

Mrs. Amna Malik

Socio-Economic Conditions in Afghanistan and the Role of the Global Community

This is the edited transcript of Amna Malik's presentation to Panel 2, "The Science of Physical Economy" of the Schiller Institute's November 13-14 conference, "All Moral Resources of Humanity Have To Be Called Up: Mankind Must Be the Immortal Species!" Mrs. Malik is the President of the Center of Pakistan and International Relations (COPAIR).

As-Salaam Alaikum [Peace be unto you].

We all know that with the withdrawal of U.S. and NATO troops on August 15, 2021, a new, interim Taliban-led government is now in power in Afghanistan. The flows of international aid and development assistance, which the country largely depended on for its advancement prior to August 15, 2021, have been almost entirely disrupted. The international donor agencies like the World Bank, the IMF, the Asian Development Bank, and the EU decided to freeze budgeted project funding payments to Afghanistan, Afghanistan-owned assets abroad, as well as official development assistance plans. Therefore, after the U.S. withdrawal, there is a new need for a new phase of reconstruction and state-rebuilding in Afghanistan which has to be passed on to other regional players, such as Pakistan, China, and Russia.

If we talk about the governance under the Taliban, which is highly totalitarian, there are no available positions for other ethnic groups, like women and minorities. This has highlighted Taliban neglect of the civil and political rights of the population and demonstrated their refusal to compromise.

In a country where 75% of the population live in rural areas, state-centered development funding has failed to reach those key populations in dire need of services. Rural communities have often been neglected in social-political development programs, further undermining the legitimacy of the central government. This has resulted in minimal improvement in areas where poverty and



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radicalization have negatively impacted the social economic status of the people's lives and maintained ripe conditions for insurgencies. The world needs to awaken on this call.

Afghanistan's economic condition, if we talk about it—this is among the poorest of nations, deprived of basic health, education, and standard of living. At present, the Afghan economy does not produce enough revenue to provide even basic needs, such

as food and power for its citizens. The country is in desperate need for foreign assistance in order to spur its renewal and growth.

Human insecurities in Afghanistan, if we talk about it, the total collapse of the public system installed in Afghanistan, the country now faces a humanitarian, identity, and human rights crisis. Protected conflict and continued instability, combined with the recent political upheaval and humanitarian and economic crisis, have caused fear and frustration among the large segment of the population.

Additionally, the break of connectivity with the domestic and international markets, along with the cessation of foreign aid, and investment into the country, have damaged productive activities. More than 120,000 people have been evacuated from Afghanistan, including qualified professionals in social, economic, and political sectors. Quite [an] unfortunate situation.

Recommendations to the International Community

So here, as the President of COPAIR, I have certain recommendations for the international community:

- First of all, to address this human insecurity in Afghanistan, the international community should develop a policy of engagement, with human-security-led goals, acknowledging the context and culture

in Afghanistan. Policies and approaches related to assistance should be people-focused, not state-focused. Humanitarian assistance needs to address food and health insecurity, and utilize international organization and humanitarian avenues, with outreach to rural areas. These programs should provide basic services relating to health, food, shelter, for internally displaced populations, and those in dire need of assistance.

- Programs should also include a discourse component to provide a safe opportunity for individuals from different sectors to engage in critical reflection and dialogue on social-economic conditions.

- For a very coordinated humanitarian and development assistance, I believe, the approach should be that the international community should convene a donors' platform to galvanize the world to help advance civil society; and humanitarian organizations [should] develop a consistent plan, with pragmatic benchmarks and long-term, continued support, to address this humanitarian security crisis; and involve the state quarters in the decision-making, like women and minorities.

- Furthermore, development projects should be channeled and implemented through civil-society organizations, and provide realistic and achievable benchmarks. The development model should be designed based on the social and economic realities of each province and ethnic community. Programs should require the local community that receives aid, to contribute in time, and in kind, to the development projects they need in their communities.

- Furthermore, measures to immediately counteract the food and health crisis by organizing aid in the amount needed and by channels acceptable to all the sides.

- Secure the resumption of the financial flows,

by providing refinancing and cash to banks in the economy, which is largely cash-based, and in which only 15% of the population have access to traditional banking services.

- Partner with foreign academic institutions and government to provide tertiary education and health facilities in Afghanistan.

How Pakistan plays its role in peace building. Troika-plus: [On Nov. 11—ed.], Islamabad hosted a meeting [of the extended Troika—ed.] comprising Pakistan, China, Russia, and United States to discuss the latest situation in Afghanistan. Pakistan has always supported, as a government, peace and regional cooperation, and economic stability in Afghanistan.

There are certain practical policy recommendations for the government of Pakistan:

Development and rehabilitation of all of Afghanistan through:

- (a) regional cooperation for economic relief;
 - (b) a humanitarian assistance packet;
 - (c) enhancing the role of regional organizations;
 - (d) protection and security for investors;
 - (e) focus on long-term economic growth;
 - (f) support for inclusive development;
 - (g) support for development assistance projects;
- and finally,
- (h) connectivity through transportation infrastructure.

At the end, I would like to say that peace in Afghanistan is peace in South Asia and peace in the world. Regional and global powers should form a unified and collective approach to deal with the Afghanistan issue. We, as an organization, are joining hands with the Schiller Institute for the initiative for humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan.

Thank you very much.