



# Pakistan Presses U.S. to Lead Global Response to Climate Disasters

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Pakistan's unprecedented flood disaster is a wakeup call for governments and international institutions on the need to build a worldwide response to the disproportionate burden of climate change on nations of the Global South — a challenge that Pakistan's foreign minister underscored to U.S. officials and foreign policy analysts Wednesday at USIP. Bilawal Bhutto Zardari urged policymakers to lead an international effort to use the Pakistan crisis as a catalyst for a more effective international effort to help the countries most vulnerable to climate change.

## Pakistan's Agony: A Global Portent

The flooding from this year's monsoon rains has submerged a third of Pakistan, an area larger than the United Kingdom, and displaced 33 million people, close to the population of Canada, Bhutto Zardari said. Like Pakistan, "most countries are not equipped to deal with one seventh of their population becoming climate refugees overnight," he said.

The flood creates a multilayered crisis that will extend for years, say Pakistanis and others, including Samantha Power, administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development. Malaria, typhoid and other diseases are spreading and will accelerate as millions of Pakistanis rely on unsafe water, the World Health Organization says. The flood has destroyed as much as half of Pakistan's economically essential cotton crop, as well as wheat, rice, livestock and other food sources. Experts expect food shortages to spike prices further after inflation reached an annual rate of about 25 percent in July. These health, housing, food and economic crises are likely to push a new influx of impoverished, rural Pakistanis into the country's already overburdened cities.

Pakistan's sudden new agony reflects a global future — a quantum increase in humanitarian disasters and human impoverishment — foreseen by crisis experts from U.N. agencies, the World Bank and many faith-based organizations. Pakistan is among the 10 countries most harmed by disasters related to climate change over the past two decades, according to the Global Climate Risk

Index published by the Berlin-based, non-profit analysis group Germanwatch. That index finds the worst-hit countries are developing nations that “have a lower coping capacity” in the face of increasingly violent storms, searing heat or lengthening droughts. These climate-driven crises in turn are heightening risks for violent conflict, according to USIP’s Tegan Blaine and other specialists on climate and peacebuilding. The Institute’s fieldwork and grants help communities in Kenya, Nigeria, Kyrgyzstan and other countries prevent violence in disputes driven by the changing climate.

#### A Pilot Case for Climate Justice?

Bhutto Zardari underscored the lopsided injustices of climate change facing his and other less-developed nations. Pakistan contributes “a negligible 0.8 percent of the global carbon footprint, but we are among the 10 ... most climate-stressed countries on the planet,” he said. Pakistan and the other worst-hurt nations “don’t have the fiscal space to adapt, ... to build the infrastructure necessary to deal with the climate challenges.”

Bhutto Zardari, whose five-month-old coalition government faces huge political challenges, spoke to several dozen U.S. officials and Pakistan policy specialists Wednesday after meetings last week at the U.N. General Assembly session and this week with Secretary of State Antony Blinken. He expressed appreciation for the \$66 million in emergency help offered by the United States.

But Bhutto Zardari also noted the vastly greater, unfulfilled 2009 commitment by the United States and other developed countries “to a goal of mobilizing jointly \$100 billion a year by 2020 to address the needs of developing countries” in confronting climate change. Those countries have failed to meet that target in what many governments, aid groups and analysts call a broken promise. “That money’s not available,” Bhutto Zardari said in a discussion with former Ambassador Dan Feldman, who has held senior U.S. diplomatic posts on Pakistan and climate issues. “It turns out that ... there’s no mechanism” of the scale required to help the poorer countries that increasingly are being crushed under the fiscal and human costs of metastasizing climate disasters, he said.

The United States should lead in making Pakistan “the pilot case” for fulfilling that 13-year-old promise, both to respond to the immediate crisis and to help similarly stricken countries in coming years, Bhutto Zardari said. In the debate over wealthy nations’ moral responsibilities as the overwhelming producers of greenhouse gases and thus climate disasters, environment advocates and scholars have urged that those countries pay reparations for the climate damage inflicted on the Global South. A vital step is for the United States and China, the world’s largest economies, to cooperate, Bhutto Zardari urged. “If the U.S. and China can work together on climate, then it’s great. We may be able to survive as the human race on this planet,” he told Feldman, smiling.

#### A Pakistani Part of the Problem

Pakistanis and international climate experts say Pakistan’s own governance problems have amplified the losses from the flood. The country suffered disastrous monsoon floods in 2010 that submerged a fifth of the country. Still, official unpreparedness, corruption and weak enforcement of laws allowed for the current repeat disaster, Blaine and USIP Pakistan specialist Jumaina Siddiqui have noted.

“Like Westerners, Pakistani elites planned for security and progress,” Pakistani-British novelist Mohammed Hanif writes in this week’s New Yorker. “We turned agricultural lands into golf courses and gated communities, and built houses on riverbeds, and grew cash crops along waterways. We thought less about the millions who live in mud houses, who till someone else’s land to feed their kids and save a bit in hopes of sending them to school one day. Now the water has turned their houses back into mud, and washed away the grain that they stocked for the entire year, and flooded the land that still belongs to someone else.”

Still, Hanif echoes Bhutto Zardari in noting that only the world’s wealthy nations have the resources to lead the investment needed to slow global warming and repair and prevent damage from climate change. Hanif criticizes the hesitations of wealthy nations, such as the United States, to provide help at the scale they have acknowledged is needed. It can sound, he writes, like “haggling over the price of life jackets with drowning people.”

Siddiqui made a similar point in a recent essay co-authored with the Cato Institute’s Sahar Khan. “Climate resiliency will not be possible if industrialized countries do not take responsibility and make changes to combat climate change,” they wrote. Many officials and commentators from wealthier countries “put the blame on countries in the Global South for being unable to battle climate change because of corruption. While this isn’t incorrect — corruption is a huge hurdle for any kind of development — this narrative takes the onus off of countries in the Global North.”

Blaine, who has worked on climate change problems for USAID and the National Geographic Society, lamented the trading of blame that has enmired the effort to build the vigorous global response that most countries have acknowledged is required. “We need to look for other discussions to bring to the table,” she said. She noted that, while it is the wealthy, long-industrialized countries that have led the historical growth of Earth’s atmospheric greenhouse gases, their contribution to that pollution has tended to level off or even begin to drop. The foreseeable growth in emissions “is primarily from the developing world,” she said, and both richer and poorer countries share an interest in making the investments needed to help developing nations “leapfrog dirty technologies” and find cleaner ways to fulfill their right to development.