



PRESS RELEASE

US Ambassador: “Those acting peacefully to seek change are not anti-government.”

US Ambassador to India Richard Verma reflects on the foundation of India-US ‘Strategic Plus’ partnership; and the role of civil society, while lauding the Ananta Aspen Centre’s role in strengthening the bilateral relationship over the years.

New Delhi, May 6, 2015: Underscoring the role of a vibrant civil society in boosting the democratic traditions of both countries, **the Ambassador of the United States to India, Richard Verma** voiced his concern today at the recent regulatory steps focused on NGOs by the authorities. He was speaking at an exclusive interaction hosted by the Ananta Aspen Centre, an Indian public policy institution.

*“I read with some concern the recent press reports on challenges faced by NGOs operating in India. I do worry about the potentially chilling effects of these regulatory steps focused on NGOs,” **asserted Amb. Verma.** “Whether it is by changing laws or policies, challenging them in court, or by strengthening their enforcement, those that act peacefully to seek change are not anti-government. They are for better government. By seeking to improve government, they strengthen national security, not weaken it.”*

The US Ambassador added, *“In today’s world, a great deal of the search for the refinements that can improve our governments is undertaken by civil society organizations. They are fighting peacefully around the world for advances in health, inclusive economic growth, environmental protections, human rights, and to strengthen democracy.”*

Both India and the US are home to vibrant and vocal civil society organizations seeking change in every conceivable area. India is home to a vibrant community of over 2 million legally registered non-governmental organizations, while the United States also has a robust civil society community.

Reflecting on growing bilateral ties, Amb. Verma observed that the India-US ‘Strategic-Plus’ partnership had been re-energized by the recent visits of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the US and President Barack Obama to India.

“I think it is fair to say the bilateral relationship is stronger and more vibrant than it has ever been. The recent visits of Prime Minister Modi to the United States and President Obama to India have re-energized a partnership that has been growing steadily for at least the last 15 years or so, even if for one reason or another it wasn’t always growing as fast as it could. But one of the outcomes of the recent visits was also the recognition that our relationship is no longer solely about our strategic interests. It is also about the trade, academic, scientific, and other unofficial ties that underlie the broad popular and political support the relationship enjoys in both India and the United States. I call this enhanced relationship our Strategic-Plus partnership,” said the US Ambassador.

In the aftermath of the high-level visits, India and the US are now engaging on more than seventy initiatives, everything from space to vaccines, including launching a civil nuclear contact group; restarting the trade policy forum to address intellectual property and food security issues; signing Memoranda of Cooperation on Smart Cities and Transportation; and hosting the bilateral India-U.S. Technology Summit, Amb. Verma added.

The US Ambassador also lauded the role of the Ananta Aspen Centre in strengthening bilateral ties.

“Ananta Aspen Centre has long been on the cutting edge of developing and discussing ideas that turn into initiatives between our countries. Your support through the years has been a vital part of strengthening the relationship. I intend to spend my time in India not just discussing the next big thing or where we’re going, but also why we’re going there. I thought Ananta Aspen Centre – with its long tradition of open dialogue – was the perfect place to start the conversation,” said Amb. Verma.

Amb. Verma is a former Assistant Secretary of State for Legislative Affairs. From 2009-2011, he served as a principal advisor to Secretary Clinton. He led the State Department’s budget and policy efforts on Capitol Hill, handled more than 200 Senate confirmations, and managed several major congressional investigations. Earlier in his career, Mr. Verma served in the Senate as the senior national security advisor to Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid. Mr. Verma served on active duty in the U.S. Air Force from 1994 to 1998. He received his LL.M. with distinction from Georgetown University Law Center, and his J.D. cum laude from American University’s Washington College of Law. He holds a B.S. from Lehigh University.

About Ananta Aspen Centre

An independent and not-for-profit organization, Ananta Centre – formerly part of Aspen Institute India – is registered under the Indian Trust Act. It engages the civil society,

inclusive of business, NGOs, Governments and other stake holders on issues of importance to India's development and national security. Ananta Centre holds discussions on key foreign policy issues as well as security matters and strategic affairs pertaining to India through regular public sessions and round tables. The Centre is based in New Delhi.

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