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Report – Roundtable

Role of Pakistani Diaspora

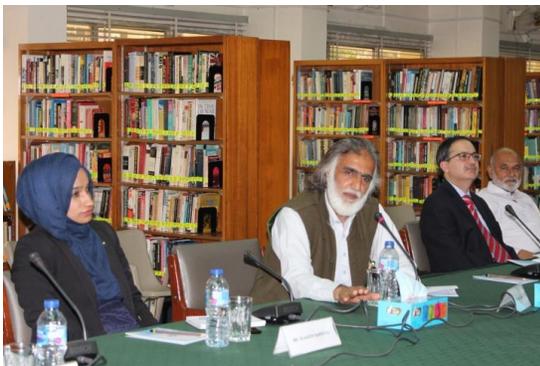
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PICTURES OF THE EVENT



Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) organized a roundtable on “*Role of Pakistani Diaspora*” on April 23, 2019. Mr. Irfan Murtaza, a prominent Pakistani community leader based in California was the guest speaker. The discussion was followed by a lively poetry session. Along with experts, a number of prominent poets based in Islamabad also participated at the roundtable including: Mr. Khalid Iqbal Yasir, Mr. Wafa Chisti, Mr. Nasir Aqeel, Mr. Naseem-e-Seher, Mr. Qayum Tahir, Mr. Majid Jahangir, Mr. Anwar Fitrat, Ms. Parveen Tahir, Ms. Farheen Chaudhry, Mr. Rahat Sarhadi, Ms. Gia Qureshi, Mr. Naveed Malik, Ms. Bushra Hazeen, and Ms. Kuaser Samreen.

Welcoming the guest, the Director General ISSI Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry said that migration has always been part of human history. Historically, people used to migrate due to economic reasons, seeking education and knowledge, or to escape torture, brutality or persecution. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) himself also migrated from Makah to Medina. In today’s world, the Diaspora serves as a bridge between their native and adopted country. Majority of Pakistani Diaspora has migrated to other countries in their search for better economic opportunities. Highlighting the importance of Diaspora, Ambassador Chaudhry underlined three major roles that a Diaspora plays or can play which include: remittances; investment; and building a soft image of their native country. He said that Diasporas can be divided into different groups. The first such group is the low income group which sends maximum remittances. This group mostly faces economic and legal problems in host countries. Second such group comprises doctors and engineers. Though this group is well-off, but does not invest in Pakistan. However, this group is very active in philanthropic activities. The third group comprises of students. This group is the most active group in expressing and projecting their love for the country, as well as building Pakistan’s softer image.

Mr. Irfan Murtaza said that some like to create distances, but others act as bridges among people. People might migrate to other countries, but the love for their native country never diminishes. He emphasized on the activities of Pakistani Diaspora in the US where Urdu literary and poetry events are regularly held. He also informed the audience about a webpage on social media by the name of "Re paint Pakistan". This page is used by the community to promote the soft image of Pakistan. In order to promote Pakistan's tourism industry, personal photographs of beautiful

places in Pakistan are also shared. But while the beauty of Pakistan is highly appreciated by people in America, but at the same time, they also express concern regarding the security situation in Pakistan. He said that there is a need for media to play a more positive role. The negative portrayal of Pakistan by the media has even made the Pakistani Diaspora hesitant from investing their money in Pakistan.

Mr. Irfan Murtaza also said that Pakistani Diaspora should be given the right to vote. The Director General ISSI pointed out that some work in this regard is being done, but there are serious problems as most of the expatriates are now dual nationals.

The identity crises faced by second and third generation of Pakistani expatriates also came under discussion. Mr. Irfan Murtaza said that the third generation Pakistanis consider themselves as Americans, and more youngsters are participating in politics, which is good. This way, Pakistan's voice will also be heard in America.

The issue of Pakistani Diaspora getting their children married in Pakistan was also discussed at length. Such marriages are doomed to failure due to cultural differences. It was pointed out that cultural shocks make it difficult for people to adjust in new environments. Communication gap that results from language barrier also plays a role in such failures. Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry opined that perhaps government of Pakistan should introduce legislation against forced marriages.

A guest also raised the issue of Pakistan Chair in various universities of the world. There is a lack of interest, as nominations are not being made by the government for these chairs. This issue need immediate attention of the government.

The roundtable discussion was followed by a poetry session where a number of poets presented their recent work. Concluding the session, Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry thanked Mr. Irfan Murtaza, other participants and poets for sharing their thoughts and poetry.