

INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT SCIENCES CENTRE FOR PUBLIC POLICY RESEARCH

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The Centre for Public Policy Research (CPPR) at the Institute of Management Sciences arranged a panel discussion on “Tribal Governance”. The discussion focused on central questions of laws and regulations related to the tribal areas in Pakistan. The idea behind the panel discussion was to explore the rights and privileges of the tribal population in relation to the Constitution of Pakistan and a peripheral discussion on the Frontier Crimes Regulations and its implications for peace and security in the region. The major question put forth was the broader policy contours of the state of Pakistan towards Tribal governance and how the successive regimes since the inception of Pakistan have failed to arrive at an informed and consensual policy on governing these areas.

Moderated by the Chairperson CPPR, Dr. J.Z. Manan the panelists included Brig (Retd) Mahmood Shah, former Secretary Security FATA, Ms. Tahira Abdullah, Council Member of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, Mr. Muhammad Raza Managing Director Bacha Khan Education Foundation, and Mr. Imtiaz Gul senior journalist and chairman Center for Research and Security Studies. The event was well attended by participants from all walks of life including media, NGOs, and a large presence of students.

All the panelists unanimously agreed on the need for a change in State’s response to the current environment of insecurity, lawlessness, and underdevelopment in tribal areas. Ms. Tahira Abdullah lamented the fact that we as a society and state have failed to integrate tribal people into the mainstream for the last 6 decades. She however said that such discussions are a right way forward to sensitize the society at large on the complexity of this issue of national importance. To a question on the presence of strong vested interest inclined to maintain the status quo in tribal areas, she responded that it doesn’t mean that nothing should be done about improving the situation. She termed the FCR as a law synonymous with subjugation. At the time of framing the 1973 constitution, no political party with whatever orientation voiced their concerns against discriminatory clauses on the status of FATA. She voiced the need of a plebiscite/referendum so that people themselves can decide what to do with their lives.

Brig. Mahmood Shah maintained a cautious posture on the issue and called for a gradual change in tribal governance. He however rightly said that the State has no concerted policy for governing the tribal areas. The former Secretary apprised the participants on the historical evolution of tribal governance by referring to the constitution (articles 246 & 247) and the demand of the tribal population to be governed under special

arrangements at the time of independence. He said that the people are not yet ready or do not want to become part of Pakistan's judicial and administrative set up. He also talked about certain privileges that the tribal people enjoy but the rest of Pakistan doesn't.

Mr. Muhamad Raza said that the government of Pakistan does not have a clear vision on how to govern tribal areas. He opined that successive regimes have used tribal areas as a springboard for furthering vested interests and to gain strategic advantage. He termed FATA as a buffer zone functioning in the very same way it was doing before the independence of Pakistan. He also lamented the fact that legislation made both at provincial and federal levels are not applicable to the tribal areas. Responding to discussion on rights and privileges of the tribal people, he said that demolishing houses, confiscating properties and imprisonment of whole tribes are glaring cases of human rights abuse. He agreed to the notion of gradual change but urged for an immediate starting point that include withdrawing of troops from these areas.

Mr. Imtiaz Gul termed the lack of vision and capacity as the determining factors in deteriorating governance situation of tribal areas. He maintained that the present turmoil in tribal areas is not a manifestation of religious extremism or any other factor per se, rather it is the unjust system which needs to be reformed.

There was a unanimous agreement on the recommendation of Muhammad Raza that the Political Parties Act of 2002 be extended to the tribal areas as a stepping stone towards integrating them into mainstream political system of the country. Ms. Abdullah's recommendation of a participatory solution to the issue of tribal governance was also hailed by the participants.

In the end, Dr. Manan urged the participants to start educating themselves and their surroundings on this important issue. He vowed that the Centre will come up with similar initiatives in the future to inform, educate, and engage public on issues facing our society.