

INTERVIEW: Ambassador Ahmad Farooq

Twenty-Two Million People in Afghanistan Continue To Face a Dire Humanitarian Emergency

The following is the edited transcript of the interview with His Excellency Ambassador Ahmad Farooq, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to the Kingdom of Denmark, conducted by Tom Gillesberg, May 31, 2022 at the Pakistani Embassy in Denmark. The video of the interview is available [here](#).

Tom Gillesberg: I'm Tom Gillesberg, Chairman of the Schiller Institute in Denmark, and also with *Executive Intelligence Review*. I'm here at the Pakistani Embassy in Denmark with His Excellency Ambassador Ahmad Farooq, the Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to the Kingdom of Denmark since April 2020. Before that, the Ambassador held several posts in connection with the United Nations: Counsellor/Alternate to the Rome-based UN Agencies; Counsellor, Permanent Mission of Pakistan to the UN; member of Pakistan's Security Council team; Director General dealing with counter terrorism at the UN and other multilateral forums; and Director, dealing with the UN General Assembly, UN Security Council, Counter Terrorism, UN Peacekeeping and other political and peace and security issues.

Your Excellency Ambassador Farooq, I'm very glad you agreed to give us an interview. You gave a speech to the Schiller Institute in Denmark's Afghanistan seminar in October 2021, "Afghanistan, What Now? Peace Through Economic Development," where you especially described the dire situation in Afghanistan at the time, and how the Afghanistan war had affected Pakistan. Since then, the people of Afghanistan have suffered through seven months of winter conditions, and the humanitarian situation is much worse, probably the

worst in the whole world. Could you please describe the humanitarian emergency for the people of Afghanistan right now?

Ambassador Ahmad Farooq: Thank you very much, Tom. I would first of all like to thank you and the Schiller Institute for coming to the Pakistan Embassy in order to discuss this important issue that is being faced by the people of Afghanistan and the region. The Schiller Institute, I must say, has been doing a very good job, in highlighting what is happening in Afghanistan, so I would like to begin by thanking you for that.

You have very rightly said that Afghanistan has been going through a very difficult situation, and when we met at the Schiller Institute in October, things were not as bad. But we could see which way the situation could go, if the international community did nothing to help the people of Afghanistan.

Unfortunately, what we had foreseen at that time did play out in the following period. What we now know—and these are statistics [that] have come out from the United Nations—is that over 22 million people in Afghanistan continue to face a dire humanitarian emergency. Over 1 million Afghan children are malnourished and at the risk of dying. The winter period, in particular, has been very hard on the people of Afghanistan, because of the food shortages and because Afghanistan had been facing a prolonged drought even before things happened in August of last year. That, combined with the economic situation that Afghanistan faced after the withdrawal of the international forces in particular, has helped to further compound the humanitarian crisis being faced by the people of Afghanistan.



Courtesy of Ahmad Farooq

H.E. Ahmad Farooq, Ambassador of Pakistan to Denmark.

So, it continues to be a very difficult situation there. The region itself, obviously, has suffered from this conflict for over four decades, and we continue to do so. There is a lot of concern in Pakistan, as it is a very sad and difficult situation that we see which the people of Afghanistan are currently facing.

Gillesberg: Obviously, much too little humanitarian aid has reached Afghanistan. The Schiller Institute has been pleading for emergency action. We also did that very much in the seminar together with you, to alleviate the sufferings of the Afghan people. And our founder Helga Zepp-LaRouche has proposed Operation Ibn Sina, named after the great doctor and philosopher and political adviser from the region, born in 980, also known in the West as Avicenna. Operation Ibn Sina is a call for mobilizing emergency humanitarian aid and building a modern health system as a focus for sparking the long-term development of Afghanistan's infrastructure and economy. What do you think of this? And what must be done to prevent even more millions of people from starving and many dying?

Ambassador Farooq: I think—and it is the position of the government of Pakistan in this regard—that the international community needs to come together and address the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan, and that there is need for engagement with the authorities in Afghanistan. There is a need for coordinated provision of humanitarian assistance for the people of Afghanistan.

So far, what we are seeing is that there is a sporadic effort, and obviously, many Western countries that were present previously in Afghanistan, no longer have any presence there. Then, we also had a significant presence of the United Nations which mostly is not there anymore. Then, there is this issue of how to deal with the authorities in Afghanistan, and what we generally see is an effort to try to bypass them when dealing with the people of Afghanistan.

Now, Afghanistan is a large country in terms of size,

area, and also in terms of the size of its population; it's over 40 million people. The way we see it, it is not possible for a good, coordinated humanitarian effort to reach the most vulnerable people in the country when you are trying to bypass the authorities. This is something we have been calling upon the international community—that everybody needs to come together and look at what the humanitarian needs are in Afghanistan. The other issues, the political issues, obviously, those also have to be dealt with, but the priority has to be on how we can prevent further suffering in Afghanistan.

As far as Pakistan is concerned, we have been trying to facilitate, for example, the UN humanitarian effort. Most of it in the past was also being routed through Pakistan, and we have an arrangement with the UN on how they can again direct their humanitarian actions through Pakistan. So that is happening.

But again, I think the principal obstacle is this issue—that the policies which the Western countries have come up with, is that whatever they do there, they have to bypass the authorities. And that, in itself, is preventing a more sustained and coordinated effort to help the people there.

So when you mention about the initiative which Helga Zepp-LaRouche has launched, it is a very good idea. It's something that should have a lot of traction, particularly for Muslim countries, because obviously Ibn Sina comes from our part of the world, and could provide a sort of rallying point for Islamic countries to help the people of Afghanistan. So, anything that can be done should be done. We are of the view that it is our obligation to help those poor people there.

Gillesberg: Could you say more about what the government of Pakistan is concretely proposing, and what they are doing in relation to Afghanistan?

Ambassador Farooq: Well, being the most immediate neighbor of Afghanistan, and a country which has suffered throughout the last four decades, both in terms of the humanitarian angle—we have been hosting over



Ibn Sina (Avicenna), 980–1037, the great doctor, philosopher, and political advisor.



UNICEF/Omid Fazel

Refugee camp in Afghanistan, May 18, 2020.

4 million refugees at any given point in time, and over 3 million still continue to live in Pakistan, we have faced the security dimension of the instability in Afghanistan, especially over the last 20 years, so we have a deep interest in having a stable Afghanistan as our neighbor.

Right after the events of August 2021, we coordinated with the international community, first in the evacuation of the international staff, diplomats, Afghan nationals that the international community wanted to evacuate from there. We have been trying to coordinate efforts among the neighboring countries of Afghanistan. So, Pakistan hosted a conference in September of the six neighboring countries; then another conference was held in Tehran, Iran, in October, and we participated in that. We then hosted the meeting of the Troika-Plus: This is a grouping of China, Russia, the United States, and Pakistan, so we hosted that, and on the sidelines of that meeting, there was also a meeting of this grouping with the Taliban delegation. Then we hosted the emergency meeting of the Islamic countries' Foreign Ministers in December, which was focused, specifically, on the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan.

So our effort has been to promote engagement with Afghanistan, bring the international community together, so that we, specifically, deal first with the humanitarian situation. Bilaterally as well, Pakistan has contributed, despite our economic difficulties, about \$30 million in terms of humanitarian assistance. We

have been facing the challenge of COVID, and despite that, we have tried to keep cross-border movement of people, as well as trade of goods and services open, so that the people of Afghanistan do not suffer more than they have to. And we recently also allowed a shipment of wheat from India: This is a sensitive issue in Pakistan, but for the benefit of the Afghan people, we allowed an over-land shipment of Indian wheat from India to Afghanistan.

So, we continue to engage with the international community in terms of what we can do to help Afghanistan.

Gillesberg: Pakistan also organized the conference in Islamabad of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) about Afghanistan, on March 22-23 this year. What was the result of that meeting?

Ambassador Farooq: Yes, as I mentioned in my previous response, actually the emergency session on Afghanistan was held in December. And there were two important outcomes of that conference: First was that a special humanitarian trust fund was created for Afghanistan; and then the Organization for Islamic Cooperation also appointed a special representative to deal with the humanitarian situation. These were the two key decisions that were taken at the December meeting. In March, we had a regular session of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the OIC, which basically operationalized those two decisions. So now that trust fund is operational, and countries have started to contribute money to that, which would then be channeled to Afghanistan through the Islamic Development Bank. So the OIC has its own set of organizations that can deal with these humanitarian issues, and we feel very happy that we were able to coordinate, and to have this work done for Afghanistan.

Gillesberg: What is your message to people in the U.S. and in Europe, regarding Afghanistan, and what should happen?

Ambassador Farooq: Our consistent message to



OIC

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation Foreign Ministers' Meeting on March 22-23 in Islamabad, Pakistan operationalized a special humanitarian trust fund for Afghanistan, and appointed a special representative to deal with humanitarian aid.

our European and other Western partners is that we have to come together: It's our obligation to help the people of Afghanistan, and it is important to continue to our engagement even with the authorities of Afghanistan. We do understand that there are sensitivities with regard to issues relating to political inclusion, as well as human rights, especially the rights of women and girls. But we believe that in order to make progress on these issues as well, we have to continue our engagement. Pakistan has been, as I mentioned, part of several initiatives in terms of trying to bring countries together on Afghanistan, and we have consistently joined the international community in expressing the same concerns that they have, in terms of human rights, in terms of political inclusion, and especially the rights of women and girls. So we share those concerns, but we believe if we are to make progress, we have to continue our engagement with the country.

Then, the most important aspect, I think, that has to be addressed is the economic meltdown which has happened in Afghanistan, because without a functioning economy, you cannot deal with the humanitarian situation. The world cannot be expected to just keep pumping in money in terms of providing food and medical assistance: The country eventually has to stand on its own two feet. And for that, we have to ensure that the banking system of the country is functional, and we have to look at this issue of the sanctions that exist

against the Taliban authorities, because when you have that kind of a situation, it is not possible for a country to do business internationally. So these, I think, are some of our key messages to our international partners, for how we bring about stability in Afghanistan, and take them out of the current sad situation.

Gillesberg: This also includes, of course, that part of these sanctions has been to freeze all the accounts of the national government of Afghanistan, so they do not have Afghanistan's money to spend on dealing with the situation in Afghanistan; but it's also a big factor that Afghanistan has been cut off from the whole SWIFT system, which means that Afghanis living abroad are not able to send money back home.

Ambassador Farooq: Exactly. So this is what I'm trying to say, that the international connectivity of Afghanistan with the banking system—the banking system of Afghanistan, it is clear, has collapsed. There is an issue of liquidity, which the United Nations is trying to address, and we appreciate that. More needs to be done. When you mention about freezing of Afghan assets, again, they have the money to take care of their people for some time, but because of the sanctions, they don't have access to it. And lately, we were also disappointed with the decision that part of that money has been sequestered to pay, to compensate the victims of, for ex-

ample, the 9/11 attack. So this again, is an unfortunate decision, because that money was the money of the people of Afghanistan: They need it. They are starving to death. So that consideration should have been given.

Gillesberg: Well, now, on top of all the calamities, you can say, in that situation, you also have a war between Russia and Ukraine, with the U.S. and NATO actively engaged in many ways, and which also directly affects the situation with these enormously rising food prices, and all of the other things involved. Now, could cooperation to help the people of Afghanistan maybe be a way for the great powers to begin to cooperate to solve their problems?

Ambassador Farooq: Well, it has been most unfortunate for the world as a whole that we have this conflict in the heart of Europe in the 21st century, which was unthinkable until a few months back, and unfortunately, it has diverted the focus of the international community from grave humanitarian situations like Afghanistan, like Yemen, also some situations in Africa, and the entire focus is now on this war: So this is most unfortunate.

Frankly, sitting in Europe, and looking at the positions which the opposing sides have taken on this conflict, I really don't see a possibility of some kind of a compromise—I mean, cooperation on Afghanistan that could help solve this conflict. It has to be the other way around. There has to be peace in Ukraine, which would be for the betterment, I think, of the entire international community. And Pakistan was among the first countries that raised these concerns, that this conflict would have serious consequences for the global economy, and especially for the developing countries that are dependent on import of food items, grain, import of petroleum products.

And it is playing out: You have seen what has happened in Sri Lanka. Pakistan itself is facing very serious economic issues on the external front, because we also import wheat, we also import most of our petroleum products, so it has put a serious strain on our economy. I'm sure there are many other countries that are facing these difficulties. So what we urge all the players that are involved in this conflict is, that we have to find a peaceful solution through dialogue, through diplomacy, because conflicts and wars don't provide any solution. That has been our consistent perspective in respect of Afghanistan, and we say that, also, in the case of Ukraine.

Gillesberg: Well, most people and most politicians normally say, "first we have to create peace, and once we create peace we can begin to collaborate." The Schiller Institute has always insisted that it's the other way around, that you create peace through development: That if nations engage with each other, in really taking care of their common interests by having economic development, then you also have the opportunity for long-term peace.

The Schiller Institute is right now circulating a petition that was released a few days before the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war, entitled, "Convoke an International Conference To Establish a New Security and Development Architecture for All Nations," modeled on the 1648 Peace of Westphalia, which, after 30 years of war in Europe, which really was over 100 years of war in Europe, the conflicting parts then agreed that peace could only come about by taking into account the interests of every country. Also, the regional economic development programs are essential for increasing global security. Do you have any comments on this proposal?

Ambassador Farooq: I think it's a good proposal. But if you look at it from a historical perspective, didn't this happen at the end of the Second World War when we created the United Nations, and the United Nations Charter has all those elements—respect for territorial integrity, non-use of threat or force; solving disputes through peaceful means—all this was there, and then the whole global architecture was created, the financial and economic architecture that was meant to promote peace and development. And the European Union, itself, is the best example that once countries start to cooperate economically, then the chance of having a war is reduced significantly. We are seeing this in the Southeast Asian region, where we have ASEAN. So it is correct.

But at the same time, we still see, that there are forces, or it's perhaps when a certain generation which has gone through these difficult times is phased out, and there is a new generation, they forget about how destructive wars are, and you see the start of another war happening. There has to be a consistent effort by humanity that wars don't provide any solutions, and we have to look at cooperation between the countries, and through that find peace.

So, this petition you have launched, it's very timely, but now we have a war here, and we have to find a peaceful solution to it, because conflicts, as I said, are no answers to any differences between countries.

Gillesberg: Well, Mr. Ambassador, it's been very interesting talking to you about these matters, and much more could be brought into the discussion, but is there anything else, at the end of the interview, you would like to say to the viewers?

Ambassador Farooq: Well, it's been an interesting time for me, serving as Pakistan's ambassador to a member of the European Union. And I believe that it is important to develop a better understanding of each other, in order to have peace, stability, and global prosperity. The world is facing huge challenges: COVID was just one example, but the bigger challenge and threat that the entire globe is facing is climate change. And what we are seeing is, for example, that the situation in Ukraine tends to dilute your focus from the bigger challenges that we all are collectively facing. So there is a need for bringing the world together to address those challenges in which everybody has a stake.

One of the key things for us which has come out of this conflict in Ukraine, is that we didn't want to take any further sides in great power conflicts, because we believe that developing countries have to focus on the

betterment of their people, and we have to look at what bigger challenges we are facing in the future.

Gillesberg: Also, when you have a conflict, where the obvious unsaid question is, when will this escalate into thermonuclear war, if the dynamic is not changed, it's difficult to see how you can be a "winner" by simply choosing sides.

Ambassador Farooq: Exactly.

Gillesberg: Then it might be better to change the dynamic.

Ambassador Farooq: That is correct.

Gillesberg: Well, Your Excellency, thank you very much for the interview. And let's talk again later, when, hopefully, some of these issues are getting a more interesting development, which gives more opportunity for actually solving the problems.

Ambassador Farooq: Thank you Tom. It's always a pleasure to interact with the Schiller Institute.

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