**Straight Talk: 2020 Davos theme — save the earth**

Hafeez Khan January 25, 2020

[Davos](https://dailytimes.com.pk/545833/pakistan-pavilion-at-davos/), Switzerland is where the rich, powerful and famous come together and rub shoulders with each other every year at the World Economic Forum (WEF). It was started in 1971 by Klaus Schwab, a business professor from University of Geneva. It is an NGO headquartered in a sprawling campus in Geneva.

It started off being named as European Management Forum and as its scope and influence increased it was renamed as WEF in 1987. I was based in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia at that point. I recollect that it created quite a buzz amongst the business community there. I heard firsthand accounts from Shaukat Aziz, former Prime Minister of Pakistan and my late friend Ahsan Rashid. Shaukat was heading Citibank joint venture Samba, living in Riyadh and Ahsan headed an oil company in Jeddah.

It was a first in assembling political and business leaders along with opinion makers to hear their views on various issues facing the world. It also provided an opportunity to hammer out differences and take a global approach to challenges facing mankind. 2020 marked the 50th year of this Forum held in January. It is a by invitation only and a five day event. It is not for the faint hearted. Membership costs range from upwards of $50,000 to half a million. In addition, admission fees are $19,000 plus hotels in Davos are not exactly cheap.

Davos is a tiny village in the foothills of Swiss Alps, having a permanent population of under 15,000 residents. It becomes the focal point on a number of occasions each year with activities of WEF, skiing events and inquisitive tourists from around the world. I was one of them. In Saudi we represented multinationals based out of Germany, France and Switzerland. We met the principals a few times each year. During summers, to get away from Riyadh’s heat I would represent our company.

I would combine some vacation time to take my favorite route to these meetings. I would travel to Vienna, Austria. Spend a couple of days there then drive to Salzburg and Innsbruck on breathtaking mountainous routes and then cross over into Switzerland to Davos. Have a short stay in Belvedere hotel before making my way to Geneva for our meetings. I have very fond memories from these trips. I love Austria, it could have been my adopted home rather than Canada, but for the language barrier.

Back to Davos 2020. Last week I had written about the devastation of our planet in the last eight decades by humans. It was triggered by witnessing the haphazard spread of Bali. When I chose to write about Davos, I was gratified that their theme was titled “Stakeholders for a cohesive and sustainable World”. Essentially, save the world. This was the perfect opportunity as I had argued that the corporate world had to work with political leaders to stem the rot.

This need was highlighted by Prince Charles of England who emphasized on corporate responsibility. However, it was the young 17 year old Swedish activist Greta Thunberg who called out the world leaders stating ‘they have done nothing; the house is still on fire”. Meaningless promises backed up with no action. The climate chaos continues to climb the ladder which will lead to complete disaster down the road.

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At best, the theme is likely to end up being just the background music while capitalism is being celebrated. I don’t degrade capitalism, it is a system that seems to work since the last century. Except now keeping in mind the degradation, it needs to be “capitalism with a conscience”. That is not possible with the leader of the most powerful country, President Trump, continuing to be in total denial. His withdrawal from Paris Accord is a stab in the back for those trying to safeguard the environment.

This approach resembles a peasant farmer who is so keen to harvest his crop and cash in, that he shows no consideration for the future generations. Yet we have to keep in consideration that this moot brings together the movers and shakers of the world. The 3,000 participants included over a 100 billionaires, one thousand of the largest corporations in the world and including some very powerful politicians. It was a “made to order” opportunity for public and private co-operation.

This provided an opportunity for Prime Minister Imran Khan to interact with President Trump. While Trump’s entire focus is on his re-election and dodging the impeachment bullet, yet he offered to mediate between India and Pakistan and displayed his intent to bring peace to Afghanistan. These are the most pressing issues for Pakistan. IK handled himself very well as a leader of a self respecting country seeking to be partners in peace and not conflicts.

This was conveyed entirely in his speech where he highlighted Pakistan’s efforts towards reviving the forest cover so brutally savaged by greedy self serving leeches.

He shared, quite honestly, the challenges faced by Pakistan in turning around a near bankrupt economy and the pain inflicted on the common man to achieve this. He emphasized on inviting foreign capital, tourism and outlined the opportunities in the country.

His performance on the international stage is amazing. However, at home the improvements in governance and reforms are absent. Sometimes he reminds me of an over developed body builder with a large torso having weak legs. IK’s efforts at providing tree cover are commendable, but they are not enough. There is a strong need to blend these with a well spelt out implementation plan of PTI’s reform agenda. Mr. Prime Minister “the house is on fire”!

*The writer is known for her articles on topics which have a Socio-Cultural impact*