

NAM welcomes ASPA

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By International Institute for Non – Aligned Studies

Non-Aligned Movement has strongly supported initiatives for South-South Cooperation and has commended many such bilateral and multilateral efforts in the political, humanitarian, social, economic and developmental fields, undertaken by the Non-Aligned countries. A prominent mechanism for South-South cooperation has been the Summit of South American-Arab Countries (ASPA), which is based on the principles of multilateralism. ASPA came into effect in 2005 with the underlying objective of bringing political leaders and civil societies of South American countries and the member countries of the League of Arab States closer together and promoting diplomatic coordination on issues of common interest.



The First ASPA Summit of Heads of State and Government, held in Brasilia, on May 10th and 11th 2005, marked the formal organization of ASPA, which is composed of 34 countries – 12 from South America (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, Uruguay and Venezuela) and the 22 members of the League of Arab States (LAS) (Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Bahrain, Qatar, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Yemen, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania, Oman, Palestine, Syria, Somalia, Sudan and Tunisia). At the First Summit, Member States from the League of Arab States (LAS) and the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) were recognised as APSA Members.

APSA was envisaged as an inter-regional forum for cooperation and political coordination, with the main objectives of opening markets in both regions to greater commercial exchange and attracting foreign direct investment. It was at the Doha Summit held in 2009 that the objectives of ASPA took a concrete form. The Doha Declaration highlighted the significance of South-South cooperation as an effective mechanism to promote capacity building and built an international order based on parity and equality, which is committed to principles



enshrined in the UN Charter. The Second ASPA Summit agreed upon mechanisms for bilateral cooperation between Arab and Latin American States in sectors such as Science and Technology; Environment (with a Sub-Committee on Combating Desertification); Culture and Education, Economy and Trade and Social Issues. The objectives of the Doha Declaration and its stance on international issues such as terrorism, safeguarding human rights, and reform of the United Nations were in complete conformity with the principles of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The Third ASPA Summit at Lima, Peru held in October 2012 further gave an impetus to the on-going efforts to strengthen the relations and solidarity and cooperation between the two regions. The Summit marked a closer cooperation between the civil societies of both the region. This was manifested in the Third ASPA entrepreneurial forum held on the side lines of the Lima Summit. One of the most important outcomes of the 2012 APSA Summit was the creation of the Federation of the Arab-South American Chambers of Commerce in order to maximise the potential benefits of trade and investment. Between 2005 and 2011, trade between South America and the Middle East grew 101.7 percent from US\$13.6 billion to US\$27.4 billion.

Apart from cooperation in trade and business, the Third ASPA Summit also discussed the possibilities of inter-regional cooperation in domains such as desertification and land degradation processes, in addition to the water resource management in arid and semi-arid areas. At the fourth ASPA Summit held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia in November 2015, the Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir spoke of a “convergence of positions” between countries of the two regions on many issues and said that that two regions had great potential for cooperation. The Riyadh Declaration “welcomed the ongoing intensified dialogue and multinational cooperation between both regions, which enabled them not only to the commitment to the agenda adopted at previous summits, but also allowed to enhance the possibilities of cooperation as means of effectively promoting development and reducing poverty, through capacity building, innovation and technical and cultural exchanges”. Thus, ASAP has emerged as mechanism that promotes and strengthens solidarity-based South-South cooperation and addresses the development and security challenges.