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Pakistan

Not even 5 percent of aid received!

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Even after 17 days of the most disastrous earthquake in Pakistan, there are areas that no one has yet reached to help the victims. That is mainly true of the Neelum Valley area, close to the so-called Line Of Control that separates Kashmir into Indian and Pakistani held areas. Only helicopters are able to reach the area. The military is the only institution that controls all the helicopters. They simply they do not have the helicopters required to bring relief to all the devastated villages.

A two-member team from one private TV channel GEO accompanying a military relief helicopter in the Neelum Valley showed a glimpse of the plight of the villagers last night on 25th October 2005. The villagers were begging, arguing, fighting, accusing and saying what ever they could say to the military officers to get some immediate relief to save the lives of their children who are not yet dead. One villager said, "17 days gone, we have no team reaching to our village. We have buried 80 from our village, many more are injured, but no help yet has reached the village".

[<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/lah2.jpg>]

Money collected at the Labour Relief Camp in Lahore, Pakistan....

The so-called LOC is closed by the Indian and Pakistani governments and no one from any country can cross the Line. If the LOC had been open, it would have taken few hours for the Indian held Kashmir people to bring relief. The Pakistani government finally suggested last week to open the Line from 5 different areas. But technical side had to be discussed by the Indian government to agree to the proposal. It has not yet been opened.

Earlier, the Pakistani military government rejected an offer from the Indian government of Indian helicopters for relief purposes. "It was not in our national interest to accept this offer, it raises the question of the security of the country" said one Pakistani spokesperson while rejecting the offer. Later the Pakistani military regime offered to accept the Indian helicopters without Indian pilots. What more security is in the mind of the Pakistani government while, according to the latest official figures, over 53,000 are confirmed death after the 8th October earthquake. Unofficial figures for the death toll are over 100,000 and more seriously injured.

Pathetic response

There has been a pathetic aid response by the governments of the advanced countries so far. Not even five percent of the total needed for the relief and rehabilitation work has been pledged or sent to Pakistan. The "friends" of general Musharaf have not been pushed properly by the military government to donate and come forward to help in this grave situation. The reason is very simple.

The military government's earlier response was to hide the facts. They tried in the initial period to show minimum losses of lives and property. I heard the core commander of the North West Frontier Province, the real boss of the province, on 9th October, a day after the earthquake "it is the politicians who are making noise about deaths and losses, I have been touring around the whole day, the maximum deaths are less than one thousand" This is a province where there are more than 20,000 confirmed deaths according to the official figures.

OXFAM UK issued a serious warning on 26th October that Pakistan has been abandoned by the industrial states. It noted that America, Japan, Germany and Italy have donated aid that does not match their financial position. While France, Belgium, Austria and Finland have announced no donations at all.

The United Nation asked for 300 million dollars in emergency relief but only one third of that has materialized. The UN economic coordinator for immediate relief in Pakistan, Mr. Rashid Kalkof, told news reporters in Islamabad on 23rd October that "we did not expect the disaster on that high level. It went beyond our imaginations. That is why there was a delay in the initial relief activities". He said, "according to our initial estimation, over three million people have suffered from this catastrophe".

[<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/lah1.jpg>]

...food and equipment on its way.

On 22nd October, the prime minister of Azad Kashmir, (Pakistani-occupied Kashmir) said, "do not wait for the death of the Kashmiris, send the helicopters now. The world community should not talk but act. The whole world has not been able to send the immediate required 200,000 tents yet, what is the use of helicopters when Kashmiris are dead". The desperation of the hand-picked prime minister of Azad Kashmir shows the real danger that is erupting to the lives of the refugees who are desperate to get the tents before the arrival of the winter in three weeks times. Already in some areas, snow is pouring down and other areas, the temperature is around zero.

At present, there a total of 46 helicopters helping in the relief efforts, some 30 of them are from the US army. According to a BBC report on 23rd October, half of the helicopters are involved in VIP activities. That mean transportation of the very important personalities or security of these VIPs.

Even General Musharaf had to admit on 21st October that only 620 million dollars has been pledged which is very little. According to the government surveys, the total damage may exceed five billion dollars. The independent surveys bring the total damage to 10 billion dollars.

The World Food Programme appeal for 56 million dollars has met with only 10 per cent success so far. It has been issuing serious warning of more deaths if the international response to this disaster is not in accordance with the needs of the time.

Militarization of the relief efforts

All the action of the Musharaf regime shows the growing militarization of the relief efforts. The military want to control all the incoming aid and want to distribute it without the involvement of the civilians. A major general Farooq Ahmed has been appointed as the relief commissioner. Another general has been appointed for the rehabilitation work. Civilians seem totally outside the network of the official channels of relief and rehabilitation work.

The total incapacity of the military regime to provide any effective help in the first three days of the earthquake has now been compensated by the mainstream media's publicity for the army as the only saviour. Even the main private TV channels are promoting the army relief efforts as the only way forward. During the six years of military rule, most civilian institutions have been headed by retired or serving army officers. Now the relief and rehabilitation work has joined the same route.

The earthquake has raised the issues like occupation of Kashmir by Pakistan and India and its effect on the people. It has raised the issue of the priorities of the Pakistani state, which has been too busy iarming itself while totally neglecting the defence of civilians in any disaster like this one.

The natural disaster has not been met with the preparations that were needed. The total loss would have been reduced to a large extent if the state had been prepared for such incidents. But the social priorities of the people are

the last words in the dictionary of the ruling classes of Pakistan.

Cancellation of the debts campaign

The national assembly of Pakistan has passed a resolution that the debts of the people in the affected area should be cancelled. So was the demand of the members of the NWFP assembly. This is related to the demand of Labour Party Pakistan to cancel the unjust debts of Pakistan. Pakistan owes 34 billion dollars in foreign loans. It pays nearly 5 billion US dollars annually in debt repayments. This is the largest part of the national budget. If the repayment of only year's debt were not paid, it could compensate for the total damage according to the official figures. The irony of the matter is that IMF has announced, not an aid, but a loan on soft terms basis even on this tragic occasion for Pakistan.

The people's response

There has been unprecedented people's response not only in Pakistan but internationally, particularly in those countries which have a large Pakistani immigrant population. According to one survey, over 10 billion rupees (200 million US dollars) donations have been sent to the affected areas by the people of Pakistan. The Labour Relief Campaign in its first four days of campaigning in Lahore raised over 250000 Rupees in cash and over 2 million Rupees worth of goods from ordinary passers-by. This has been the case of many more relief camps which emerged in every part of Pakistan. There have been the cases all over Kashmir and NWFP affect areas where the first aid came from the people and not from the state.

What is to be done?

The social movement internationally should take the question of earthquake on an urgent basis. It should urge the governments in the advanced countries to do more than they have done so far. It has to take the question to the labour movement and to help the Kashmiri and Pakistani workers and peasants who have lost everything. The response has to come on urgent basis. More effective measures have to be taken to collect funds for the refugees not only for immediate relief but also for rehabilitation work.

Please visit Labour Education Foundation website for more details of Labour Relief Campaign www.lef.org.pk

Donations can be sent to the Labour Education Foundation appeal in two ways:

To Pakistan, but which might be very costly:

LABOUR EDUCATION FOUNDATION

A/C No. 01801876

BANK ALFALAH LTD., LDA PLAZA, KASHMIR ROAD, LAHORE, PAKISTAN

Route:

Please advise and pay to Citi Bank, New York, USA Swift CITI US 33

for onward transfer to BANK ALFALAH LTD., KARACHI, PAKISTAN A/C No. 36087144

and for final transfer to BANK ALFALAH LTD., LDA PLAZA, KASHMIR ROAD, LAHORE, PAKISTAN

Swift: ALFHPKKALDA for A/C No. 01801876 OF LABOUR EDUCATION FOUNDATION

Or through a Paris-based NGO, the ESSF, which is centralising the transfer of funds:

THROUGH ESSF:

Bank Account:

Crédit lyonnais

Agence de la Croix-de-Chavaux (00525)

10 boulevard de Chanzy

93100 Montreuil

France

International bank account details :

IBAN : FR85 3000 2005 0044 5757 C12

BIC / SWIFT : CRLYFRPP

Account holder : ESSF