

Minutes – The Cambridge Majlis, Michaelmas 2023-24 – 2022 Pakistan Floods

On Saturday 21st October 2023, the Cambridge Majlis collaborated with Cambridge Climate Justice and the Cambridge University Pakistan Society for a talk on the 2022 Pakistan floods by activist, filmmaker and human rights lawyer Aisha Ghazi. The floods killed around 1800 people, injured around 13000 people and left over 2.1 million people homeless. Up to one-third of the country was underwater at one point and large swathes of agricultural fields were destroyed.

Based on fieldwork for her upcoming documentary, Aisha's talk "The Pakistan Floods: Climate Injustice and Colonial Hangover" focused on how these impacts manifested at the micro-level on already impoverished communities. Her photos and video interviews highlighted the devastating effects on these communities - lost livelihoods for landless agricultural labourers, destruction of farmlands and houses, spread of diseases, and loss of livestock - often the only form of property for many families. One particularly heart-wrenching interview showed an old woman with nowhere to go after the floods destroyed her home.

Aisha then spoke about how this crisis is inextricably linked with colonialism. Global heating, caused primarily by the historic emissions of rich countries, made the floods significantly worse and Pakistan is one of the most climate vulnerable countries, despite being responsible for less than 1% of global emissions. Poor water management and excessive damming, which began during British rule but has continued post-Independence, have led the poorest communities to be located in areas more prone to flooding. She also highlighted how the lack of education and economic opportunities, again a continuing effect of the colonial experience, worsens the impact on these communities.

After the talk, many attendees stayed back to chat with Aisha, primarily discussing how we can help. It was a timely and important event, and left the audience with a clearer understanding of the profound human impacts of climate change - arguably the defining challenge of our times.

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