

APPEAL IN SUPPORT OF PAKISTAN'S FLOOD VICTIMS

UN Headquarters, New York City, 1 pm, Friday, September 3, 2010.

Remarks by Rajmohan Gandhi, Research Professor, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Ambassador Haroon, friends, ladies and gentlemen:

Playing a part in this event is deeply meaningful for me. While still shaken by the magnitude of the disaster that has hit Pakistan, I am more than glad – I am moved – to stand next to Ambassador Hussain Haroon and make with him a joint plea for help for the people of Pakistan.

In Pakistan, the sky and the mountains became oceans, and the waters came crashing down, swallowing towns, villages, homes, fields, roads, bridges, crops, belongings, schools, hospitals.

For South Asia, this is the most destructive and most widespread natural disaster in living memory.

I want to add my voice to the appeal for generous support for the people of Pakistan who are in need.

Thirty-three heroic men, trapped under a deep mine in Chile, have captured the imagination of much of America and the world. I too feel and pray for them.

But I feel and pray also for the hundreds of thousands of courageous Pakistani children, women, men, and the elderly who lost in minutes what was built over a lifetime or inherited from the toil of earlier lifetimes, and who are ready nonetheless to face the future. These are life-loving, not death-loving, millions.

It is said that one person killed is a drama, a million killed is a statistic. In recent weeks Pakistan has witnessed a million powerful dramas, each of them unique, each of them intensely personal, each involving shock, and pain, and courage, and faith, and hope and love.

I don't expect the international community or America to become aware of all the million individual Pakistan dramas or to keep track as the subjects of these dramas step into their darkened future. But I do expect and urge **some** of us to follow **some** lives and support them.

Luckily we have begun to learn of the acts of service and giving by group after group of ordinary Pakistanis who have taken food, tents, medicines and doctors to the hungry, the sick and the homeless.

In Pakistan and outside, young Pakistanis have given amazing leadership. Pakistan Youth Alliance, Youth Catalyst Pakistan, Relief4Pakistan, Mercy Corps Pakistan, and Pehla Qadam (the first step) formed by Pakistani law students in the UK, are only some of the bodies organizing relief. On my campus at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, the Pakistani Graduate Students Association has done such impressive work that the City has just decided to give to the association a special award.

When there is constant talk of alleged failed states, shouldn't we recognize this remarkable proof of the strength and vibrancy of Pakistani society? Let us praise and honor the stoic bravery of the victims of Pakistan's floods. Let us praise and honor also the numerous selfless and creative Pakistanis who have gone to the aid of their stricken compatriots. Let us recognize too the tireless role of many Pakistani soldiers in providing relief.

The UN has helped, America has helped, but more is needed.

I was very glad that the government of India has given aid. Many Indians have also helped individually. Learning that I would be speaking here today, Suresh and Mala Vazirani, good friends from Mumbai, asked me to announce, in their words, a modest donation of \$2,500 towards relief in Sindh -- from "fellow-Sindhis," they wanted Ambassador Haroon to know.

Let us recognize that in this catastrophe, as in all wars and conflicts, the poorest are once more the prime sufferers, losing not a portion of what they had but all they had. Their sorrows are unrecorded, their heroism unsung, their pain unremembered. I pray that this flood will help us in South Asia to reorder our priorities.

I received the following email yesterday from a friend in Peshawar: "Indeed, nature has poured its wrath on this unfortunate country and we must wonder why it has done so in a way that punishes the poor most of all. For our so-called elites, the fact that they are largely unaffected, should be a source of shame and guilt rather than relief."

If the better-off of South Asia are touched by this moment to come closer to their needy compatriots, then we will extract some good out of this tragedy.

Allow me to say that at this moment I am thinking of a dear friend, Ambassador Haroon's younger brother Hameed, who has been unwell but is luckily getting better.

As a historian, I am aware of what some here may not know, namely that Yusuf Abdullah Haroon, a great leader of Sindh, the grandfather of Ambassador Haroon and of my friend Hameed, was one of the closest political colleagues of Pakistan's remarkable founder, Qaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah. Remembering this makes me glad, for as a boy I had seen Mr Jinnah. Later, I studied his life.

I will conclude by quoting what a 40-year-old Jinnah said in 1916 in Ahmedabad in western India. It is an exact quote but I am making two substitutions. “South Asia” for “India” and “South Asians” for the word used by him in 1916, “Indians”. This is what he said:

For a real new [South Asia] – *a new Pakistan and India* -- to arise, all petty and small things must be given up. To be redeemed, all [South Asians] must offer to sacrifice not only their good things but all those evil things they cling to blindly — their hates and their divisions, their pride in what they should be thoroughly ashamed of, their quarrels and misunderstandings. These are a sacrifice God would love.

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