

## **Pakistan's Project of Renewal**

*The floods are only the latest challenge to hit my country.*

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Pakistan, a nation beset by political tragedies for generations, now faces a new test of its national character: a natural calamity unprecedented in our history. Millions have been displaced and thousands have died in floods caused by unabated rain. The monsoons are destroying villages and exposing thousands to illnesses including cholera and dysentery. Apart from organizing immediate rescue and relief operations, our people and our government also face the challenges of rehabilitation and reconstruction.

As the floods hit the country, I faced a dilemma as head of state. I could stay in Pakistan and support the prime minister in our response to the floods, or I could continue with a scheduled visit abroad. I chose to use my travels to mobilize foreign assistance—money, supplies, food, tents, medical care, engineers, clean water and medicine—for our people. Some have criticized my decision, saying it represented aloofness, but I felt that I had to choose substance over symbolism.

As a result of my meetings with French President Nicolas Sarkozy and British Prime Minister David Cameron, the plight of Pakistan's flood victims is receiving full international attention. The British government pledged \$24 million in aid. The U.S. government, with which I was in touch by telephone, has pledged \$35 million in relief funds and made helicopters available for rescue efforts. The NATO coalition, at war in neighboring Afghanistan, has also offered help, as have major European nations and Japan.

My visit to Britain, an important ally in fighting terrorism, also helped defuse potential political friction over Mr. Cameron's remarks in India ostensibly criticizing past Pakistani policy on jihadist militancy. And it allowed me to reaffirm to the relatively new British government Pakistan's commitment to fighting all terrorist groups.

After a decade of suffering the political, economic and social abuses of military dictatorship, Pakistan has spent the last two years re-establishing our democratic infrastructure and rebuilding our national character and cohesiveness.

Our project of national renewal is even more difficult because we are on the front lines of the battle against international terrorism. In particular, we live with the effects of the historical errors of the 1980s that have come back to haunt the world. The use of jihad in Afghanistan as the blunt instrument to destroy the Soviet Union certainly had short-term benefits. But the decision to empower the most radical elements of the mujahideen—and then to abandon Afghanistan economically, politically and militarily after 1989—set the stage for the dreaded clash of civilizations that has plagued the world since.

Whatever horror the Western world has faced at the hands of extremists acting in the name of Islam pales in comparison to the nightmare endured by the people and government of Pakistan. Terrorists have killed more Pakistani soldiers than NATO coalition troops fighting in Afghanistan. Pakistan has lost 2,000 police in the war on terror, more than all other countries combined. And we have lost almost 6,000 civilians, twice the number who died in the World Trade Center.

We have also lost our country's greatest recent political leader—my wife, Benazir Bhutto. My wife's death was even more shocking than the United States losing a president or Britain its prime minister, because she defined our democratic consciousness in the face of dictatorship. She was a symbol of hope to tens of millions in my country—and hundreds of millions around the world—that there could be a better future ahead for our children.

As I return to Pakistan, I bring back tangible results that will help the flood victims in the short run and lay the foundations for national recovery in the long run. I might have benefitted personally from the political symbolism of being in the country at the time of natural disaster. But hungry people can't eat symbols. The situation demanded action, and I acted to mobilize the world.

Now the work must continue. I call on the generous people of the United States to rise to this occasion as they have countless times over the last two centuries. Pakistan welcomes your contributions, as individuals and by your government.

*Mr. Zardari is the president of Pakistan.*