

7th Karachi International Water Conference

Water, People, Health – Coping with Floods

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Opening remarks

By

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Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Assalamualaikum and warm greetings to all of you.

I welcome all respected guests to the 7th Karachi International Water Conference, which is a signature initiative of the Hisaar Foundation since 2013.

My association with the Hisaar Foundation began way back in the year 2012 when Ms. Simi Kamal and her colleagues invited me to join their Board of Governors.

I found this group of people deeply invested in issues like our water scarcity, food insecurity, and the environmental challenges confronting our country. This is at a time when public awareness on these matters was nominal, and the adverse impact of these problems on our everyday lives was also minimal. So, we did not get to hear much about these existential threats in our public discourse.

The first Karachi International Water Conference, held in 2013, was an important milestone for all of us, as it marked the fruition of extensive efforts by the Hisaar Foundation to initiate a strategic dialogue on water and to address this issue at scale.

I am happy to see that what was born from Simi Kamal's dynamic advocacy has now evolved into a transformative platform for water discourse, representing collaboration, thought leadership, and innovation.

It's okay. The Panjwani Hisaar Water Institute at the NED University of Engineering and Technology is a three-way collaboration between these three constituent bodies. Panjwani Foundation has established several institutions of higher learning in Pakistan, as we strongly

believe that the most powerful and sustainable interventions are those built on foundations of knowledge, research, and informed decision-making.

Following up on this logic, I and my friends at Hisaar approached the NED University with the idea of establishing a center of excellence for water studies and water solutions. I've had the privilege of serving on the Senate and Syndicate of the NED University for over 20 years now.

Professor Dr. Sarosh Lodhi Sahab, the then Vice-Chancellor, warmly and generously supported this idea, and the NED University, being a premier academic organization of Pakistan and an active promoter of innovation and collaboration, became the home of this project.

Ladies and gentlemen, Pakistan is one of the most climate-vulnerable countries in the world. Glacial melt in the north, erratic monsoons, and prolonged droughts have disrupted our traditional water cycles and reshaped our hydrology. As we grapple with mounting environmental challenges such as unprecedented floods, intense heatwaves, degraded and contaminated rivers, a demographic explosion, and serious governance gaps, our water crisis has evolved into a full-blown emergency.

After the devastating floods of 2022, the international community made impressive pledges of aid and solidarity, but three years down the line, much of the promised international support has remained unfulfilled. The stakes are high. Food security, public health, economic stability, and regional peace all hang in the balance.

It is high time we learned to take charge of our own response to climate disasters. Our recovery lies in institutional reform, strong national resolve, and local innovation. What we need is a bold action plan, starting with investing in water-efficient irrigation technologies, reassessing our agricultural priorities and focusing on essential demands, building and maintaining water reservoirs, strengthening our water governance, and educating communities on water conservation.

In this distressing scenario, the Panjwani Hisaar Water Institute is a small and humble step from our side. This is where science will meet stewardship, where data will guide decisions, and where communities will find solutions.

Through our research and training programs, we will study our water issues in depth, develop qualified water practitioners, bring about attitudinal and behavioural changes in society on water consumption, engage with government and legislators for developing better water policies, support and highlight Pakistan's water concerns at all fora, and work for our water security and resilience in every possible manner.

I'm happy to tell you that we have begun to translate these ambitions into action, one small step at a time. Our pace is measured, but the direction is clear, and the journey has started.

Understanding the enormity of our water issues, we began our academic activities even before we had initiated construction work of the institute. Being placed at the NED University, we had the advantage of using their existing facilities for our programs. So, our first series of short courses on water began in 2019, and even during the dreadful Corona crisis, we continued with our academic work online.

Today, three full-fledged Master's degree programs are underway at PHWI. These are in the fields of climate change management, urban water management, and coastal and water resources engineering. I think our first batch of graduates has already graduated, right, students? Regular short courses on different aspects of water management are also on offer.

Our students are engaged in some very interesting and relevant research projects, laying down the groundwork for innovations that will shape tomorrow's water solutions. Their initiatives hold possibilities. Each inquiry and each experiment is destined to grow into tools, technologies, and ideas that will serve communities and ecosystems.

In our mission of establishing the Panjwani Hisaar Water Institute, we have faced some formidable challenges. But each challenge strengthened our resolve to build something enduring and impactful, because this Water Institute is not just a one-time donation. It is much more than that. It is our legacy and a testament that we recognized the value of every drop of water and built an institution worthy of protecting it.

Not for ourselves, not for ourselves, but for every child who deserves clean water, for every family that needs food, for every farmer who has to harvest his crops, and for every coming generation that will ask, what did you do when the rivers started running dry?

On this significant occasion, I would like to thank my esteemed colleagues at the Hisaar Foundation and the NED University of Engineering and Technology for their support, for their commitment, and for their firm trust in our shared cause. I couldn't have asked for better collaborators.

I must also acknowledge the Government of Pakistan for partnering with us in this cause and extending a generous grant to PHWI. Together, we have built something meaningful and worthy. Ladies and gentlemen, water is the rhythm of life. Without water, there is no health, no harvest, no hope, and no happiness. So, let us rise together to protect it, because when we protect water, we are protecting life, we are protecting prosperity, and we are protecting Pakistan.

Thank you very much.