**Afghanistan Humanitarian Crisis: International Responsibility**

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The “extraordinary session” of the 57-nation Organisation of Islamic Cooperation on Afghanistan recently concluded in Islamabad. The OIC Summit was of significance for Pakistan because it was hosting a meeting of the OIC foreign ministers on Afghanistan after 41 years. We must also commend the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for proposing this summit on such a timely basis.

More than 150 delegates, including envoys of the United States, United Kingdom, United Nations, P5+1, Germany and other European Union countries were in attendance. The summit garnered international headlines. The presence of international dignitaries solidified Islamabad’s eminence in the Muslim world. It also jogged back the memory of the historic OIC Summit of 1974 hosted by the then Prime Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, which was attended by almost all Muslim leaders.

As we know, the purpose of the summit was to take steps to prevent any human tragedy from occurring in Afghanistan. It is no secret that Afghanistan is at the brink of an economic and humanitarian crisis. According to the United Nations, an estimated 22.8 million people, more than half of Afghanistan’s population, are experiencing high levels of acute food shortages stemming from years of war, a severe drought and high levels of poverty. The WHO official said malnutrition continues as a growing health challenge across Afghanistan, as an anticipated 3.2 million children under the age of 5 are expected to suffer from acute malnutrition by the end of 2021.

These are not just statistics, but the lives of millions of human beings, especially children at stake. If these statistics emerged anywhere else in the world, the international community, especially international media, would be at their heels to aid and highlight the plight of the vulnerable people facing food shortages and bracing the harsh winter.

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However, the silence by the international community over the worsening humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan has once again exposed the double standards of the Western world. Muslims, especially Afghans, Kashmiris etc., are considered the children of a lesser God.

Currently, 75 per cent of Afghanistan’s budget depends on external assistance. And the country’s monetary reserves of $9.5 billion are frozen. The Afghan government is unable to pay its employees due to a lack of access to financial channels, as a result, the socio-economic situation in the country is worsening with every passing day.

Pakistan, being the next-door neighbour of Afghanistan, has the most at stake in the region. If the economic and humanitarian crisis continues to worsen in Afghanistan, it can escalate into a fully-blown non-traditional security threat for Pakistan.

We have witnessed how the Afghan war and then the civil war in the 80s and 90s era triggered an exodus of refugees into Pakistan. To date, Pakistan is grappling with the issue of Afghan refugees and their legal status in the country. The country’s socioeconomic fibre has transmuted because of the events occurring on its Western border. Pakistan cannot afford an unstable Afghanistan, anymore.

It is imperative that the Taliban government also realises the gravity of the situation. Any stubbornness in their behaviour will only increase the suffering of the people of Afghanistan who are in dire straits. They need to show flexibility in their policies and willingness to ensure basic human rights, especially towards girls and women in the country, as are guaranteed in Islam as well. Or, it will be too late. The Taliban government, by now, should realise that they cannot operate in isolation.

The international community also needs to discern that the ordinary people of Afghanistan are still the same as they were under Ashraf Ghani’s rule. They should not be equated to the Taliban government. Two to three generations of Afghanis have grown up under the clouds of war, terrorism and destruction. Let’s stop another from growing under the shadow of hunger and starvation.

The Afghan people are on the brink of a catastrophe and need urgent international assistance. It should not be forgotten that if the situation takes a turn for the worse, there will be nothing to stop millions of Afghans from being exploited by the miscreants for their heinous purposes. The consequences will be grave for the entire world, as the reverberations of the human tragedy of Afghanistan will reach the Western capitals and cities, sooner than later.

Pakistan, in its capacity, should continue to highlight the plight of the common Afghanis and emphasise that they should be given relief by the international community. The international community also needs to realise the gravity of the situation. The lives of millions are at the edge of disaster.

In this regard, the recommendations made from the platform of the OIC Summit hold significance because they reflect the stance of Muslim states globally. The fact that Afghan Taliban officials also participated in the Summit as “observers” is a positive step. The establishment of the Humanitarian Trust Fund and Food Security Programme to mainstream financial channels for assisting Afghanistan is a step in the right direction, and the appointment of the special envoy of the OIC secretary-general for Afghanistan, a welcome move. But, it is important that the decisions made by the platform of the OIC are implemented in their true letter and spirit to display the unity of the Muslim countries.

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