

# THE EARTHQUAKE A TRAUMA OR TURNING POINT

---

**SPEECH ON THE FLOOR OF THE SENATE & ASLO  
TRANSLATED FROM ISHARAT**

**Manshurat Mansoorah, Lahore**

**November 2005**

**PROF. KHURSHID AHMAD**



## THE EARTHQUAKE A TRAUMA OR TURNING POINT

Prof. khurshid Ahmad

In the early morning hours, at 8.52 a.m., on 8 October 2005, a vast area in Pakistan's North, extending from the Frontier Province to Azad Kashmir witnessed a deadly earthquake. Within seconds it pushed about a hundred thousand lives into the vale of death. Over 150,000 men, women and children, young and old received grievous injuries, five million people were rendered homeless and dozens of towns and hundreds of villages throbbing with life were reduced to rubbles. The magnitude of this massive destruction was such that its tremors were felt at once around the globe and tears rolled down billions of cheeks not only within Pakistan and the Muslim Ummah, but throughout the world.

How painful it is, however, that the Senate of Pakistan could get an opportunity only after more than a month to discuss the great tragedy and its consequences. Though late, the debate, nevertheless, provides an important opportunity to all of us to review the whole situation and set some guidelines to appropriately meet this challenge.

All such great calamities have two dimensions: one the physical and the other the moral. They have a spiritual and civilizational message to convey. The basic difference: between an Islamic and a non-Islamic approach in such emergencies is that while a non-Islamic approach lays full stress only on the physical and temporal aspects, like the rescue, relief and rehabilitation, the Islamic approach also takes in its stride the ultimate objective and the spiritual dimension of all our actions, i.e. the quest for Allah's Pleasure. As Muslims, we need to draw sustenance from His Guidance and try to reform our situation in its light and take measures to establish the writ of justice and fairplay so that our society may become an abode of goodness and virtue and merit the Blessings from Allah, pouring down from heavens and gushing forth from the earth.

The Qur'an integrates the physical and moral approaches and informs- human beings to rise above the physical to apprehend the moral dimension. Alhamdu Lillah, the people of Pakistan have responded to this challenge with courage and full faith in Allah Subhahu wa Ta'ala. The Western media was wonder-struck to-see how even young boys of 9 or 10 said that the Divine Will (Allah ki Raza) is supreme and we accept it. This is a great source of strength and an effective shock absorber. However, the leadership and those in authority at every level of national life must do some honest soul- searching to realize how far we have departed from our Islamic precepts! Every one of us must commit to bring about the changes in their personal and collective behaviour that could please Allah Subhahu wa Ta 'ala and be in conformity with the objectives for which must commit to bring about the changes in their personal and collective behaviour that could please Allah Subhahu *wa Ta 'ala* and be in conformity with the objectives for which Pakistan was established. Moral regeneration and establishment of justice and fair-play in society is the real recipe for physical and socio-economic security.

Death is an undeniable reality that we witness day in and day out, often in the form of the departure of our near and dear ones and sometimes in the shape of major incidents and calamities that shake all and sundry without distinction. The accounts narrated by the Book of God of the nations destroyed in the past in different manners are not just tales of the peoples who met with their horrible fate. These are also a warning till eternity for the world, specially the Believers and those who are ready to take lesson from such eye-opening catastrophes of human history. In fact, the real objective behind these narratives is to reawaken the humans from their deep slumber and let them draw lessons from the scenarios of life and death, whether of the past, or those emerging around us from time to time and to which we are all a witness. Let us ponder a while over these Ayahs from Surah Al-A'raf:

"Do the people of the towns feel secure against the coming of our wrath by night while they are asleep?

Or, do they feel secure against its coming in broad daylight while they are at play?

Do they feel secure against the Plan of God? But none can feel secure against the Plan of God except those (doomed) to ruin!

Has it not, then, become plain to those who have inherited the earth in succession" to its (previous) possessors, that had we so Willed, We could have punished them for their sins..." **(S. VII: Al-A'raf, 97-100).**

At the time when the whole nation is severely traumatized by the grievous impact of the devastating quake and its aftermath, what is essentially required, side by side with the much-needed relief and rehabilitation work, is a return to Allah Subhahu wa Ta 'ala, the individual and collective self-introspection and reckoning, repentance and seeking the Lord's Pardon and reaffirmation of our allegiance to Him. It also demands of us to refresh and reaffirm our resolve to fulfill the objectives for the achievement of which the Islamic Republic of Pakistan was established and for which we had pledged to our Lord that we would always hold aloft the banner of our Faith and follow the path of His Apostle (PBUH).

The instantaneous response that the great tragedy of 10/8 evoked has in itself' some significant points to ponder. There were on the one side the frightened people who called the Lord in utter helplessness and humility and sought His Pardon. I am myself a witness to the scene when every big and small faced Qibla with trembling and folded hands praying for his safety as the earth shook and the high-rise buildings moved like pendulum. In the aftermath of the earthquake, the common man and specially our youth from the universities, colleges, schools and Deeni Madaris, rushed at once, individually and collectively, to help their quake-stricken brothers and sisters. From Khyber to Karachi, there was an upsurge of reawakening and the rich and the poor, the young and the old, all got restless to do something for their afflicted brothers and sisters. Donations started pouring in; the people began clearing the debris with their bare hands; and there was a beeline to rescue those

under the fallen structures, donate blood for the injured and make arrangements for burying the dead. It was an inspiring spectacle of a heroic people. The whole nation rose like one body, reawakened with a new sense of purpose to boldly meet the challenge posed by the most horrific earthquake of Pakistan's history. That was a ray of hope in a stifling darkness and the sign of a new dawn!

Side by side with this soul-stirring response, there were those who held the rein of power in the land and were supposed to be the first to comprehend the enormity of this national calamity. It was rightly expected of them to rise up immediately without losing any time to properly tackle the situation and take the steps urgently needed for relief and rescue. Unfortunately, however, they lost full three days in a state of indecision and apathy. The Federal Minister for Information and his media managers tried to depict things as normal and going on well 'as planned'. One of our Corps Commanders snubbed the hapless people not to raise 'unnecessary' hue and cry, as he claimed that the number of those who lost their lives was very small and hence 'insignificant'. The Prime Minister was similarly jittery against what he described as 'the media's negative attitude'. Even in; the Federal Capital just one crane was available initially to remove the debris of the fallen blocks of the 'Margala Towers'. Within 24 hours of the tragedy, the rapid emergency relief teams arrived from UK, Italy and Japan, but it took three days for our celebrated Frontier Works Organization to move and for the relief contingent from Gujranwala and Karachi to reach Islamabad. Similarly, the rescue team from Spain landed at Islamabad Airport within 24 hours, but they had to stay at the Airport for 48 hours waiting for the *concerned* authorities' signal for further move.

It was a dismal sight to see the criminal apathy, ineptitude and inaction of our authorities for 'Crisis Management'. It was difficult to believe that we did not have even the basic tools and machines ordinarily available to nations, even poorer than us, to meet such emergencies, like cranes, RCC cutters and the instruments for detecting the survivors' tinder the debris of fallen buildings. Even our Police and the Armed Forces were not trained and properly equipped to handle such natural disasters. The Fire Brigade is expected everywhere in the world to have the necessary trained manpower and tools for emergency situations. Unfortunately, we had none! The Civil Defence Act of 1952 and the West Pakistan's National Calamities (Prevention and Relief) Act of 1958 remain part of our statute book. A Disaster Management Cell was established in the Prime Minister's Secretariat in the wake of 1974 earthquake in parts of Northern Areas. In the year 2000, a 'National Crisis Management Cell' was set up in the Federal Ministry of Interior, headed by a Retired Brigadier. There is then the project of the proposed National Disaster Management Agency, which has been lying in the Govt files since last five years, and for which a sumptuous budget grant of Rs. 155,000,000/- was allocated by the UNDP long time back. Unfortunately, however, when the actual time of trial came we were caught napping and had to depend on our bare hands, or beg for foreign assistance, to conduct even a normal rescue operation.

Those who responded almost instantaneously to help their grief-stricken brothers and sisters undoubtedly represent the glorious side of our society. Imbued with a sense of service above self,

our common man has been in the forefront of the relief and rescue marathon. They rose like one body with an undaunted spirit to help those in need and soon relief caravans started moving from the length and breadth of the country, led by God-fearing men and women, to share with their afflicted brothers and sisters whatever they could by way of clothing, food, tidbits for the children, medicines, tents and hospitals. Side by side with these angels of mercy stood those busy in photo sessions and media shows. The tragedy had a lesson for all of us. The good has been made distinct from the bad and it is now upto the society how best can it encourage and organize the good into a dominant force and check and reform the bad to help it play a more positive role in the society's moral and physical growth. The counterfeit and the real, the false and the true stand fully exposed today. The glaring contradictions of our civil society have been taken note of not only by our own people but by the outside world as well. The foreign media reports have exposed quite a few of our darker sides. The need of the hour, therefore, is that we should stand as a rock behind the forces of good to repulse forever the agents of evil in our society. If we succeed in doing that, the great calamity that has befallen our nation would eventually prove to be a precursor of goodness and glory.

The services rendered individually and collectively by private parties and organizations must also be acknowledged and lauded. Special thanks are due to the Islamic organizations for what they have done selflessly and under extremely trying conditions to provide relief and rescue to the affected people. They were there much before those in civvies or uniform could show up their presence. These religious organizations have set a glorious example of dedication and selfless service and proved once again that the segment the society can look up for its uplift and rejuvenation is that of the Islamic forces, endowed with a resolve to serve.

It is important that the nation has faced this calamity with faith and fortitude and the best in the society has come out to share the agony and sufferings of their fellow countrymen. All political differences were set aside and the nation responded as one solid fraternity. It has also become very clear that our best friends are our brothers in the Islamic Ummah. The support from the peoples and Governments of the Muslim world has been overwhelming. According to one estimate, some 76% of the external aid has come from the Muslim Ummah. While we thank all countries and peoples, who have extended support in our hour of need, the people of Pakistan and their elected leadership are of the view that the Western world, for which Pakistan has taken many unnecessary risks, has not come upto their expectations. It is not difficult to note the discriminatory attitude of our friends from the West, especially when we look to the manner and extent to which they extended help in case of calamities like Katrina and Tsunami. It is time that we review our Foreign Policy and recast it in a manner that is in keeping with the ground realities and Pakistan's vital interests.

## Action Plan in a Nutshell

The time has come for us to reflect and ponder over our failures and shortcomings, as also our accomplishments. It must be an objective and critical- assessment to help us evolve our strategy for the future and promote on the one hand our good aspects as a nation and on the other avoid repetition of our failures. The challenges that we may face for the future are grave. It is only through national consensus, effective Parliamentary oversight, total transparency and complete accountability that -we can acquit of our responsibilities. I would like to suggest the steps that are needed to be taken in ail earnestness to streamline our relief and rehabilitation efforts over a longer period of time and ensure a better future for the affected people in particular and the nation as: whole:

1. There must be an all-powerful Committee of the Parliament, with representation , from all the major parties represented in the National Assembly and Senate, to immediately review the whole programme and recast it to cater for the relief; affairs in the changed situation. This Committee should be the final authority and should be responsible for financial control as well as administrative policy decisions.
2. The Earthquake Authority should not be a temporary institution and it should be re-structured through an act of the Parliament, laying down its functions, powers, and system for accountability. Its reports must go to the Parliament every three months. The arbitrary powers given in the present arrangements should be done: away with. There should also be the involvement of all the Provinces in this Authority.
3. There is an urgent need to establish a proper and well-equipped Crisis Management Authority to face such calamities in the future. We may retrieve some of its blueprint from the projects lying dumped in our files. Meanwhile, Turkey and Iran have managed to develop highly efficient and technologically upto date infrastructures during the last few years. Development of such facilities should be our priority.
4. It is important that civil defence training programme and fire brigade facilities should be upgraded to meet such emergencies. Revamping of the curricula of schools and colleges should also be reactivated to equip our students with capabilities to meet such challenges. It is unfortunate that the Scouts Movement and National Cadet Corp facilities that were available even during British Raj find no place in our educational system. We are more interested in "performing arts" and less in preparing the nation to face the hard realities of life. A total mind change is needed. Reform to introduce First Aid, disaster management and such other subjects should also be given priority. This is more important than the much publicized Volunteer Corp, which is bound to end in fiasco. We already had many a Mujahid and Janbaz Force and it is time we should not repeat old mistakes.

5. The restructuring phase should start as early as possible and in such a manner that the whole process becomes part of the Civil Government with close cooperation between the Centre and the Provinces. All operational arrangements must be through the Provinces and the Local Governments should also play a key role. Without this devolution, the whole thing could become counter-productive. The earthquake should not be used to impose a unitary presidential system on the country with Army as its operational Wing. It is important that the Army's role should -be restricted to what is bare essential. It is the civil administration which should take over the whole process of reconstruction and rehabilitation.' This is also in 'the best interest of the Army because its reputation would suffer due to its involvement in such activities, a process that has unfortunately begun. Its immediate role in relief and recovery was necessary, but to use it for a paradigm change from civil system to a kind of Marshal Arrangements would be disastrous both for the country and the Armed Forces. It is a very sensitive and urgent issue and should be addressed without delay.
6. It is important to realize that the continuity of 'Tent Cities' and perpetuation of refugee camps would be a national disaster. Proper planning should be made for the re-development of the devastated regions, with active participation of the affected persons and their families, and the involvement of local and provincial governments in this process. Sooner this is done the better. Otherwise it is going to have serious economic social, moral and political consequences. Governments should concentrate on infrastructure development and facilitate people to build their houses and find out new avenues for economic support to them. Any other option would create more problems.
7. The question of effective medical aid to and support system for the affected, particularly those who have lost their limbs, is also important. So is the question of permanent long-term arrangements for widows, orphans and the incapacitated. This calls for a comprehensive medical aid master plan for the victims of the earthquake.
8. A three-phase Emergency Relief & Rehabilitation Plan is needed to be worked out forthwith as follows:
  - a) The first phase of immediate relief may be spread over 3-4 months. During this period the tasks to be carried out on an emergency basis should include well-planned and uninterrupted supply of the daily needs, water, power, Medicare, psycho-therapy, provision of shelter, and opening up of roads and tracks.

- b)** The reconstruction phase follows next. For this, immediate schemes will have to be prepared and necessary funds arranged to reconstruct towns and settlements on properly selected sites after necessary surveys and scientific analysis of the essential data. In an integrated manner the project should cover all the basic facilities, like residence, education, health, employment, transport and conveyance, water and power.
- c)** In the third phase, the loose ends would have to be tied up and snags, if any, removed in order to ensure normal living conditions to the rehabilitated people and proper functioning of the institutions set up at "their townships and settlements. It would have to be ensured that the orphans are getting adequate care and their academic and maintenance needs are being fulfilled in a systematic and sustained manner; the widows have been rehabilitated economically and jobs provided to them in self-, sustaining social welfare schemes, handicrafts centers^ and vocational training camps; and proper employments have been arranged to the youth and the able-bodied, for which a skill development programme would have to be devised and launched on an urgent basis in the affected areas.
- 9.** Corruption and mismanagement is unfortunately the bleeding wound of our national existence. People have lost their trust in the government and its institutions. Seventy percent of the local government and fifty percent of the civilian, administration are known to suffer from this malady. The Military, once known for its financial integrity, is now also badly affected by the disease, which appears - incurable under the present dispensation. This is the biggest challenge facing the task of reconstruction and rehabilitation. If not properly and timely checked with a national will and a suitable system of accountability, all efforts, howsoever well-meaning and well-planned, are bound to be a dismal failure.
- 10.** Finally, the question of the mobilization of financial resources is also very important. The support that has come from abroad is much less than what is needed. It is only through self-reliance and mobilization of support from within, the Pakistan Diasporas and from the Muslim Ummah and the recognized international agencies and friendly countries that we must try to mobilize on a war footing.

To conclude, I would like once again to invite the attention of all those concerned to the dire need for proper training in ethics and higher values of life. It is time we know the worth of honesty, integrity, an effective system of accountability and immaculate transparency. That is possible only



when the material resources are used within the limits set by moral norms, and honesty becomes the basic prerequisite of our trained manpower along with academic qualifications and physical fitness. The Government, the civil society and the people should all be imbued with a sense of moral responsibility and accountability of the Day of Reckoning.

In order to achieve the desired goal, the national leadership would have to bring about a change in its perceptions and approach. The rule of the law would have to be translated from paper into practice; the dream of good governance would have to be turned into reality; every institution would have to be made fully capable of independently managing its own affairs within its well-defined spheres; and the folly of centralizing everything in one person or a single authority would have to be discarded once for all. The last but not the least, a system of public accountability would have to be so devised, side by side with the legal accountability, that no person in authority should feel unaccountable or above the law.

If the calamity of the October serves to change our outlook, cleanse us from our past misdeeds and put us on the right track for our onward march, it would then prove to be a turning point and a blessing in disguise for the entire nation. That is the change which alone can transform our present and ensure us a bright future in this world and in the Hereafter.

---