**Humanitarian Assistance For Afghanistan**

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The civil and military leadership of Pakistan have all along been supporting and calling for durable peace and stability in Afghanistan because its pursuit is closely connected with the peace and stability of Pakistan. Prime Minister Imran Khan, Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi, and Army Chief General Javed Bajwa in their interactions with the world leaders and diplomats have also been strongly pleading for immediate financial, food, and medical assistance for the people of Afghanistan on humanitarian grounds.

On the quite important and welcome initiative of Saudi Arabia, the OIC Summit Chair, Pakistan hosted the 17th Extraordinary Session of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Council of Foreign Ministers in Islamabad on December 19, 2021, to review the situation in Afghanistan and the developments taking place in the wake of the departure of US-led NATO forces. These allies failed to achieve the desired objectives even after 20 years, as a result of which the Taliban were welcomed back in Kabul.

As is already well known within the country and abroad, the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers had unanimously adopted a comprehensive resolution pledging to play a leading role in the delivery of humanitarian assistance to on the brink of starvation people of Afghanistan; agreed on establishing a Humanitarian Trust Fund, the launch of a Food Security Programme and engagement with the World Health Organization (WHO) for securing vaccines and medical supplies. The Humanitarian Trust Fund is to be operationalised by about March 2022.

According to the estimates of the world body, United Nations, almost 60 per cent of Afghanistan’s 38 million people are facing crisis-level of hunger and that situation is getting worse every day.

According to the UNHCR, 665000 people have been newly displaced within Afghanistan in addition to the 2.9 million people already displaced.

The World Food Programme has warned that 3.2 million children in Afghanistan are at risk of acute malnutrition. According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), a large number of 665000 people have been newly displaced within Afghanistan between January and September 2021 in addition to the 2.9 million people already internally displaced in the country.

As already stated, Pakistan has all along been supporting the people of Afghanistan and this was reiterated last Friday in the third meeting of the Apex Committee on Afghanistan in Islamabad presided over by Prime Minister Imran Khan.

After due deliberations, Pakistan once again vowed not to abandon Afghan people in time of need and that Pakistan was committed to providing all-out support to the Afghan people to avert a humanitarian crisis. It also welcomed the UN General Assembly’s appeal to the international community for aid to Afghanistan.

On its part, Pakistan has already announced a Rs 5 billion assistance package that includes food items, life-saving drugs, winter supplies, and shelter besides assistance in the fields of health, education, and training.

For streamlining and coordinating the provision and supplies to the people of Afghanistan on humanitarian grounds, Pakistan had established a special cell called the Afghanistan Inter-Ministerial Coordination in November 2021 within two months after the departure of US-led NATO forces there in furtherance and continuation of support to the people of Afghanistan.

The special cell so established is headed by Security Advisor to the Prime Minister Dr Moeed Yusuf and it includes members from the Federal Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Finance, Commerce and Interior as well as the representatives of Customs, National Logistic Cell, Civil Aviation Authority, State Bank of Pakistan and the Frontier Corps for ensuring smooth flow of people and trade across the borders.

The special cell has been and continues to work on comprehensive proposals for expansion of cooperation under the assistance package especially in the fields of health and education.

As a delegation from Pakistan headed by the National Security Advisor is visiting Afghanistan in this regard, it is imperative to briefly mention here the initiatives so far undertaken under the special cell.

Under the humanitarian assistance package of Rs 5 billion announced by Prime Minister Imran Khan, Pakistan is providing 50000 metric tons of wheat among other important items like winter shelters and emergency medical supplies. Against this, Pakistan has already sent the first consignment of 18000 metric tons to Afghanistan as humanitarian assistance.

The Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations, and Coordination has already dispatched a team of engineers and technicians to Afghanistan for early completion of three hospitals there for providing relief to the people of the neighbouring war-torn country. The buildings of the three hospitals namely the Nishtar Hospital, Jalalabad; Jinnah Hospital, Kabul, and Logari Hospital, Logar have already been completed. The installation and commissioning of medical equipment worth Rs 2 billion are currently in progress, For bringing the medical equipment into use, a team of four Pakistani engineers along with technicians was working round the clock. This may also help our brotherly neighbouring country in achieving Universal Health Coverage.

Furthermore, over 100,000 people travelling from across Afghan borders have also been successfully vaccinated against COVID-19 since November. Out of these, over 51600 and 55000 people have been vaccinated at Torkham and Chaman border crossings respectively. Ministry of National Health Services has pledged to provide over five lakh doses of COVID-19 vaccine for vaccination of the people at the borders.

The Ministry of Interior has introduced an elaborate mechanism to facilitate relief activities of international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) in Afghanistan.

The main objective of these new measures is to facilitate the humanitarian assistance efforts in war-torn Afghanistan. Both new INGOs, as well as those already registered, will be befitting from it.

An INGO applying for registration would be required to submit a credentials certificate letter from the concerned embassy, proof of registration in the country of origin, and source of funding along with local residence address and details of its designation. The Scrutiny Committee will complete the process within three weeks. Similarly, the process of issuance of visas has also been made less cumbersome and time-consuming. Time duration for processing visa requests has been reduced to 10 days and entry visas for INGO or international organizations’ staff wanting to work for humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan will be issued without security clearance.

If all augurs well, the world seems to be awakening to calls from Pakistan, the UN General Assembly, and other sources for providing humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan to avert a looming crisis on an urgent and emergency basis. People of Afghanistan should be assured that the people and civil and military leadership of Pakistan stand with them in their difficult time and the international community at large will also continue to be urged to come forward and provide humanitarian assistance to the suffering people of Afghanistan at the earliest possible.

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