

Labour Relief Campaign for flood victims in Pakistan

Progress Report for the month of August 2010

The Labour Relief Campaign's first camp was organized in Lahore on 1st August 2010 at Regal Chouck Lahore. Earlier on 25th July 2010, we decided to launch a Baluchistan appeal.

This appeal stated, "Torrential rains have unleashed flash floods in different parts of Baluchistan over the few days. Water levies broke leaving the people exposed to flood water. At least three villages in district Sibi have been destroyed. Houses, live-stock such as cattle and goats, household goods, clothes, shoes and other items have been destroyed. Residents of villages are currently without drinkable water, food, shelter and in need of clothes. In particular, the situation is dire for children and women and they are in desperate need of food and clothing. Disease is spreading fast in the areas affected due to lack of drinkable water. In particular, flu, fever, diarrhea, cholera have been noted and are spreading. The government's response has made matters worse. They failed to act immediately, leaving tens of thousands of people unaided. They came after twenty four hours to the make-shift camps with paltry amount of food bags to distribute. The gap between the food being distributed and the large number of people desperate to eat led to fighting breaking out making matters even worse for these desperate people. Rubina Baluch, Women Secretary LPP Baluchistan, who is a resident of one of the affected villages said, 'there is absolutely nothing left here – food, water, and clothing – and we are in desperate need of these'. At least, 10, 000 people are said to be in suffering in these grave conditions".

Perhaps this was the first appeal by any political group in Pakistan to ask people to help the victims of torrential rains in Baluchistan.

After an informal consultation with several social and political groups in Lahore, we decided to set up the first camp. Already a group of 42 activists including 35 women belonging to Labour Education Foundation were trapped in the town of Kalam, Swat valley. The flood in the river Swat had swept away all the bridges and the road links were cut off from the rest of the country. They were eventually evacuated by a military helicopter after 8 days of ordeal.

The camp in Lahore was supported by many activists and on the first day, we collected nearly 18,000 Rupees within two hours. Next day, it went up to nearly 50,000 Rupees.

A Labour Relief Campaign (LRC) committee was established with 8 members from eight different organizations. They included, the Khalid Malik Labour Education Foundation, the National Trade Union Federation, the Qalandar Memon Labour Party of Pakistan, the Bushra Khaliq Women Workers Help Line, the Ammar Jan Progressive Youth Front, the Farooq Tariq Pakistan Kissan Rabita Committee, the Khaliq Shah CADTM Pakistan and the Cindy Kariaper Pakistan For Palestine. This Labour Relief Campaign committee decided to meet at least twice in a week to discuss all aspect of the campaign.

The LRC committee agreed to campaign on two fronts, collecting funds for the immediate relief and to change the priorities of the national budget demanding a total no to repayment of foreign debts and reduce the military budget, no cuts in development budget, but grants and aid to those worst affected by the floods.

On 7th August, we issued a new appeal and here is a part that we wrote,

"Please donate to Labour Relief Campaign to help the people of Pakistan who are facing the worst ever floods of its history. Torrential rains have unleashed flash floods in different parts of the country since last three weeks. Water levies broke leaving the people exposed to flood water. More than 12 million people have suffered due to these floods. More than 650,000 houses have collapsed, mainly in villages. Thousands of acres of crops have been destroyed due to flood water. Houses, live-stock such as cattle and goats, household goods, clothes, shoes and other items

have been destroyed. Residents of villages are currently without drinkable water, food, shelter and in need of clothes”.

Five days later, the situation has even more worsened and **it was estimated that over 20 million people are affected by the flood by then,**

We wrote on 12 August,

“The flood is still at dangerous levels in several parts of Pakistan. The numbers of people affected by the flood have passed 20 million. More torrential rains are forecast by the weather department. This is been considered one of the most devastating flood in world history. The UN has once again appealed for donations for Pakistan. But there has been a very slow response internationally to help Pakistan in this period of great devastation. After destroying most of Khaiber Pukhtoonkhawa and Southern Punjab, the water has now washed down the Indus River Valley, causing a deluge further south in the Sindh province. The water has been powered by unusually fierce monsoon rains that began in the country’s northern areas some three weeks ago. Roads, bridges and other infrastructure have given way, overwhelming the government’s ability to cope. At this point an estimated 1,600 have been killed with another 5 million left homeless”.

Camps were set up in different parts of Pakistan including Rawalpindi, Mardan, Hyderabad, Moro, Karachi, Sanghar, Layya and Sibbi.

We send the appeal to all our international friends and by then, the world was awakening to the most catastrophic incident of Pakistan history.

In one month, we have raised the following

Lahore	Rs. 654587 (cash)
Lahore	Rs. 45000 (goods)
Rawalpindi	Rs. 5000 (cash)
Hyderabad	Rs. 184100 (cash)
Hyderabad	Rs. 299550 Goods and medicine
Moro	Rs. 766,190 (cash)
Karachi	Rs. 450,000 (cash)
Karachi	Rs. 250,000 (goods)
Mardan	Rs. 70,000 (cash)
Sibbi	did not have information
Sanghar	no information yet
Layya	no information yet
International appeal	Rs. 371784

Confirmed commitments and information received

SAP Netherlands	Euro 5000 (Rs. 550,000)
Olof Palme International Center Sweden	SEK 50,000 (Rs. 589,500)
Cultural Life Buoy campaign NOK 10,000	(Rs. 138,000)
Yasmeen USA	US\$ 2000 (Rs.172,000)
Pakistanies in Denmark	US \$ 1000 (Rs. 85000)

A total in cash raised from Pakistan: Rs. 2,129,877

International Rs. 371,784

Commitments Rs. 1,534,500

Goods: Rs. 594550

Total cash, goods and commitments on 3 September 2010, 4,630,711 (US\$ 54,478)

Apart from the relief campaign, we have also launched a political campaign for non payment of foreign debts by Pakistan. We held our first press conference in first week of August in Lahore and we said, "Pakistan must refuse to pay the foreign debts and divert the amount into the relief and rehabilitation of the flood affected people. It is high time to change the priorities of the national budget and all those suggestions to cut the development budget spending on flood affected people be stopped. There is an easy way out. Stop paying the debts owed to International Finance Institutions, donor countries and clubs".

The press conference was the first voice in Pakistan on the issue. We contacted like minded groups and parties to raise the issue and the idea was well received. Social and political groups in Islamabad met and decided to take on the issue. In Lahore, on 29th August, LRC organized a multi party conference to oppose the debt retirement and 28 political parties, trade unions and social movements agreed to participate in this campaign. On the 2nd September several hundreds marched to Islamabad to demand non payment of foreign debts. One of the largest private television channels, Dunia took up the issue on a prime time talk show, "Dunia Mery Aaghey" and invited one of the organizer of the demonstration to put up the case. There is now a beginning of the awakening of some main stream political parties to take up this issue.

Where the money is being spent

We have decided to spend the amount on flood victims on selected areas where we have local teams to deal the question of distribution in more organsied manner and also to the most needy ones. The initial three areas selected were Union Council Tully in Sibbi district of Baluchistan, Pir Sabaq union council of district Noshehra of Khaber Pukhtoonkhawa and Southern part of Punjab. We helped with food items, kitchen items and construction material in two areas, while we were unable to do anything in Saraiki area. Lately, LRC has send an amount to Hyderabad Jamshoro, Moro and Thatha area of Sindh through the Sindh Labour Relief Committee. The local teams in Baluchistan reported wide spread disruption in food item distribution and they had to take special measures to avoid that. They issue tokens of particular food basket after conducting surveys of

three villages and then asked them to collect food from a special place designated for collection the food items. The same process was carried out in Pir Sabaq area where distribution of food items and construction material was done with a very disciplined manner. The main reason of smooth distribution was our local committees which included political and trade unions activists.

In Hyderabad Jamshoro, we set up medical camps and distributed medicines through our doctors association. Here in Hyderabad, we were jointly working with the Communist Party of Pakistan and with Aadersh, a Sindhi literary magazine. In Moro, our local relief committee was formed in association with local traders and trade unions. These were the most successful in collecting amount and goods from an area which was itself effected. Through a joint effort, they have won the sympathies of many in the city and are the main distribution group of the area. Several other organizations have been contacted and asked for help in distribution to the flood affected people of Moro and Dadu district. In Karachi, SRLC set up four camps and sent four trucks of good to Moro and are at present busy in Thatha district to help the flood victims who are sleeping on roads and schools.

The International Response to LRC appeal

This was to give you some idea of our activity during the first month of our relief work. Most of the amount collected in Pakistan are from ordinary people. They have donated to us generously. By setting up camps and distributing aid to flood victims in some selected areas, we have tried to counter the influence of the right wing forces particularly the religious fundamentalists groups. Several hundreds activists of LRC are busy in collecting funds locally and we are also encouraged by different responses from abroad. Political groups associated with trade unions in several countries particularly in Netherlands and England have send us amount already, while several individual groups in the USA have brought some cash to the relief. From Sweden, we have already received information of 50,000 Swedish SKR and in Norway, an initiative by actor Toni Usman for a theater show on 19 September has already won support of Norway artist association with leading actors of Norway taking part voluntarily to help the campaign. In Australia, APHEDA, the official Australian trade unions international assistance agency is collecting funds for LRC.

We had the great arrival of South Asians at Lahore relief camp to collect funds from Pakistanis. Social and peace activists from India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka came to Lahore and brought some amount from their own countries and contributed to LRC funds. They have brought with this a consciousness of South Asian solidarity in real terms.

We appeal to all our international friends to continue collecting funds for our future planned aid and political activities. Apart from the campaign on debts, we have decided to organize peasant rallies in Sindh and Punjab to demand land rights and end of feudalism.

For more information, please visit the Labour Education Foundation website on www.lef.org.pk