

Doctors, Lawyers, and Climate Change: Understanding the Nexus

Barrister Sarah Kazmi

The writer is the Co Chair of the Climate Change Committee at the Islamabad High Court Bar Association

The Climate Change Committee (CCC) of the Islamabad High Court Bar Association (IHCBA), in collaboration with the Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations & Coordination, organized a lecture titled “Understanding the Climate Change-Health Nexus in Pakistan.”

The event was held at the IHCBA Lecture Hall to examine the critical intersection of climate change and public health. The climate change committee at the bar aims to promote climate literacy among lawyers as climate change affects diverse practice areas now, including health law.

Dr Raza Zaidi, a public health expert and E4H Technical Director at UK’s Evidence of Health Programme, delivered a compelling lecture emphasizing the need for legal reforms to address the climate-health nexus. He elaborated on the role of atmospheric pollutants and the emergence of climate-sensitive illnesses such as heat-related conditions, vector-borne diseases, and waterborne infections.

Dr Zaidi also discussed the impact and strain climate change places on public health systems. He summarized the objectives agreed upon at recent COPs, including COP26, COP28, and the most recent COP29, which outlined priority actions to place health at the heart of climate solutions.

He humorously pointed out the traditional tension between doctors and lawyers but acknowledged the essential role of legal professionals in providing the legislative cover required for effective enforcement of health and climate-related initiatives.

Waiza Rafique from the National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) raised a critical question on



whether vulnerable groups, particularly women, were being adequately considered in Pakistan’s climate-health objectives and policymaking.

Ahmed Kamal, a young lawyer, highlighted research suggesting that every dollar invested in primary and preventative care could yield savings of up to \$90 in tertiary care, particularly in developing countries. Ahmed further drew an interesting analogy from the landmark case of *Rylands v. Fletcher* (1868), linking the principle of strict liability established in the case to the context of climate change.

Barrister Shoaib Razzaq, Advocate Supreme Court, emphasized the importance of building the capacity of legal professionals involved in international negotiations, such as COPs.

The Role of Lawyers in the Climate-Health Nexus

In my presentation, I highlighted the critical roles lawyers can play in addressing the climate-health nexus: Draft and propose comprehensive laws that integrate climate change considerations into health sector regulations. Lawyers can hold stakeholders accountable for environmental degradation and climate-related health impacts. Push for reforms that align Pakistan’s public health framework with climate action goals, ensuring sustainability and resilience. Lawyers can collaborate with health professionals, policymakers, and civil society to develop integrated approaches for tackling climate and health challenges.

Drawing on global examples, such as Australia’s Climate Change Act 2017, Ger-

many’s Climate Adaptation Act 2024, and France’s Climate and Resilience Act 2021, I emphasized how globally, legislative action is being taken to address climate consideration in the public health space

Dr Zaidi’s concluded his presentation emphasizing the critical need for legal reforms to address the intersection of climate change and public health. His key points were: Sensitization and awareness raising among multi-sectoral stakeholders through the ‘One Health’ approach; collaboration for evidence generation for climate resilient health systems- for proposing effective adaptation measures; and governance measures for creating an enabling environment including legislative reforms.

‘One Health’ approach for Implementation of Reforms

It became clear to the audience that lawyers play a pivotal role in shaping policies, drafting legislation, and ensuring accountability in addressing the climate-health nexus. The Secretary of the Islamabad High Court Bar Association, Shafqat Abbas Tarrar, appreciated the active participation of the audience and the Ministry of National Health, and he encouraged events like this lecture that foster collaboration between professions.

The Climate Change Committee of the IHCBA is dedicated to promoting climate literacy among legal professionals and building partnerships with stakeholders across various sectors. We invite professionals and organizations interested in collaborating on climate and health-related initiatives. ■