

FLASH UPDATE

Post-Relief and Return -- South Asia Earthquake

Six months after the South Asia Earthquake of 8 October 2005, more than 64,000 earthquake survivors have left relief camps for their homes. Thirty camps have been closed, leaving some 87,000 people in over 120 camps with 50 or more tents.

Since the Government of Pakistan announced the commencement of camp closures on 10 March, North West Frontier Province (NWFP) (where most camps are run by the Pakistani military), has seen over 50,000 camp dwellers (which is close to 80 % of the camp population there) returning home and 25 camps closed.

In the Pakistan-administered Kashmir, returns are taking a slower pace. Over 10,000 persons have returned to their villages from the camps, in a process that started in late March. Five camps have closed there.

Managing the Return Process

UNHCR continues to stress that return must be based on an informed and voluntary decision and must take place in a dignified manner (*Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, IASC/IDD*). Initially, there were concerns over the strong encouragement by the Army for return, particularly in NWFP. While physical force was not used, vulnerability of people,



Maidan camp: emptying. UNHCR/O. Ozcan

family condition and specific areas of return were not always considered. Through discussions with the Government, the local authorities and relevant partners, the process of return has improved significantly.

UNHCR is working in coordination with other UN agencies (UNICEF, UNHCHR, OCHA), NGOs (NRC) and other international organizations (IOM), to assist the Government in managing the return process, monitoring the returns from camps, screening vulnerable individuals and addressing the needs of those who are unable to return at this point in time.

In order to provide camp residents with updated information on how the government plans to assist them upon their return, UNHCR, together with OCHA, IOM and the Government of Pakistan, has launched a mass information campaign using posters, flyers and community meetings to reach a wide audience. In addition, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) has set up Legal Aid and Information Centres (ICLA) to provide legal assistance and guidance to returnees.

In coordination with the Protection Cluster led by UNICEF, UNHCR is monitoring returns at the point of departure, in order to ensure the dignified nature of the return. Monitoring is also conducted en route and at the final destination by members of the Protection Cluster.

The vast majority of people have returned to their places of origin. The Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority (ERRA), a governmental body in charge of the post-emergency phase of the operation, is working closely with the humanitarian community to rebuild damaged or destroyed infrastructure in the areas of origin including roads, schools, hospitals, shelter, etc.

There will be some vulnerable persons who cannot go home immediately for various reasons. Some have been orphaned, widowed or disabled; others have lost their land or originate from towns like Balakot, which lies on major fault lines and have to be relocated. It is critical that these vulnerable people continue to be assisted until more permanent solutions are found.



Return: Manshera area. UNHCR/B. Baloch

UNHCR welcomes the NWFP government's decision to set aside three camps for these residual groups. The camps are: Siran Sialkot in the Siran Valley, Ghari Habibullah in Balakot and Meira in Besham, which will be run by the Regional Relief Coordinator (RRC). To prepare them for this task, UNHCR has provided training in camp management through partners like Registered Engineers for Disaster Relief (RedR) Australia and NRC. Similarly, for Muzaffarabad, two sites are confirmed for the residual caseload: Mera Tanolia and Thori Park.

Vulnerability Survey

UNHCR supported the Pakistan Government in conducting a registration exercise in relief camps in NWFP and Pakistan-administered Kashmir in January 2006. This registration served to identify vulnerable individuals living in camps and to assess their needs. Results of the survey are now used to monitor returns, identify a residual population among the vulnerable living in camps and to help the

Government plan longer-term solutions for them.

Vulnerable individuals are predominantly persons with serious medical conditions, disabilities and women at risk. About half of those interviewed expressed the wish to return to their places of origin. However, obstacles to return are manifold which include land and property ownership questions, road conditions, lack of health, water and sanitation facilities in places of return and fear of further landslides.

In response to these problems, UNHCR has referred a number of the physically disabled persons to Handicap International and other NGOs who can provide assistance in form of prosthesis, counseling and other support. A list of the vulnerable individuals was also submitted to the camp managers, all UN agencies and NGOs, to ensure that the needs of vulnerable persons are accommodated at the time of return. Legal matters have been referred to the Protection Cluster lead, UNICEF, NRC/ICLA and the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan as well as to relevant local authorities in charge of land, property and compensation matters.

In the Pakistan-administered Kashmir, the authorities have been receptive and cooperative in support of the return of the vulnerable persons. In NWFP, many of them are already in their places of origin.

Process of Disengagement, Handover and Capacity Building

UNHCR will phase out its involvement in the earthquake operation at the end of August 2006. Until then, it will gradually reduce the number of operational Hubs and their staff in the affected-areas as required. To ensure a smooth handover of responsibilities to the Government, NGOs and other partners, UNHCR continues its capacity building efforts through hands-on guidance and trainings.

In collaboration with NRC, supported by UNHCR, RedR Australia trained over 1,200

participants from the Government, NGOs, UN and other organizations on a variety of camp management topics including water management, hygiene promotion, community mobilization, settlement, return issues and report writing. As of April, UNICEF is supporting RedR to train staff on camp closure and protection issues.



Return: Balakot area. UNHCR/B. Baloch

UNHCR will also second advisors to RRC, Camp Management Office and Transitional Recovery Cell until the end of the year. They will provide expertise on camp management (for the residual caseload), returns and protection issues. Meanwhile, discussions are ongoing on which agency will take the lead in the Camp Management Cluster after UNHCR's disengagement.

Finally, as camps are being closed and decommissioned, UNHCR will continue to ensure that the equipment and facilities installed by various agencies will also be disassembled in an environmentally friendly manner.

UNHCR Pakistan Website

In order to provide easier access to update on UNHCR's activities in Pakistan including the Afghan repatriation operation and activities on the South Asia Earthquake, UNHCR-Pakistan has launched a new website where reports, maps, photos and information on donors are available online.

Please visit: www.unhcr.org.pk for details.

Funding Overview

As at 11 April 2006, a total of USD 33,323,115 has been confirmed as cash contribution. UNHCR is very grateful to the following donors:

Governmental/Inter-Governmental	Amount USD
Australia	370,370
Canada	854,701
Czech Republic	299,569
Denmark	3,139,717
European Commission	4,824,274
Finland	1,176,471
France	82,353
Ireland	300,000
Italy	323,415
Japan	1,000,000
Kuwait	500,000
Norway	5,981,413
Republic of Korea	50,000
Sweden	3,811,944
Turkey	500,000
United Kingdom	2,370,741
United States of America	4,000,000
Sub-total	29,584,969
Private Donors	
Austria for UNHCR	12,082
Australia for UNHCR	266,432
Islamic Association Bahrain	9,970
Germany UNO-Flüchtlingshilfe	764,706
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Netherlands Stichting Vluchteling	352,941
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Shinnyo-en (JPN)	100,000
Japan for UNHCR	381,822
United Kingdom	3,565
USA for UNHCR	544,283
HQs Online activities	86,656
Sub-total	3,738,146
Grand Total (Cash)	33,323,115
In-kind contributions:	
NFI Airlift by NATO Member States	
France	2,421,308
Denmark, Greece, Italy	Cash value tbd
Luxemburg, Turkey, UK	"
NFI Land transport: Turkey	50,000
Deployment Site planner: UK	71,174
Grand Total (In-kind)	2,542,482