



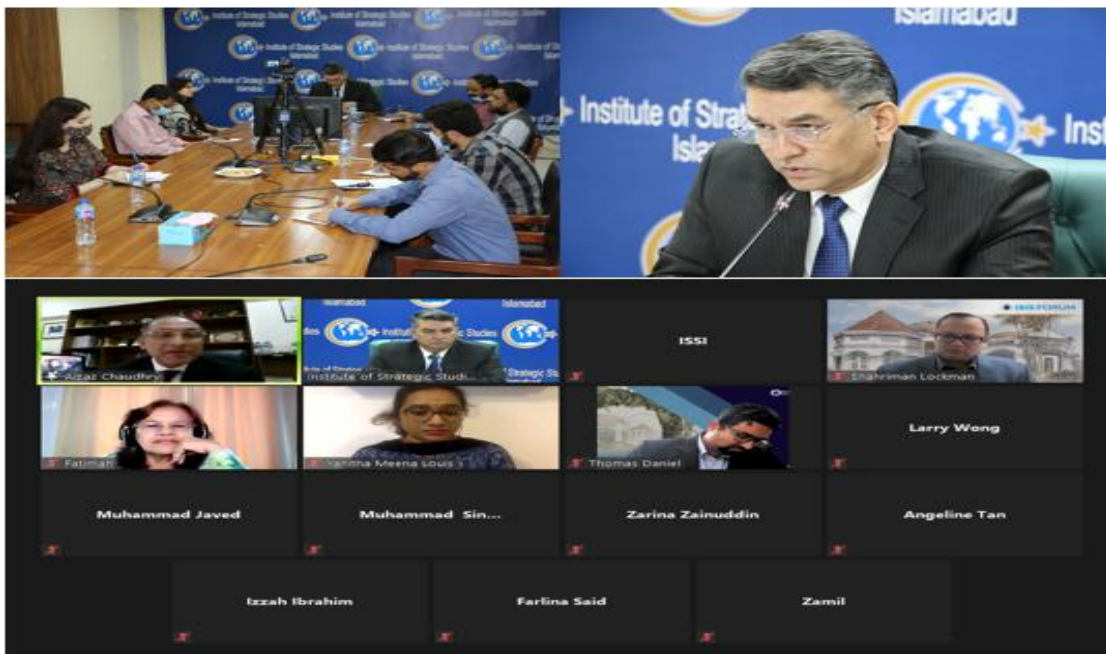
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*Report – Bilateral Dialogue*

# “Food Security Cooperation under the OIC framework”

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The China-Pakistan Study Centre (CPSC) at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) held its first institutional level virtual dialogue with the Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) based in Malaysia on 28 July, 2021. The theme of the dialogue was Food Security Cooperation under the Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC) framework. The dialogue was held with the aim to focus on the development of agriculture sector, underscoring food security, enhance growth and prosperity, and to explore the strategies for the integration of long-term strategic plans for self-reliance and cooperation in all aspects of food security across the Muslim world.

Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry, Director General ISSI, in his welcome remarks said that traditionally the OIC focused more on political issues but recently there has been much talk on non-traditional issues, and food security is one of such topics which is a win-win subject for discussion and dialogue. To ensure food security, Ambassador Chaudhry stated that we need to increase the crop yield and strengthen supply chains. For that, we need to invest more in R&D in the context of food sufficiency, crop production, climate change etc. He underlined cooperation among OIC members is one of the many strategic steps to ensure food security and advance economic development.

Mr. Shahrman Lockman, Director of Chief Executive's Office ISIS, speaking on behalf of Mr. Herizal Hazari, Chief Executive, said that COVID-19 pandemic has been the worst nightmare for food security in several conflict ridden OIC countries. He added that last year when the pandemic was at its peak, we saw an abrupt crunch in the global food supply chain which led to food shortages and increase in food prices. This synergy intensified political instability in the Muslim world especially in the conflict-ridden regions. However, the OIC remained unsuccessful in addressing these issues. Ergo, there is a need of cooperation among the OIC members to ensure supply chain stability in the Muslim world.

During his opening remarks, Dr. Talat Shabbir said that Agriculture and Food Security is an important part of OIC 2025 Plan of Action formulated in 2016-17. Under this the member states agreed to share various activities to achieve the goal of increased agricultural productivity and profitability of farming systems to achieve sustainable food and nutrition security among the OIC members. For this, Islamic Organization for Food Security (IOFS) has developed a 5-year

Plan of Action to implement the OIC 2025 Plan of Action. He further added that sustainable food security is at the core of economic development of any country. Today's dialogue has shown a platform that gives us an opportunity to exchange views on enhancing bilateral and multilateral cooperation between the two countries.

The working session consisted of four experts on the subject who made presentations and exchanged views on the theme. The eminent speakers from both sides included: Ms. Ume Farwa, Research Associate at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI); Ms. Yanitha Meena Louis, Researcher-Foreign Policy and Security Studies in the Institute of Strategic and International Studies, Malaysia; Dr. Mukhtar Ahmad, Assistant Professor Arid Agriculture University Rawalpindi; and Professor Datin Paduka Fatimah Mohamed Arshad, Head Agriculture and Food Security Cluster in Academy of Professors of Malaysia (APM); Senior Fellow in the Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs (IDEAS); Research Fellow in Laboratory of Agricultural and Food Policy Studies in the University Putra Malaysia.

Ms. Ume Farwa highlighted the significance of agricultural potential of the OIC members' states and lauded its importance in their socio-economic development. She said that OIC nations are blessed with huge water reservoirs, arable land, human resources, and best alluvial soil. Recent statistics show that with an arable land area of 1.38 billion hectares, the OIC countries accounted for more than one-fourth of the world's agricultural land area. The agriculture sector accounted for more than 20% of employment in 36 OIC member countries. In fact, this ratio even exceeds 50% in 12 OIC members located in Sub-Saharan Africa. Half of the OIC member countries were also ranked among the top 20 producers of the major agricultural commodities throughout the world. However, despite this considerable progress and huge potency, agricultural productivity in OIC member countries remained insufficient to feed the growing population. Still many OIC member countries rely heavily on food imports to meet their local demand.

She identified some common threats to food security present in many OIC member states such as internal conflicts, locust outbreak, population displacement, climate change and COVID-19 outbreak. At the end she gave some recommendations on how OIC can help in mitigating this crisis. She said the OIC has already developed a robust institutional mechanism for promotion of agriculture and food security. The gulf between "what can be achieved" and "what is achieved"

is very wide. The major reason is the absence of a “common free trade area.” Without establishing a collaborative commerce and trade network of agro-commodities, food security cannot be achieved in OIC countries. She ended her remarks by adding that the OIC needs to treat its members preferentially: on the basis of its development indicators, national performance in the agriculture sector, and its agro-ecological zones.

Ms. Yanitha Meena Louis deliberated on OIC’s initiative of empowering East and South Asian countries (ESA) in the realm of food security. She said that the true potential of member states from East and South Asia (OIC-ESA) is relatively untapped. OIC-MENA is said to have clout and represents the ideational core of not only the OIC but OIC-ESA, too, has several systems, capacities, and platforms and could contribute significantly and have a bigger voice in the organization. She stated that some OIC-ESA member states can even leverage existing memberships in two other multilateral mechanisms with overlapping goals. This will encourage consistent dialogue and a check-and-balance system to ensure shared objectives are achieved. This strategy is similar to how the member states of the OIC-MENA cooperate proactively through the Gulf Cooperation Council and Arab League to advance goals in line with the OIC. This could be the reason behind the OIC-MENA’s strength, influence and hold on the status quo.

She also emphasized on the need to have greater political will, cooperation and synergy among members’ states of OIC for achieving food security for all. The OIC could benefit from the collective effort of all member states as they work towards pandemic recovery. Hence, it would be counter-productive if only a handful of historically influential members drive major agendas.

Dr. Mukhtar Ahmad, in his brief presentation highlighted the prevailing hunger scenario in the Muslim world and then made the case for swift action to provide food and humanitarian relief to the most at-risk regions. At the same time, he shared that a profound change of the global food and agricultural system is needed if we are to nourish the more than 690 million people who are hungry today. He said that the world is not on track to achieve Zero Hunger by 2030. If recent trends continue the number of people affected by hunger would surpass 840 million by 2030. He further added, COVID-19 pandemic could now double that number, putting an additional 130 million people at risk of suffering acute hunger.

He put forward some strategies which could be useful to adapt following climate change. Firstly, identification of vulnerabilities of present agricultural systems that are resilient and sustainable to climate change (i.e. their resilience to extremes of heat, cold, frost, water shortage, pest damage and other factors). Secondly, test the robustness of new farming strategies as they are developed to meet changes in climate, technology, prices, costs and other factors. Thirdly, genetic variability for crops is widely related to climate change. Use this genetic material for evaluation development of new varieties. The climate change studies further demanded the value of networks of experimenting stations that can share genetic material and the results. He concluded by adding how interactive communication brings research results to farmers.

Professor Fatimah Mohammed Arshad focused on the fragility of food security in OIC and said that today half of the OIC population suffers from food insecurity as compared to the quarter population in the rest of the world. She highlighted that some of the world's hungriest nations are OIC members such as: Yemen, Uganda, Afghanistan, Syria, Sudan, Nigeria and South Sudan. She identified some factors contributing to the emergence of food insecurity among the OIC member states that includes: spread of COVID-19, supply and demand imbalance, inventory affecting prices, climate and natural calamities, and technical factors. Besides, every country thinks for itself, thus, no 'one' measure fits everyone, and this self-centric approach contributes to nothing collateral.

She further added that structural setbacks of food security under OIC during pandemic has disproportionately affected the poor because their main asset is physical labour which is restricted in the lockdown. Average share of income is spent on food which results in the disruption of food value chain and they have minimally restricted access to health services. She proposed some recommendations for a sustainable food system and said that there is a need for a new food security system based on a virtuous cycle to improve food production and performance of the food system. The OIC needs to address its institutional challenges and promote coordination at all levels to prioritize its short term and long-term goals. It needs to encourage cooperation, intra-trade trends, education, training and technical cooperation programs among the OIC members.

Dr. Talat Shabbir delivered a vote of thanks and concluded the dialogue with both sides committing to taking forward bilateral engagement and cooperation between the two institutes.



