

AT UNGA 2022, CLIMATE CRISIS AND FLOODS IN PAKISTAN TOOK THE CENTRE STAGE

By
Mir Sher Baz Khetran

*Research Fellow
Centre for Strategic Perspectives (CSP), ISSI*

Edited by
Dr Neelum Nigar

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*(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do
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The 77th United Nations General Assembly (UNGA 2022) was held in New York on September 13-27. Major themes of the summit were increasing energy prices, food insecurity and the crisis in Pakistan due to climate change. Climate action was at the forefront of UNGA after a year when climate-related impacts continued to make headlines. This year has brought record-high temperatures and a steadily increasing number of severe droughts.¹

Moreover, the UNGA on October 7th 2022, unanimously adopted a resolution urging donor nations and institutions to provide full support to rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts in Pakistan. The resolution, co-sponsored by 159 countries, urges the international community, in particular donor countries, international financial institutions and relevant international organisations, as well as the private sector and civil society, to extend full support and assistance to Pakistan in its efforts to mitigate the adverse impacts of the floods and to meet the medium- and long-term rehabilitation and reconstruction needs.²

¹ Eric Koon, 'UN General Assembly 77 (UNGA 2022) Convened After Pakistan Flooding,' *ENERGY Tracker Asia*, September 30, 2022

<https://energytracker.asia/un-general-assembly-77-unga-2022-convenes-after-pakistan-flooding/>

² Anwar Iqbal, "UNGA agrees to support Pakistan's reconstruction," *Dawn*, October 8, 2022, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1714048>

Key Focuses of World Leaders

Antonio Guterres, UN Secretary General

- Pakistan should suspend international debt repayments and restructure loans with creditors after recent floods added to the country's financial crisis. Pakistan had earlier estimated the damage at \$30 billion, and both the government and UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres have blamed the flooding on climate change.³
- He urged lenders to consider debt reduction to help those nations that were facing a possible economic collapse.
- Creditors should consider debt reduction mechanisms such as debt-climate adaptation swaps, he said again at the UNGA. These measures can save lives and livelihoods in Pakistan, which is drowning not only in flood water, but in debt.

Joe Biden, President of the US

- Unveiled \$2.9bn global fund, and called for negotiating debts of vulnerable nations.
- The US president also called for action to address the climate change crisis and efforts to support life-saving humanitarian and food security assistance across the globe for this year.⁴
- Suggested for transparently negotiating debts of vulnerable nations to forestall broader economic and political crises around the world.
- He called on major global creditors including the non-Paris Club countries to transparently negotiate debt forgiveness for lower income countries.

Emmanuel Macron, President of France

- Financial solidarity must be strengthened to provide financing for the poorest countries for their energy needs.

³ 'Pakistan floods caused nearly \$30 bn economic loss: UN Chief Guterres,' *Business Standard*, September 09, 22

https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/pakistan-floods-caused-nearly-30-bn-economic-loss-un-chief-guterres-122090901318_1.html

⁴ Anwer Iqbal, 'Biden urges world to help 'underwater' Pakistan, September 22, 2022

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1711378/biden-urges-world-to-help-underwater-pakistan>

- “We must learn from the global pandemic.” The international community must act in solidarity to meet the world’s shared challenges and be respectful of each other.
- Germany has been making quick progress in these areas, with its own technical innovations.
- “We want to be climate-neutral by 2045, and we want to contribute to enabling all countries around the world to take this route.

Pakistan’s Perspective

Pakistan is ranked among the most climate-vulnerable countries in the world, according to the Global Climate Risk Index, which tracks the devastating human and economic toll of extreme weather events. The country is estimated to have lost nearly 10,000 lives to climate-related disasters and suffered about \$4 billion in losses between 1998 and 2018. Already, there are signs that the climate-related devastation will worsen in the coming years. The rains this year have been 87 percent heavier than the average downpour. Pakistan should prepare for more flooding and damage to infrastructure as its glaciers continue to melt at an accelerated pace, causing flash floods.

Mr. Shehbaz Sharif, Prime Minister, Pakistan highlighted Pakistan's plight due to the flooding crisis caused by global climate change, and urged global leaders to come together and "act now" before it's too late.⁵ He shared his concerns about the aftermath of the floods with the world leaders he met on the second day of his four-day visit to New York. This included managing director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Kristalina Georgieva. Their talks focused on the Fund’s continued support for Pakistan’s efforts to rebuild its economy.

Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto attended the Closed-Door Leaders’ Roundtable on CoP-27 on the sidelines of UNGA in New York. The Foreign Minister underscored that Climate Change was an existential threat for all nations and peoples. Its implications were becoming more pronounced, frequent and severe, such as the ones manifested in the recent catastrophic floods in Pakistan. ⁶He emphasised that even with a minimal contribution to the global greenhouse gas emissions, Pakistan was facing the brunt of natural calamities in the form of heat waves, glacial outbursts, droughts, torrential rains and unprecedented monsoons, causing both human and economic losses. The

⁵ Naveed Siddiqui, In UNGA address, PM Shehbaz highlights Pakistan's plight and urges global leaders to 'act now' on climate change, *Dawn*, September 23, 2020
<https://www.dawn.com/news/1711591>

⁶ ‘Foreign Minister participates in the Closed-Door Leaders’ Roundtable on CoP-27 on the sidelines of UNGA’ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan, 21 September 2022
<https://mofa.gov.pk/foreign-minister-participates-in-the-closed-door-leaders-roundtable-on-cop-27-on-the-sidelines-of-unga/>

Foreign Minister highlighted the devastation caused by the recent climate-induced floods in Pakistan, including loss of lives and livelihoods as well as massive damage to critical infrastructure. He noted that the loss to the economy was expected to run over 30 billion dollars.

The Foreign Minister stressed the need for collective and urgent action to build back better, in a greener and climate resilient manner. He proposed a number of actions for addressing the issue of climate change at the global level including in the context of the forthcoming CoP-27. The Foreign Minister called for a “Green Marshal Plan” to assist and support the most climate-vulnerable countries.

Conclusion

Climate Change has been identified as a threat multiplier since the 2015 Paris Agreement and currently comes under the 13th Sustainable Development Goal. The adverse impact of climate change on unprecedented precipitation patterns has resulted in severe floods in Pakistan. Sindh and Balochistan are one of the worst affected provinces of Pakistan. There is a need to move from mitigation to adaptation as this matter has now transformed into an alarming existential threat. In the recent UN session, Pakistan successfully highlighted the devastation caused by climate change to which Pakistan’s contribution is minimally around 0.9 percent. Pakistan’s financial needs still remain high, given the country’s vulnerability to climate change, Pakistan's demand for climate justice from the industrialised countries for rehabilitation of flood affectees is justified.