

Pakistan: Abdul Sattar Edhi - The richest poor man is no more

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A Statement by the Asian Human Rights Commission

PAKISTAN: The richest poor man is no more

The Asian Human Rights Commission condoles the sad demise of Abdul Sattar Edhi and pays tribute to the country's most loved social worker for his dedication and selfless service to humanity.

It is not every day that one comes across a man like Edhi. A legend in his own right, he was a philanthropist who went on to become Pakistan's identity. He died after a prolong illness on July 8.

His legacy shall forever live in the hearts and minds of Pakistanis; the great philanthropist shall always be remembered for his fortitude in the service of humanity. Edhi devoted his life to the service of the poor and vulnerable, and his life is an example for all Pakistanis to emulate. Revered and celebrated, Edhi was the amongst the most respected persons in Pakistan. He was also referred as Pakistan's "Father Teresa".

Born into a lower-middle class family, Abdul Sattar Edhi was greatly moved by the pain and misery around him. He made a vow to himself to serve humanity till his last breath. Edhi's legacy inspired thousands of people. His organization spread throughout the length and breadth of the country, and also in various other countries. Wherever conflict arose, the EDHI Trust was there to serve humanity. The organisation has played a pivotal role during times of crises. Be it natural calamity or man-made chaos, Edhi Trust volunteers have been the first ones to respond to emergency situations.

For Edhi, all humans were equal. He was an epitome of selfless service for all humanity, transcending caste, religion, ethnicity, and race. He has often been quoted saying, "My religion is humanitarianism, which is the basis of every religion in the world". From a single ambulance that he bought in 1948, the fleet of Edhi Foundation, i.e. both air and land ambulances, became the largest in the world, with over 1500 ambulances serving those in need.

Edhi was the greatest proponent of right to life. He spread a network of cots outside Edhi centers all over Pakistan, where parents could leave their children born out of wedlock. The service saved thousands of innocent lives. Edhi's legacy is unique because no humanitarian organization could achieve what Edhi Trust managed to do single-handedly.

Mr. Edhi, often called Maulana Edhi, was often criticized by opponents for helping Hindus, Christians, and other religious minorities, and for offering ambulance service to all and sundry. He would silence his critics, saying that the ambulance will not discriminate. "The ambulance is more Muslim than you," he would tell them.

The Edhi Foundation burial service is also the only service currently available in Pakistan that affords the dead their right to last rites and respectful burial. To date, the organization has buried 20,000 unclaimed bodies, many being victims of extrajudicial killing and police encounters.

Despite the terrible tragedies that the organization witnesses everyday, each Sunday is celebrated with mass weddings of orphaned girls housed at Edhi Village. Thousands of girls have been married, after thorough investigation into the eligible suitors by staff members.

Every day the Edhi family – as the volunteers like to be known – help thousands in need. Edhi Foundation has fed, clothed, offered medical services, and provided shelter to many Pakistanis. The Foundation has practically provided every essential service that the democratic and welfare State is constitutionally required to provide to its citizens.

What makes Edhi stand apart from his predecessors, contemporaries, or successors, is the dedication with which he served his countrymen. Edhi was the first to offer old-age homes, free food, and shelter service in Pakistan.

In a country where philanthropy has strings attached, Edhi Foundation managed to remain a self-sustaining organization, based on the spirit of volunteerism of many selfless people. Edhi Foundation was amongst the first donation choices for many reputed organizations and trusts that went on to become institutions. Edhi Foundation has also provided materiel support to any humanitarian organization that has request for it.

For many vulnerable and underprivileged Pakistanis, Edhi has been a saviour and a hero. He was the brother, father, and son to many he housed in his shelter homes, orphanages, and old homes. The word Edhi would elicit care and protection in the minds of Pakistanis who have been suffering under corrupt governments. He never shied from resorting to begging for alms to serve those in need, and people would flock to give him alms and charity. No analogy and no word is enough to extol the richest poor man who won the hearts of all in his life and even after his death.

Edhi had pledged to donate all his organs after death. After his death, his eyes were donated to two blind persons, whose sight has been restored thanks to the gifts bestowed by Edhi. Even after his death, the man has taught us to give selflessly.

Abdul Sattar Edhi had set an example for others to follow; a trail-blazer for many, Edhi has shown by example how to selflessly serve humanity. His legacy will forever remain etched in the hearts and minds of all Pakistanis. May his soul rest in eternal peace.

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