

**Speech of the Prime Minister
on the
Occasion of his meeting
with the Heads of Leading NGOs of Pakistan
(October 18, 2010)**

Excellencies, Federal Minister,

Senators, MNAs

Heads of leading NGOs of Pakistan

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Assalam-o-Alakium

I am pleased to be part of this distinguished gathering today. The presence of the voluntary leadership and the professional staff of the leading NGOs of Pakistan at the Provincial and the National levels represents a welcome gesture on the part of the stakeholders and conveys their compassion for the flood victims.

This post-flood moot affords us an opportunity to revisit our response during the rescue and relief operations. It provides us an opportunity to share valuable information and experiences in order to improve coordination between the government and NGOs as well as identify and plug grey areas for enhanced output.

As you are already aware, I have called this meeting:

- To learn at first-hand from the Heads of the leading national and provincial level NGOs and their respective perspectives based on their experience of rendering flood relief support and also about utilization of funds / resources for the affected people.
- I would also like to know proposals for the next phases of rehabilitation and reconstruction.
- I will share with you how the Federal Government views present and future challenges in post-flood rehabilitation and reconstruction and renewal, and the role of Pakistani NGOs.

The intended outcome of this moot is: improved information and knowledge amongst all participants of their respective contributions, and the potential for more cohesive co-operation in a shared national vision and mission of reconstruction and rehabilitation.

Ladies and Gentlemen

During and after the catastrophic floods of August 2010, Pakistan has entered a new phase of phenomenal challenges virtually on all fronts.

We are a country that is accustomed to facing crisis on a continuous basis since the year of Independence 63 years ago. But so comprehensive and so damaging has been the impact of the floods for about 20 million of our people that it has transformed the fundamental aspects of the entire country's development and progress.

Distinguished audience

As we enter rehabilitation and reconstruction phase, we have to understand that over 20 million have watched their entire lives, their homes, their crops, their cattle, their assets washed away in 82 districts. 1974 people lost their lives and about 3000 gravely injured.

Education and Health sectors suffered the worst losses with over 471 health facilities were damaged.

Likewise, more than 12593 public schools and colleges were either completely or partially damaged.

The initial estimates reveal that 1.65 million houses were damaged and a crop area of 20,000 sq km was inundated. According to an assessment of the ILO, about 5.3 million jobs have been lost. Damage to communication and energy sectors has also been phenomenal that runs into billions of rupees. Consequently, we are faced with serious challenges in sectors of the economy, energy, environment, education, food security, livelihoods, physical infrastructure, and re-generation of our agriculture.

Ladies and Gentlemen

In such a grave situation, it becomes the national duty of all citizens of Pakistan to rise above all differences and divisions, and to work together to face this unprecedented crisis.

I am humbly proud to note that almost immediately after the natural disaster, the entire nation responded to the best of its ability. The Government of Pakistan immediately recognized the scale of the disaster and deployed all available resources including the civil and the military to conduct rescue and relief activities with our own available resources and facilities. The provincial governments, AJK and Gilgit-Baltistan also activated their own respective departments to steer the rescue and relief efforts.

Dear Participants

Represented by all the federating units, the federal government established National Oversight Disaster Management Council (NODMC) to oversee the release, flow and utilization of the funds to the flood affectees in a transparent manner.

I have also invited the Chairman of Public Accounts Committee and the Auditor General of Pakistan to monitor the entire process and conduct the audit of the funds being released.

The Finance Ministry is already reviewing the budget so that maximum resources can be made available to meet the needs of rehabilitation.

The government has frozen expenditure at last year's level besides cutting down non-development expenditure and promoting the culture of austerity in the government's departments. Tax structure is also being reviewed with a view to widening tax net, and increasing tax to GDP ratio by 13% in the medium term.

These measures are aimed at mobilizing indigenous resources for the flood victims. In order to ensure that the aid money reaches the deserving without any hiccup, the government has started the registration process with the help of NADRA. We have already distributed the first installment of Rs. 20,000 through the Watan Cards to be followed by payment of remaining Rs. 80,000. Initially, an amount of Rs.40 billion has been earmarked for this purpose. Out of which 50% will be contributed by the Federal Government. Besides this, the Benazir Income Support Programme, Pakistan Bait-ul-Mal, and other agencies are also busy in providing relief and assistance to affectees round the clock.

Ladies and Gentlemen

One of the extra-ordinary manifestations of the capacity of the people of Pakistan to give practical shape to their sympathetic emotions is the role rendered by hundreds of non-governmental organizations. Some of the NGOS already existed and had existing networks and their own organizational infrastructure on

the basis of which they were able to enter the field of flood relief work. At the same time, there are examples of some organizations which were created overnight to bring citizens together to face a new emergency. Such groups also joined the campaign to render relief to the affectees whether formally or informally. In order to enable a purposeful and manageable exchange of views, the number of participants in this meeting does not, and cannot reflect the total number of NGOs throughout Pakistan which have rendered active and valuable work during the floods. However, an attempt has been made to bring together here in Islamabad representatives from a few NGOs of each province at the national level.

The Government thanks the NGO sector of Pakistan for its dedicated and valuable contribution before, during and after the floods of 2010.
Distinguished audience!

I also laud the role of the media in making the nation and the world at large instantly aware of the scale of devastation and deprivation caused by the floods.

Their presence in the field, their providing victims with the opportunity to express their feelings and depict their conditions, their continuous scrutiny of relief efforts made a vital contribution to mobilizing and accelerating the overall efforts.

Let me assure you that the Government is fully committed to complete transparency and accountability in the receipt, management and use of funds and resources. We are confident that the NGO sector will also ensure equivalent transparency and accountability.

Ladies and Gentlemen

While the scale of destruction caused by the floods is, no doubt, colossal but greater still is our resolve to rebuild a better Pakistan, which inspires hope and confidence among its people. Our past bears witness to the fact that our great nation has always risen when confronted with challenges.

We would turn this crisis into an opportunity. I am sure that a better Pakistan would emerge from these testing times and we are committed to making this happen.

Thank you very much

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