established by the UN General Assembly in June 2023;
- The Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic – established by the UN General Assembly in June 2023;
- The International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for Syria (often known as “the Mechanism”) which was established by the UN General Assembly in December 2016;
- The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic – which reports to the Human Rights Council in Geneva.

The UN chief noted that conflict is Syria is far from over, and civilian protection must be the highest priority. Fighting continues in the north with terror group ISIL/Dae’sh still a “major threat”.

“At the same time, extensive Israeli airstrikes continue. They are violations of Syria’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. They must stop,” he continued.

Pakistan’s Vision for A Greener Future Rise of Eco-Conscious Plantations

Dr. Muhammad Shahzad Ashfaq

Pakistan a land of mountains and natural beauty of glaciers facing pressing environmental challenges ranging from deforestation to air pollution. The motherland has begun to envision a greener future through the promotion of eco-conscious plantations. Plantations are vital role in maintaining ecological balance mitigating the effects of climate change and fostering sustainable development. Pakistan’s vision for a greener future specially focusing on the of eco-conscious plantations as a key strategy to combat environmental degradation. The nation recognized the urgency of addressing environmental issues and has taken significant steps to promote eco-conscious plantations.

One of the primary motive behind this vision is the need to take up deforestation which has been a major concern in the country. Deforestation not only leads to loss of biodiversity but also contributes to soil erosion, reduce water quality and increase in greenhouse gas emission. The vision of Pakistan aims the rise of eco-conscious plantations to reverse the trend of deforestation and restore degraded ecosystems. Furthermore, eco-conscious plantations play a crucial role in mitigating the impact of climate change. Trees absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere helping to reduce greenhouse gas concentrations and combat global warming.

The expansion of forest cover through sustainable plantations, Pakistan can contribute to international efforts to curb climate change or meet its commitments

under the Paris Agreement. Forest act as natural carbon sinks, storing carbon and offsetting emission from various sources. Pakistan has recognized the economic potential of eco-conscious plantations. Sustainable forestry practices not only contribute to environmental conservation but also offers economic benefits to local communities.

Pakistan is facing environmental challenges including air pollution, deforestation and climate change impacts. The country need to increase its forest cover through sustainable plantations. The Paris Agreement and the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals, an international treaty aimed at limiting global warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius and emphasizes the importance of afforestation and reforestation in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Through proper implementation of sustainable forestry practices Pakistan can contribute to these global efforts and align itself with the goals of Paris Agreement. Sustainable plantation offers a range of environmental, social and economic benefits.

In Pakistan the expansion of forest sequester carbon dioxide from the environment and increase fresh air to mitigate climate change. Moreover, forests are home to a diverse range of plant and animal species many of which are threatened by deforestation and habitat destruction. Although creating new forest habitats through plantations Pakistan protect endangered species, preserves ecological balance and strengthen the resilience ecosystems against climate change impact.

The country is taking significant steps to address these challenges and protect its natural heritage. Pakistan has made considerable efforts in protecting endangered species. The country is home to a

diverse range of wildlife including the iconic snow leopard, the Indus river dolphin and the Markhor, the national animal of Pakistan. The species face threats from habitat destruction, illegal wildlife trade and climate change.

Pakistan has established protected areas and wildlife sanctuaries where endangered species are given refuge and monitored for conservation purposes. Different areas are designed under various conservation law and regulations to ensure the sustainable management of their habitats and the protection of these species residing within them.

One such example is the Deosai National Park, located in the northern area of Pakistan which serves as a sanctuary for the endangered Himalayan brown bear. The park’s unique ecosystem provides a safe habitat for these bears, allowing them to breed and multiply without the threat of human interference. In terms of preserving ecological balance, the motherland recognizes the importance of maintaining a harmonious relationship between human activities and the environment. However, while it emphasizes the need for coexistence between humanity and nature, it lacks specificity regarding how this harmony can be achieved. A mere acknowledgment of the relationship does not address the complexities involved in balancing economic development with ecological preservation. The country has implemented various policies and regulations to promote sustainable land for reduce pollution.

This anthropocentric framing risks prioritizing nationalistic sentiments over global ecological responsibilities. A more effective discourse would involve interdisciplinary approaches that integrate scientific research with community engagement

to foster genuine environmental stewardship. Ultimately, while the assertion is commendable in its intent, it necessitates a more nuanced exploration of practical strategies and frameworks to facilitate sustainable practices. Only through comprehensive planning and inclusive dialogue can we hope to achieve true ecological balance.

Pakistan’s focus on eco-conscious plantations serves as a model for addressing environmental challenges while fostering socio-economic growth. Pakistan’s commitment to eco-conscious plantations exemplifies a progressive approach to tackling environmental challenges while simultaneously fostering socio-economic growth. The nation has recognized the detrimental effects of deforestation and climate change, leading to initiatives such as the Billion Tree Tsunami, which not only aims to restore ecosystems but also creates employment opportunities. Prioritizing reforestation, Pakistan demonstrates that environmental sustainability can be integrated with economic development.

Moreover, these plantations serve as a catalyst for community engagement and empowerment. Local populations are involved in planting and maintaining trees, instilling a sense of ownership and responsibility toward their environment. This participatory model not only enhances biodiversity but also promotes social cohesion as communities unite for a common cause. Additionally, eco-tourism generated from these green spaces can stimulate local economies further. A greener future is not just a vision; it is an imperative that demands immediate action from all sectors of society.

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Cartoon by Amjad Rasmī. (Courtesy of Asharq Al-Awsat)

Angela Merkel’s Memoir

Dr Qaisar Rashid

Angela Merkel, Germany’s first female chancellor (2005–2021) and leader of the centre-right political party, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) (2000–2018), has penned a collection of her memories, “Freedom: Memoirs 1954–2021”. Merkel’s personal assistant, Beate Baumann, is the co-author.

Originally written in German and later translated into English, the book was published last month. In it, Merkel equates the word “freedom” with Western democracy: the advent of Western democracy in Germany heralded freedom for the Germans. This is the central theme of the book, which is particularly intriguing because her rise to the office of Chancellor in 2005 is attributed to her right-wing rhetoric, which helped her oust the centre-left party of then-Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD). During her election campaign, Merkel raised right-wing slogans such as “Conserve German competitiveness” (Deutsche Wettbewerbsfähigkeit) by limiting the influx of non-Germans into Germany. In doing so, she criticised Schröder’s policy of opening Germany to the outside world.

After assuming power, Merkel adopted a more moderate stance. This about-turn frustrated her right-wing supporters. In October 2010, while addressing the youth wing of her party in Brandenburg State at Potsdam, she unequivocally declared that the idea of multiculturalism in Germany had failed (Multi-kulti ist gescheitert), leaving no room for any culture other than German culture to flourish in Germany. Instead of promoting the benefits of Western democracy facilitating multiculturalism, she tailored her message to suit her audience. Nevertheless, her statements did not satisfy the youth wing. Consequently, in April 2013, thousands of them renounced their allegiance to Merkel’s party and

founded the Alternative for Germany (AfD), a far-right political party, to revive the vision of right-wing conservatism that had helped Merkel secure her electoral victory and ascend to the chancellorship.

In her memoir, Merkel expresses disdain for East Germany while extolling West Germany. She claims, for instance, that she was born in Hamburg, West Germany, and that her parents relocated (without her consent) to Brandenburg, East Germany, where she pursued her education and earned a PhD in Physics from the University of Leipzig. Readers may be surprised to learn that her father, a pastor, held leftist political leanings yet chose to move to East Germany, where the right-wing held sway. These claims seem aimed at portraying her as a reluctant resident of East Germany. Ironically, despite benefiting from East Germany’s educational opportunities, Merkel expresses no gratitude towards it. Nowhere in her memoir does she highlight any positives of East Germany, suggesting that her narrative is crafted to appease prospective left-leaning readers. Her antipathy towards East Germany is a recurring theme throughout her extensive recollections. This sentiment ignores historical nuances, such as the Potsdam Conference of August 1945, where the Allies and Soviets agreed to divide Germany. East Germany did not independently decide to join the Soviet bloc in 1949; rather, it was a consequence of the Cold War.

Merkel was 35 when the Berlin Wall fell in November 1989. The fall of the wall enabled her to move to West Germany and begin her political career, fulfilling her long-standing admiration for the West. However, two interesting contradictions emerge. First, after German reunification (1989–1990), despite her father’s leftist inclinations and her stated yearning for freedom in West Germany, Merkel joined the centre-right CDU, which was allied with the Christian Social Union (CSU), another centre-right conservative party. Second, despite her affinity for West Germany, she chose to represent Constituency 15 in Mecklenburg–Western Pomerania, a state in northeast

East Germany. Merkel remained the representative for this constituency until 2021. By her own narrative, one might expect her to have joined a centre-left party, such as the SPD, and represented a constituency in West Germany. However, she did not do that.

In the chapter discussing American politics (Donald Trump), Merkel expresses hope for Kamala Harris’s success, representing the Democratic Party, as the book went to press before the United States presidential election. To promote the English-language edition of her memoir in the US, Merkel met former US President Barack Obama at the Anthem Theatre in Washington, DC, on 2 December.

As German Chancellor, Merkel served the interests of the CDU-CSU alliance for four terms (2005–2021) by opposing multiculturalism in Germany. She condemned Schröder for introducing foreigners (Ausländer) — including workers, PhD students, and researchers, most of whom were non-white — whom she accused of undermining German competitiveness. Pursuing a protectionist policy, Merkel harmed the careers of countless foreigners in her quest for political power. Yet, in her memoir, she offers warm support to the US Democratic Party, which champions the cause of multiculturalism and welcomes foreign workers, PhD students, and researchers, irrespective of race, to enhance the competitiveness of American society and systems. Interestingly, both Harris and Obama, non-white advocates of multiculturalism, oppose protectionism. While Merkel resisted non-white foreigners in Germany, particularly English-speaking ones, she sought the support of English-speaking non-white Americans to promote her book abroad. By doing so, she acknowledges that publishing her memoir solely in German would have limited its reach, necessitating its translation into English to connect with a broader audience.

In summary, the memoir reveals that Merkel’s political expediency was confined to Germany alone.

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IS North Korean Corner

Kim Jong Il’s Exploits for Cause of Anti-imperialist Independence

Spokesman Report

As he performed outstanding exploits for the cause of anti-imperialist independence with his extraordinary wisdom and practice, Chairman Kim Jong Il (1942–2011) is still highly praised by the world’s progressive mankind as a peerlessly great man in the era of independence.

Outstanding Thinker and Theoretician

Kim Jong Il, by conducting energetic ideological and theoretical activities, gave perfect answers to the numerous theoretical and practical problems raised by the times and history, thereby greatly encouraging the world’s progressive people in their struggle for independence.

He developed in depth the immortal Juche idea created by President Kim Il Sung (1912–1994), providing the most scientific ideological and theoretical weapon in the era of independence.

In particular, when the imperialists and reactionaries made a big fuss about the “end” of socialism availing themselves of the massive political upheavals created in some socialist countries from the late 1980s to the early 1990s, he left an indelible trace in the human history of ideology with his scientific insight, strong ability to analyse and judge and energetic authorship.

He made public many works including “The Historical Lesson in Building Socialism and the General Line of Our Party”, “Abuses of Socialism Are Intolerable” and “Socialism Is a Science”, providing the banner of struggle for the victorious advance of the cause of socialism.

Still many political parties and people in the world study his profound ideas and theories in depth and regard them as the banner of their struggle for anti-imperialist cause.

Defender of Peace and Security

Towards the close of the 20th century the US-led imperialist allied forces intensified political and military offensive and pressure against socialist Korea more than ever before. Kim Jong Il considered that the independence and dignity of the country and the global peace and security could be defended only by dint of self-defensive arms, tremendous military capabilities, in the present era when justice was being ruthlessly trampled upon by the high-handedness and arbitrariness of the imperialists.

His extraordinary military wisdom and unexcelled courage turned the DPRK into a political and military power, foiled the offensive of the imperialist allied forces to crush the country and safeguarded peace in the Korean peninsula where a touch-and-go situation was created.

Peace and security in the Korean peninsula can be said to constitute an indisputably important factor in ensuring peace and security in the Asia-Pacific region and the rest of the world. It is because, but for Kim Jong Il, a war would have been inevitable in the Korean peninsula and mankind would have suffered another catastrophic world war.

By building up powerful self-defensive military capabilities, he smashed the moves of the imperialist allied forces against his country and ensured peace and security in the Korean peninsula and the rest of the world. This is the greatest exploit he performed for the cause of global independence.