

G7 Summit – uniting for a fairer, greener and prosperous future

The G7 grouping of countries is an easy one to criticise. As someone who has attended several of these summits, I know well the risks of them becoming talking shops with wordy communiqués that are forgotten the moment the ink dries. Beyond the theatre, and the perennial questions of how to make this format inclusive, the real test is whether the agreements reached had any substance. This year, the group needed to show that countries could come together and address how we can all build back better from the pandemic, and unite to make the future greener and fairer.

The summit did this on three important shared challenges: coronavirus, climate change, and giving all girls a good education. All three are issues on which Pakistan is a vital partner.

First, on coronavirus, the G7 agreed that no-one is safe until everyone is safe. They recognised that we must work together to prevent an international catastrophe like Covid-19 from happening again. The UK's own world-leading scientists developed the Oxford University-AstraZeneca vaccine which is now saving lives around the globe including in Pakistan. At the summit, the UK pledged to donate at least 100 million surplus vaccine doses within the next year, including 5 million starting in the coming weeks, and out of a total of 1 billion doses pledged by the G7; that's on top of the £548 million we have committed to the global Covax facility so far, which will help supply at least 1.3 billion vaccine doses to over 90 countries. Over £1 billion of new UK aid will help end the pandemic as quickly as possible.

Here in Pakistan we have pivoted our aid budget to help Pakistan fight Covid-19 and to help mitigate its health and economic impacts. G7 countries committed to a new "Pandemic Preparedness Partnership" to save countless lives from future diseases by reducing the time taken to develop new vaccines from 300 to 100 days; and the UK will set up a new Animal Vaccine Manufacturing Centre, building on British scientific excellence, that will help protect people from the risk of zoonotic diseases, here in Pakistan and globally.

Second, on climate change, the G7 agreed that we have to act now to save our planet. As Sir David Attenborough told G7 leaders, our scientific collaboration on vaccines has showed just how much we can achieve together if the goal is clear and urgent. There is much the world can learn from Pakistan as we look to build back better by protecting the environment. Pakistan's pioneering pledge to plant 10 billion trees and its promise to end new coal power investments are being noticed across the globe.

Earlier this month Prime Minister Boris Johnson saluted Pakistan's efforts to set a global leadership example on environmental issues during his speech for World Environment Day, hosted in Islamabad. This was closely followed by a phone call between Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Prime Minister Imran

Khan, underlining the ongoing friendship between our two nations. At the G7, the UK built on its ambitious pledge to cut carbon emissions by 78% by 2035 compared to 1990 levels with further commitments on green finance, protecting our oceans, and on nature conservation. Leaders also committed to conserve or protect at least 30 per cent of land globally by the end of the decade, something Pakistan has already committed to. The UK will host the UN's COP26 Climate Change Summit later this year, and will ensure a voice for the world's most climate-vulnerable countries. Further ambitious commitments from Pakistan will send a powerful signal to the rest of the world.

Third, the G7 agreed that we can only build back from the pandemic if we are better at ensuring opportunities for all in our societies. We know that a country can only reach its full potential when all of its population gets a good education. Pakistani girls and young women have shown time and again they have the ambition and talent to excel, when given the chance. The UK has played an important role in helping to educate girls in Pakistan. Through our education programmes, UK Aid has since 2011 helped over 5.5 million girls in primary school and 2.5 million girls in secondary school.

Last year, nearly 60% of our Chevening scholars (the UK's flagship postgraduate scholarship for leaders) were inspirational Pakistani women. We need to do more – it is not acceptable in today's world that children and especially girls still miss out on a good education. We have to help our children catch up with lost learning due to the pandemic. At the G7, leaders agreed ambitious global targets to get more girls into school and learning, and pledged to increase their support to the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) in time for the Global Education Summit, being co-hosted by the UK and Kenya in July. The UK announced a commitment of £430 million. This is the largest pledge the UK has ever made to GPE; and in time, GPE aims to train 2.2 million more teachers, build 78,000 new classrooms and buy 512 million textbooks, transforming education opportunities for our world's children.

Global challenges do not respect borders. This was not just a small group of countries deciding what was best for the world. Instead, it was about bringing big ideas and resources to help tackle big challenges together, sharing knowledge and expertise. From the streets of Glasgow to the Karakoram mountains, our world is our responsibility. We have to act together – while we still have time.