**Positive way forward**

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The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation’s (OIC) members have taken a number of important steps as a positive way forward to express solidarity with the people of Afghanistan—they pledged money and food aid as a first step towards averting the threat of the humanitarian crisis looming large.

These important and appreciable decisions were taken at the 17th Extraordinary Session of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers after day-long deliberations at the Parliament House in Islamabad on December 19, 2021 which will indeed go down in the annals of history as an important date, more on humanitarian grounds than anything else.

Saudi Arabia took the important welcome initiative on November 29, 2021 as the OIC Summit Chair to convene an extraordinary session of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers to consider the situation in Afghanistan and the problems and issues faced by the Afghan people on an urgent basis. Pakistan, which has been urging the world at large to help the Afghan people in averting the serious humanitarian crisis all along, appreciated the much-needed initiative and hosted the moot on a Sunday.

[348 new COVID-19 cases emerge in Pakistan](https://nation.com.pk/29-Dec-2021/348-new-covid-19-cases-emerge-in-pakistan)

The moot decided to set up a Humanitarian Trust Fund and a Food Security Programme to deal with the rapidly aggravating crisis as winter was fast setting in Afghanistan. The 57-member Islamic bloc, which is also the world’s second largest multilateral forum after the United Nations, adopted a communiqué stating that it will play a leading role in the delivery of humanitarian and development assistance to the people of Afghanistan.

Prime Minister Imran Khan delivered the keynote address at the gathering besides OIC Secretary General Hissin Brahim Taha, the Foreign Ministers of Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iran, Niger and others. UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres was represented by the Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, Martin Griffiths. Host Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi conducted the proceedings besides introductory remarks. Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud announced the first monetary assistance of one billion Riyal ($ 265 million) and somehow there were not many follow up announcements, contrary to the initial expectations in this regard. Host Pakistan had already committed $30 million for helping the Afghans besides taking other steps to facilitate food, medicines and blankets etc on its own and other donor countries.

[Motorway sections closed as fog blankets parts of Punjab](https://nation.com.pk/29-Dec-2021/motorway-sections-closed-as-fog-blankets-parts-of-punjab)

OIC Foreign Ministers have also made a clarion call to the US for unfreezing the financial resources of Afghanistan, which were frozen following its withdrawal from there a couple of months back, thus creating acute financial problems for the Taliban-led Afghan government. The banking system in Afghanistan stands collapsed and the donors are facing difficulties in sending relief money in the absence of financial channels.

Important, welcome and appreciable decisions taken by the moot were announced at a joint news conference by the OIC Secretary General and the host Foreign Minister.

The Humanitarian Trust Fund will be managed by the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) which will be made operational by March 2022 and act as a channel for delivering humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan. It will function in collaboration with international financial agencies. Through the communiqué the OIC member states, Islamic financial institutions, donors and other international partners are to announce pledges to the Fund.

[Omicron variant ‘appears to be less severe,' says UK scientist](https://nation.com.pk/29-Dec-2021/omicron-variant-appears-to-be-less-severe-says-uk-scientist)

Besides setting up the Humanitarian Trust Fund, the OIC would also be establishing a Food Security Programme and the organisation’s Assistant Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs Ambassador, Tarig Ali Bakheet has also been named as a special envoy of the OIC Secretary General for Afghanistan for coordinating relief efforts besides pursuing economic and political engagement with Afghanistan with the assistance from the OIC mission in Kabul.

Prime Minister Imran Khan warned the OIC in particular and the world at large in general of the impending chaos in Afghanistan; the instability in that country would not be in anybody’s interest as it could lead to another refugee influx from the war-ravaged country and heighten the terrorism threat particularly from the militant Islamic State group.

Quite appreciably, the Prime Minister also availed the opportunity to exhort the OIC member states that besides the people of Afghanistan, the people of occupied Kashmir and Palestine are also looking towards them as the world at large is not paying due attention for amicably resolving these decades’ old issues for the right of self-determination in accordance with UN Security Council resolutions.

[Focus in Vienna nuclear talks shifts to Iran's key demands](https://nation.com.pk/29-Dec-2021/focus-in-vienna-nuclear-talks-shifts-to-iran-s-key-demands)

Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi proposed a six-point framework for the OIC to deal with the crisis prevailing in Afghanistan.

The OIC Foreign Ministers meeting was convened to discuss and prepare an effective and practical strategy for dealing with the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan whose more than half of the population—nearly 22.8 million people—was facing an acute food shortage. According to the estimates of UN agencies, about 3.2 million children were at great risk of acute malnutrition.

A good beginning has apparently been made though at a comparatively small scale for helping the people of Afghanistan to avert the shortage of items such as food, medicine and others through the one-day OIC Council of Foreign Ministers. But it is worth appreciating that not only the Islamic countries but also international agencies have now become more aware about the problems and issues of the Afghan people. Surely more help and assistance will now be pouring in through the channels of the Humanitarian Trust Fund and the Food Security Programme.

[Govt decides to take legal action against Shehbaz for guaranteeing Nawaz's return](https://nation.com.pk/29-Dec-2021/govt-decides-to-take-legal-action-against-shehbaz-for-guaranteeing-nawaz-s-return)

It may be mentioned here that over the years, the OIC has been extending consistent support to the people of Afghanistan. Today more than ever, the Afghan people need support from the international community including the OIC. Hopefully, the gravity of the situation in Afghanistan has been realised through the moot, not only on the Islamic countries but also the world at large.

Pakistan has been engaged in intense diplomatic outreach. This is duly illustrated by the Prime Minister’s extensive contacts with world leaders, the Foreign Minister’s numerous bilateral interactions and visit to four neighbouring countries of Afghanistan, the establishment of the 6 neighbouring countries platform at Pakistan’s initiative , participation in the Moscow’s meetings and hosting the Troika Plus and other visits and engagements nationally and internationally.

Afghanistan is a founding member of the OIC and as part of the Islamic Ummah, we are bound by fraternal bonds of amity and brotherhood with the Afghan people who cannot and should not be left alone in this difficult time.

A momentum has been built through this important moot in Islamabad and hopefully, it will be maintained and all sorts of assistance for the otherwise starving people of Afghanistan will start pouring in from everywhere much sooner than expected.

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