

**Address by the Chief Guest
Honourable Syed Naveed Qamar
Federal Minister for Water and Power
at the Event of
International Workshop on Floods in Pakistan – 2010
(Lessons Learnt and Way Forward)
Held on March 12, 2011**

Engr. Husnain Sahab, President Pakistan Engineering Congress

Mr. Kamran Emami, Representative for ICID

Participants of this most appropriately timed seminar

Ladies and Gentlemen !

This morning when I woke-up and turned on the news and saw the Tsunami and the Earthquake wreck devastation of the world's most technologically advanced country and how helpless man was in front of nature. It was an eye-opener reminder once again to us that while we may think that we have achieved heights of excellence, nature is far bigger, far more powerful and able to bring in forces, which we have not even conceived of. But, at the same time, God has given us the ability to think, conceive, to organize and manage and to be able to withstand any kind of challenge that may come in front of us. And definitely my mind went back to last year when, obviously, the scale of the disaster that all of us saw, either from a distance or up front, was beyond eye-imagination and expectations. I remember the sleepless nights that I personally had to spend alongwith the rest of my constituents, being myself representative of a riverine area which was going through this relentless increase in the size of the river, mighty River Indus, and every sleepless night, one had to not only mobilize people, personally supervise the blocking of every Rat hole in the bunds but also make a media outrage reach, re-assure the mothers that their children were safe and pre-vigilant and thus we were able to atleast save that stretch of land, that was under my watch but unfortunately we were not that lucky in a lot of other areas. And definitely it makes one thing that we still have a lot of weaknesses, a lot of rethinking, a lot of re-prioritization which we require and I was glad to see that a lot of those issues were highlighted in the presentation of the Irrigation Secretary, the Chief Engineer from Punjab, that until and unless we don't find answers to those questions, these nightmares will keep on coming to haunt us and this time around, we'll have no excuses!

Obviously there's a need to look at these things dispassionately, there's a need to go away from the camera glare and objectively start looking at each one of our weaknesses. Yes, we are a country that is water scarce, we are a country which has a psychology of scarcity of water and, therefore, when we get the abundance, we are not even mentally prepared to deal with it. Yet alone

physically be prepared through years and years of neglect, expecting that such thing will never occur.

So each question needs to be looked at separately. What are SOP's? What are—as was said—the Plan-B? If your normal procedures don't work, quite clearly are irrigation departments, which was the first line of defense that we have, anywhere in this Country. It was beyond their capacity to cope with this kind of a disaster. So we should have been prepared or we should at least have plans in hand, that, in that case what are the resources we need to put together. Yes, the automatic response is to call in the armed forces. But beyond that, this was a particular type of an emergency, required Civil, Military, Para military, across both kinds as well as international coordination that was required.

So, do we have the plans now? The physical work that is required, the resources obviously in a country where as it is, we were short of resources and last year's flood has only excavated the economic difficulties of this country. So when we talk about putting in more resources in flood management in fortifying embankments and so on we should be aware of our own difficulties. So there's a need also to bring in a more realistic approach in all that we ask for and, therefore, I was really glad to hear, that such an opportunity exists when experts and people of experience not only within Pakistan but from abroad are going to sit together and put their minds to try and find answers, try and share experiences, try and give us solutions to some other questions, that beg answers. I think, ladies and gentlemen, this is a big challenge that you all face in a short time frame that you have set for yourself. If at the end of today, after all the papers have been read, all the discussions have taken place, all the questions raised and some potential solution is given, I'm hoping that I get a piece of paper, which will have at least some of the answers. No miracles, no big answers, at least some of the answers, some obvious, some not so obvious. That's what experts are here for and that's where we intend to take up from. No Government is a sole source of wisdom ; no department can come-up with a solution on its own alone.

So, when I leave here, I hope that this challenge that I throw down to you, which you have set for yourself, I hope that you'll take up that challenge and in earnest look at how you can help us to prevent last year's disaster from hither in Pakistan in this year or in future years to come.

I thank you all Ladies and Gentlemen !

Pakistan Zindabad