

## **United Church Response to Flooding in Pakistan, Aug. 2010: Context and Background**

*The crisis currently confronting Pakistan is complex. Understanding the nature and causes of the crisis and knowing how to respond in a thoughtful, effective manner are not straightforward. Following is some pertinent background on the crisis and an explanation of the challenges facing organizations like the United Church.*

### **What are the Underlying Causes of the Crisis?**

There is strong speculation that climate change lies at the root of the Pakistan floods. Experts from the United Nations and universities around the world say the recent extreme weather events in countries like Pakistan prove that global warming is already happening. Jean-Pascal van Ypersele, vice-president of the body set up by the United Nations (UN) to monitor global warming, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), said the dramatic weather patterns are consistent with changes in the climate caused by humankind. In an August 10 article in the *UK Telegraph*, he was quoted as describing extreme weather events as intensifying in a climate that has been disturbed by greenhouse gas pollution and making climate change visible.

The UN has rated the floods in Pakistan as the greatest humanitarian crisis in recent history. As well, flooding in China has killed more than 1,100 people this year and caused tens of billions of dollars in damage across 28 provinces and regions. In Russia the Moscow morgues are overflowing and wildfires are raging in the countryside after the worst heat wave in 130 years.

Dr. Peter Stott, head of climate monitoring and attribution at the Met Office, the UK's national weather service, said it was impossible to attribute any one of these particular weather events to global warming alone. But he said there is "clear evidence" of an increase in the frequency of extreme weather events because of climate change. In the same *Telegraph* article, Stott is quoted as warning that such extreme events are becoming more and more common, to the point that they might be seen as "normal" by mid-century.

Other factors exacerbating the crisis in Pakistan include a lack of emergency response infrastructure, responsibility for which some say must be borne by the Pakistan government. Also, Pakistan may be experiencing some partial ostracizing within the international community owing to allegations of government corruption and the harbouring of international terrorists.

Politicizing a humanitarian crisis usually only hurts the people who are already hurting. The United Church is firmly focused on how it can best help ordinary Pakistanis through this exceedingly difficult time in their lives.

## **What is the United Nations Doing?**

The severity of damage caused by recent and continuing monsoon season flooding in Pakistan prompted the UN on August 11 to appeal to member states for nearly \$460 million in emergency aid. UN Under-Secretary General and Emergency Relief Coordinator John Holmes called the floods the worst floods in Pakistan in living memory and said millions more will be needed to help rebuild the devastated country. Holmes said the flooding is a “major catastrophe.”

The affected population is estimated to be more than 14 million—almost one-tenth of Pakistan’s population. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, which Holmes heads, said at least six or seven million flood victims require immediate humanitarian assistance including shelter, food, clean water, sanitation, and medical care. Many of the affected communities were still in recovery mode from extensive damage caused by a major earthquake two years ago. The floods have compounded their ongoing suffering.

Canada has pledged \$33 million in response to the UN appeal. Some of this amount will be used for water, sanitation and other immediate needs, some will be used to rebuild local infrastructure.

## **What are International Non-governmental Organizations Doing?**

Since the first reports of the floods reached Western countries, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been scrambling to provide emergency aid to the flood victims. The international NGO community includes major first-line emergency response organizations like the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Red Crescent, and, in Canada, Care Canada and Médecins Sans Frontières. Second-line relief organizations rely on linking with partners in affected countries and international relief networks like the ACT Alliance to provide support through aid dollars. In Canada, these include The United Church of Canada, Presbyterian World Service and Development, and the Primate’s World Relief and Development Fund (Anglican Church).

## **What are the Challenges of Getting Aid to Those Who Need It?**

Raising funds for emergency relief is one matter. Actually getting the aid to those who need it most can be a challenge for numerous reasons.

The United Church has a solid history of working with its in-country partners and organizations like ACT to deliver aid to affected communities in a timely, efficient, and effective matter. With Pakistan, the situation is not so straightforward. Delivering aid to the affected communities is extremely difficult, because they are in mountainous, remote, and hard-to-reach regions. The Government of Pakistan has limited capacity to coordinate a major emergency relief effort and requires assistance from other states that will take time to organize.

International NGOs with a presence on the ground in Pakistan are also challenged logistically by difficult terrain and other factors and are therefore limited in their

capacity to deliver aid quickly to communities most in need. Patience, ongoing consultation, and careful planning and monitoring are critical requirements in responding effectively to a crisis as complex as that currently unfolding in Pakistan.

### **How is the United Church Reaching Out to Affected Pakistani Communities?**

Regardless of the logistical and other challenges posed by Pakistan, the United Church is confident that the initial emergency funds it has sent—\$65,000 from emergency relief funds and \$15,000 of equity in the Canadian Foodgrains Bank—has reached or will soon reach communities in need. For this we are grateful to the ACT Alliance, which has issued an appeal for Pakistan to which members including the United Church are contributing. The United Church does not have partners in Pakistan, as we do in countries such as Haiti and India, and therefore relies on ACT as our principal vehicle for emergency aid delivery.

ACT relies on three member organizations with a physical presence in Pakistan to reach affected people, the vast majority of whom are Pakistani Muslims. Ninety-five percent of Pakistan's population is Muslim. In line with the United Church's long history of interfaith dialogue and co-operation with Muslim sisters and brothers, we are exploring options to work co-operatively with Muslim organizations in Canada and abroad in the relief effort. Otherwise, we continue to monitor the situation in Pakistan closely, work with ACT, and stand ready to send more funds as they can be effectively absorbed and programmed.

### **How Can We Cooperate with Muslim Organizations in the Relief Effort?**

On the subject of interfaith dialogue and co-operation, the crisis in Pakistan offers an important opportunity to deepen the United Church's experience of working co-operatively with Muslim organizations in Canada and abroad. To this end, we are consulting with various organizations to determine what might be possible and helpful.

In the same vein, we want to encourage United Church members and congregations to use this opportunity to reach out to their Muslim neighbours in Canada who are shouldering an enormous burden of worry and concern about families and loved ones in the flooded areas back home. *That We May Know Each Other* is an excellent United Church resource designed to encourage understanding of and engagement with Muslims in Canada. A copy can be downloaded at [www.united-church.ca/partners/relations/interfaith](http://www.united-church.ca/partners/relations/interfaith).

### **How Can United Church Members Donate?**

To donate to the United Church's efforts to help those affected by the crisis in Pakistan, please visit the [Emergency Response](#).