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Unchecked Housing Growth Risks Food Security: Iqbal

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Pakistan's rapid urban expansion is putting the nation's food security at serious risk, warned Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Ahsan Iqbal. As cities continue to grow, valuable agricultural land is being lost to unregulated housing projects.

Speaking at a national dialogue on food systems transformation, Iqbal expressed deep concern over the spread of housing developments into fertile farming areas. He emphasized that the country is approaching a critical point. "We are eating up the fertile land that

provides food for our people,” he said, noting that this trend is already affecting national food supplies.

The minister highlighted how agricultural land, particularly in Punjab and other key farming regions, is being rapidly converted into residential and commercial plots. He warned that if this continues, Pakistan may become increasingly dependent on food imports. This could strain national resources and make food less affordable and accessible for low-income families.

Urban sprawl, fueled by population growth, weak planning policies, and speculative real estate investment, has caused housing colonies to encroach on rural areas. Iqbal called for improved land-use planning and a change in mindset that prioritizes long-term sustainability instead of short-term profits.

He urged provincial and local governments to take concrete steps, such as enforcing stricter building rules, protecting agricultural zones, and promoting vertical housing developments within cities. “We need smart urbanization that preserves our ability to produce food while also meeting the housing needs of our people,” he said.

The national dialogue brought together experts and stakeholders from multiple sectors to discuss ways of transforming Pakistan’s food systems. Many echoed Iqbal’s concerns and emphasized that food security must be treated as a top national priority, especially with climate change and rising global food prices posing additional threats.

Iqbal’s remarks underline the fact that food security is not only about growing more crops. It is also about preserving the land needed to grow them. With Pakistan’s population expected to exceed 250 million in the coming years, balancing urban growth with agricultural protection is essential.

As the country continues on its development path, the message is clear: food security and urban planning must move forward together. Ignoring these warnings today could lead to a food crisis tomorrow.