



# Pakistan Humanitarian Forum

Statement by the Pakistan Humanitarian Forum  
Regarding the Critical Situation of the Displaced in Pakistan  
May 21, 2009

On May 6, tensions between the Pakistani Military and insurgents in Swat, Buner, and Lower Dir Districts in Northwest Frontier Province expanded into open conflict, forcing nearly 1.5 million civilians to flee their homes. These people join the nearly 600,000 displaced prior to May 6, bringing the total number of displaced to approximately 2 million. Most are women and children. Nearly 90% are in host communities while the remainder have sought shelter in IDP camps. UNHCR has stated that they expect the crisis to grow as the fighting continues and curfews are periodically lifted to allow civilians to flee. Likewise, the United Nations and aid agencies expect that it will take many months to resettle the displaced, which foreshadows the continuing needs that IDPs will have for the foreseeable future. In short, the situation is dire.

At the most fundamental level, international donors must ensure that the United Nations Consolidated Appeal for the Revised Pakistan Humanitarian Response Plan is funded quickly and comprehensively. Likewise, all actors should take steps to minimise civilian casualties, and all IDP response work must be undertaken in compliance with the internationally recognized Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and the International Committee of the Red Cross Code of Conduct.

In addition, as a consortium of 32 of the largest INGOs working in Pakistan, the Pakistan Humanitarian Forum believes that all actors must take urgent steps in order to ease the suffering of the displaced, especially women and children, and ensure that they return to their homes as quickly and as safely as possible. We call upon the Government of Pakistan, the United Nations, and the donor community to take the following actions:

To the Government of Pakistan:

- The Government of Pakistan should do everything possible to ensure complete, safe, unhindered humanitarian access to civilians in conflict-affected areas, in accordance with international norms.<sup>1</sup> The Pakistan Humanitarian Forum is deeply concerned about those who remain inside the conflict zone, especially women and children. Many thousands of people are displaced within Buner, Swat, and Lower Dir, yet aid agencies cannot safely reach them. The elderly, disabled, and sick cannot leave their homes, despite their location in an active combat zone. The Pakistani authorities should ensure full, safe, unhindered humanitarian access so that civilians can be safely evacuated and aid workers can assist people who need food, water, medicines and other essential aid.

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<sup>1</sup> See International Committee of the Red Cross, THE CODE OF CONDUCT FOR THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT AND NGOS IN DISASTER RELIEF (hereafter, “Code of Conduct”), Principle One and Government Recommendation Two; Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, GUIDING PRINCIPLES ON INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT (hereafter, “Guiding Principles on IDPs”), G.A. Res. 60/L.1, ¶132, U.N. Doc. A/60/L.1 (2005), Principles 17(3), 25(3) and 30.

To the Government of Pakistan and International Donors:

- The Pakistan Humanitarian Forum believes that combining military and humanitarian objectives is not only ineffective, it can compromise the perceived neutrality of aid and development organisations, which jeopardizes the safety of humanitarian workers and the communities they serve. The Pakistani civil and military authorities should ensure public safety, while humanitarian agencies should be recognized by all parties as independent actors focused solely on meeting the needs of the affected population in a neutral and impartial manner.
- The Government of Pakistan and the donor community should bear in mind that more than two-thirds of those displaced are living outside of the camps in host communities. Many of these communities were destitute even before the arrival of the displaced. Basic services like health, education, water and sanitation, as well as livelihoods opportunities that were stretched before have now reached their breaking point. Women and children suffer disproportionately whenever there is such a strain on resources. Likewise, any time that resources are so scarce, the potential for conflict rises. Accordingly, the Pakistan Humanitarian Forum urges all actors to pay adequate attention to the needs of the displaced in the host communities as well as the host communities themselves.
- The Government of Pakistan and the donor community should make a long-term commitment to those displaced by the conflict because IDPs will require assistance for many months to come. Farms, livestock, businesses, and other livelihoods have been neglected or destroyed during the conflict. As a result, it is imperative that donors provide sufficient resources so that those displaced may build a sustainable future once they return in safety and with dignity to their homes.

To the Government of Pakistan and the United Nations:

- The Government of Pakistan and the United Nations should take extra steps to ensure that all those displaced are properly registered so that assistance can be provided to those who need it.<sup>2</sup> Currently, IDPs cannot register with the UN or the Ministry of Social Welfare without a National Identity Card, and the UN only distributes relief to those who have registered. The majority of those without National Identity Cards are women. The Government of Pakistan and the UN should either create an alternative method of demonstrating identity, or urgently dispatch the National Database and Registration Authority (“NADRA”) to register IDPs for National Identity Cards.
- The right of IDPs to choose when to return to their homes, or to resettle elsewhere, must be respected.<sup>3</sup> Any returns process should be voluntary, safe, dignified and informed. An incentive sometimes exists for some actors to declare an area safe for return, deny IDP registration to new arrivals, or de-register IDPs from those areas. It is the IDP who freely and voluntarily makes the ultimate decision about whether a conflict area is safe or not. In the event an individual determines that an area is not safe, he or she should be registered as an IDP and receive the benefits concomitant with such status.

To the United Nations and the Donor Community:

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<sup>2</sup> See GUIDING PRINCIPLES ON IDPS, *supra* note 1, Principle 3(2) and 20(2).

<sup>3</sup> See GUIDING PRINCIPLES ON IDPS, *supra* note 1, Principle 3(2) and 14(1).

- The UN should ensure that the Consolidated Appeal Process for Pakistan IDPs allows for ample NGO participation and funding. Too often, an appeal is underfunded and NGOs are largely excluded from funding mechanisms. As a result, the relief effort fails to benefit from the specialization, agility, and efficiency of the NGO community. Ultimately, it is those affected by the crisis who suffer.
- The UN, donors and Pakistani authorities should work effectively together to ensure that coordination mechanisms at national, provincial and especially district levels are strengthened and properly resourced. The Pakistan Humanitarian Forum affirms the Cluster System as the primary coordinating body for the relief effort. However, the Cluster System should not act as a funnel through which all resources must flow. Each Cluster should list individual projects which donors may fund, and donors should consider funding NGOs bilaterally. The current dual role of cluster lead agencies – as coordinator and donor – inevitably produces conflicts of interest and can exacerbate tensions within the relief community.

To the Government of Pakistan, the United Nations, and the Donor Community:

- The Government of Pakistan, the United Nations, and the Donor Community should ensure that those already displaced from the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (“FATA”) receive adequate services.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, the Government of Pakistan, the United Nations, and the Donor Community should identify sites for those who will likely be displaced as the operation in FATA gains new momentum. The Pakistan Humanitarian Forum also urges all actors to ensure an equitable distribution of relief resources, independent from the date on which the IDP was displaced.<sup>5</sup>
- The Pakistani authorities, with the support of donors and the response community, must undertake special efforts to meet the distinct protection and assistance needs of women and girls, who are among the most vulnerable IDPs. The United Nations estimates that half of the displaced are women and children, and another 20% are children under five. It is imperative that the most vulnerable receive the attention they deserve.

To the World:

Now is the time for the world to demonstrate its solidarity with the farmers, families, and children who are the primary victims of this conflict. Now is the time to demonstrate that the international community is just as concerned about the vulnerable as it is about combating extremism. While the crisis has exacted a catastrophic toll upon the displaced, it has also presented a singular opportunity to demonstrate our compassion for a people that was previously unreachable. We must seize upon it.

*\*This statement has been endorsed by 88% of PHF membership.*

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<sup>4</sup> See GUIDING PRINCIPLES ON IDPS, *supra* note 1, Principle 18.

<sup>5</sup> See GUIDING PRINCIPLES ON IDPS, *supra* note 1, Principle 4 and 18.