

Discussion on “Syrian Refugees Crisis: Responsibilities of International Community”

MUSLIM Institute organized a Round Table Discussion (RTD) “Syrian Refugees Crisis: Responsibilities of International Community” on Tuesday October 06, 2015 at National Library of Pakistan, Islamabad. Former President, National Defence University (NDU) & Chairman Pakistan People Forum, Lt. Gen (R) Raza Muhammad Khan presided over the session. Heads and deputy heads of missions and delegations of different countries, professors of universities, researchers from different institutions, analysts, TV anchor persons and media personnel actively participated in the discussion. After the remarks by speakers, interactive session was also held and speakers discussed and answered different questions raised by the participants. Renowned TV Anchor Mr. Faisal Rehman moderated the proceedings of discussion. Brief summary of views share by speakers is given below.

Sahibzada Sultan Ahmad Ali

Chairman, MUSLIM Institute

I am profoundly thankful to all of you to join us in today’s RTD. Ongoing conflict in Syria has led to massive displacements and migrations, causing serious humanitarian crisis. Though Syria’s neighbouring countries as well as EU states are extending hospitality to Syrian refugees yet a lot more is required by international community. We have experienced refugees crisis of Afghanistan and have realization that refugees suffer a lot in different spheres of life. Leaving one’s homeland, foregoing comforts of life, leading life in camps, taking on uncertain future etc. are shared miseries of refugees. Alongside international campaign and efforts to find solution to ongoing conflict in Syria, more intensive efforts to mobilize global support to offer respectable living conditions to its refugees are warranted.

Dr. Tughral Yamin

Associate Dean, Centre for International Peace & Stability, NUST

It is a big humanitarian crisis which is largely impacting human kind. At the moment there are more than 2 million refugees in Turkey,

1.7 million in Lebanon, 625 thousand in Jordan and more than 132 thousand in Egypt. In Europe, more than 67,500 have reached Italy and 68,000 in Greece and they are heading towards Germany which has welcomed the refugees. EU has started good job and it should treat refugees on humanitarian basis. The international community, particularly UN must bring peace in Syria. Countries with capacity to absorb refugees, like US, Australia, rich Muslim countries & others should play a leading role in accepting more refugees.

Mr. Ahmad Qureshi

Renowned TV Anchor, Express News

I myself have been working with NGOs working for refugees in Pakistan coming from Afghanistan and Kashmir. To address the issue of Syrian refugees, the Syrian conflict needs to be addressed by international community. Everyone thinks as its legitimate right to secure its interests and has some reason of proxy war but what about the legitimate right of Syrian people? Most unfortunate part about Syrian refugees is the politicization of the issue. Instead of discussing about solving the crisis, the debate escalated about who is doing little or more. There are double standards in politics and politics is being played even on Aylan Kurdi's dead body.

Mr. Kai Muller Berner

First Secretary Economic and Political, Embassy of Germany, Islamabad

We have to treat people in human manner and thus cannot refuse the protection request and Germany will remain committed to this cause. Many people in Germany are working voluntarily to help refugees. No single country in EU can accommodate all or most of the refugees alone. Very complex debate has taken place in Europe that how to move forward regarding refugees. Germany has contributed in it with a 10 point plan covering joint registration centers, fair distribution of the refugees and stronger efforts to combat the cause of flight and displacement in countries of origin and transit. Stabilizing states and curbing violence in civil war must go hand in with concentrated efforts to

achieve economic development and create real economic and social prospects – especially for young people.

Ms. R. Demet Sekercioglu

Deputy Head of Mission, Embassy of Turkey, Islamabad

Syrian crisis has become the world's largest humanitarian tragedy. With over two million, Turkey is the biggest Syrian refugee hosting country. They are being accommodated in 25 temporary protection centers and provided with food items, health, education and other services. Turkey has spent more than US\$ 8 billion for all these efforts whereas received only assistance of US\$ 471 million from international community and therefore it is unsustainable. Turkey has started operation in Mediterranean Sea in order to maintain safety and security for migrants. Fight against smugglers and human traffickers needs to be intensified. A safe migrant zone for migrants can be created in north of Syria otherwise more and more Syrians will embark in the journey to Europe.

Mr. Anton Chernov

First Secretary, Embassy of Russia, Islamabad

Geneva Communiqué clearly describes about transition in Syria and it is signed by Syrian government as well. I would like to say that according to the international law, when we use force in a third country, we can use it in accordance with the UN Charter or we can use it in accordance with the invitation or request of the country which needs such assistance; one week ago the Syrian president has requested for the assistance from the Russian government. There is no confrontation between Russian military and American military in Syria.

Mr. Stefano Gatto

Deputy Head of Delegation of the European Union

In Europe, there is a very complex combination of debate among citizens about economic and migrant crisis. Southern Europe is receiving number of people from different origins from last many years with majority as economic refugees which need to be distinguished from political refugees. EU is receiving 200,000 refugees per month and there is a lot of stress in Hungary because according to Dublin Regulation,

asylum seekers have to be identified on entrance. EU commission proposed to share 160,000 migrants among member states which is a big number but definitely not the final. We have put into motion a new naval mission in order to fight against smugglers and mafias.

Ambassador (R) Amir Anwar Shadani

Former Ambassador of Pakistan

We will have to look in basic reason why this large scale immigration happened? This is basically a political game which is being played up. Unless a political solution is arrived, there is very little hope of this crisis to stop. Many people have said that refugees could be helped if neighbouring countries do something more, this reminds me about the huge burden that we faced by hosting about 5 million Afghan refugees and we still have millions of refugees in Pakistan. It is necessary that all of us get together and ensure that the basic necessities like food, shelter and medicines are being provided to the refugees who are risking everything to find safety from war.

Ambassador (R) Khalid Khattak

Former Ambassador of Pakistan

Syria is not the case of double standards but of no standards. There is complex situation in Syria and people are caught in fire. There are special interests of different groups and powers and these interests are driving them into some kind of proxy war. There has to be some kind of grand alignment of interests. If we don't solve this problem, what will happen is that refugees will settle in tents and some assistance will be provided to them and then we will think that problem is solved as that happened in case of Afghanistan. Turkey and Syria have impact on one another and one's situation impacts other just like Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Dr. Moeed Pirzada

Editor Strategic Affairs, Dunya News

The refugee crisis is getting more and more severe with piling up numbers in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan etc. Syria's total population is about 22 million and more than 7 million have been displaced from their homes showing complete social destruction. One reason of refugees

moving towards Europe is the protracted nature of war. Whatever the international community does to refugees, it will be a temporary solution to the refugees crisis because the real solution lies in ending the Syrian civil war. We have observed double standards in terms of responses towards Arab Spring and democracy in Middle East. The war in Syria has to end and people have to take the responsibility as it is the only solution.

Ambassador (R) Asif Ezdi

Renowned Columnist & Former Ambassador of Pakistan

The refugees crisis was clearly foreseen as it took four years to build. Syrian neighbours have taken very large number of refugees. In Lebanon every 4th person is Syrian. EU woke up to this situation only when the refugees started to flee to them; till then, this problem was confined to the neighbouring countries. It is quite admirable that some countries like Germany, Sweden and Austria also have welcomed the refugees but there is a limit to which the EU can go. My appreciation for the refugees hosting countries but now they are fighting among themselves that who will take more refugees. Pakistan has emotional attachment to the holy places and therefore our relation to Syria goes back to many centuries ago.

Ambassador (R) Ishtiaq Hussain Andrabi

Former Additional Secretary Foreign Affairs & Former Ambassador of Pakistan

The burden of refugees shared by Syria's neighbouring countries is much more than that shared by the international community. EU has just taken droplet from the ocean to accommodate. Having experience of hosting the large number of refugees in Pakistan, we know how much pressure it brings on the socio economic fabric of the country. Syrian people are not only victim of war but also victim of failure of international community in order to find a solution of Syrian issue. The developed countries, like EU, US, Canada etc. and Arab Gulf countries have to share more burdens than that they are willing to. International community should support UN and neighbouring countries to better deal with the crisis.

Ambassador (R) Tariq Osman Hyder*Former Ambassador of Pakistan*

There has been an unprecedented global rise and surge in displacements of IDPs and refugees which is straining the capacity of the affected nations and institutions. The Syrian refugees are part of a large continuum in Middle East which should be kept in sight. Existing and protracted refugee situations such as that of the Palestinians and the Afghan refugees should not be forgotten and sufficient funds should be provided for Afghan refugees' volunteer repatriation. Under the classical developed world governing economic system there should be free movement of goods, capital and labour, while the former two are allowed to flow, the movement of people in search of work has not been permitted. To prevent such exoduses developed countries must open up to manage migration at a much higher level.

Lt. Gen (R) Raza Muhammad Khan*Former President, NDU & Chairman Pakistan People Forum*

I will like to compliment MUSLIM Institute for arranging such kind of RTD as this issue is not getting much attention on Pakistani media. In Pakistan we have observed that after IDPs coming from different parts, we have to share major resources with them. About Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries, Jordan doesn't have enough water even for its own people and now it has to host hundreds of thousand Syrian refugees. Separation of miscreants or human smugglers from migrants is a serious problem which needs to be primarily managed. All Muslim counties including Pakistan, Middle Eastern especially Gulf countries must help the Syrian Refugees to the extent possible. UN involvement in Syrian situation needs to be seriously considered.

Sahibzada Sultan Ahmad Ali*Chairman, MUSLIM Institute*

Respected chair of the session, moderator, participants, ambassadors, foreign delegates and guests, I thank all of you for participating in today's round table discussion. I hope that we will be able to tackle the refugees crisis on humanitarian basis. I thank all of you once again for taking out your time on invitation of MUSLIM Institute.

Recommendations

MUSLIM Institute has formulated following recommendations based on the discussion made in RTD:

- Syrian refugees crisis needs to be dealt on humanitarian basis; it should be considered as global issue and must not be politicized.
- Stepped up assistance should be provided to IDPs and those displaced internally, sheltering in neighbouring countries as well as those who have reached developed countries seeking refuge. UNHCR should play an effective role to look after refugees and international community should extend requisite assistance and support in this regard.
- A special zone should be created within Syria and on the borders of Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon to keep the refugees and managed through UN, UNHCR and other donors.
- Closed borders, rejections, and push-offs of refugees is not a humane answer to a call for refuge. All states should refrain from engaging themselves in xenophobia and principles of non-refoulment, as declared by the UNHCR, must be followed.
- In terms of both temporary shelter and resettlement of refugees, while security considerations are the right of every host nation, there should not be any preference or discrimination in terms of race or creed.
- Countries that have capacity to take and adjust the refugees like US, Australia, Canada, and rich Middle Eastern countries should also help the Syrian refugees to the extent possible.
- Urgent assistance to refugees should be provided keeping in view the advent of winter season and inclement weather conditions which would further aggravate miseries of refugees.
- Children among refugees should be protected and given especial attention with provision of food, health and education facility.
- All states should have fair domestic procedures for assessing the refugees and UNHCR and International Organization for Migration (IOM) should ensure, support responses in monitoring asylum seekers and providing them with information.

- All refugees hosting states must take effective actions to investigate and prosecute human trafficking gangs.
- International and local media should report responsibly and play vital role in spreading awareness about the crisis as well as to shape the public opinion in favour of refugees.
- To prevent such exoduses of refugees, developed countries must open up to manage migrations at a much higher level and provide more economic assistance where required to stabilize the situation.
- The permanent solution of refugees crises lies in peace in Syria therefore, the international community, particularly the UN should put efforts to bring the fighting to an end.