

Why Have Donations to the Pakistan Flood Crisis Been Relatively Meagre?

The current flood-related crisis in Pakistan (see www.united-church.ca/pakistan), which began with the onset of torrential monsoon rains in late July, has not garnered the kind of response one might expect given its scale and impact on human life, according to numerous reports from media and Canadian and international relief organizations. Donors have not responded robustly as they did in the wake of the earthquake in Haiti in January.

For example, one week after launching a fundraising effort to help victims of Pakistan's floods, The Humanitarian Coalition, a coalition of Canadian charities (Care Canada, Save the Children, Oxfam-Canada, and Oxfam-Quebec), had raised just \$200,000 for the region. A week after they began a similar campaign following January's Haitian earthquake, more than \$3.5-million had been raised.

Yet, United Nations Secretary-General Ban-Ki Moon has called the crisis in Pakistan the worst he has ever seen. Media and aid agencies have speculated on the reasons for the tepid response. They include the following:

- Pakistan may have an image problem. In international media, Pakistan has often been portrayed as overly militarized, generally destabilized, corrupt at many levels of governance, and associated with international terrorism. Pakistan is also at times linked with wartorn Afghanistan. However, these depictions overlook the fact that the majority of Pakistanis are ordinary people seeking to support their families in impoverished conditions.
- The earthquake in Haiti received almost blanket international media coverage for weeks. While the Pakistan floods received not insignificant international media coverage, it has not been on the scale or of the intensity as that of Haiti.
- International media outlets have apparently not dispatched journalists to Pakistan in the numbers they did to Haiti.
- The remoteness of many of the communities affected by the flooding, as well as the flood conditions themselves, present significant logistical challenges to international reporters in gaining access to the stories of human suffering that tend to motivate potential donors.
- The earthquake in Haiti was a sudden event of catastrophic proportion that made the country the focus of immediate global attention. In contrast, the floods in Pakistan, although far more people are affected than were Haitians, have unfolded over several weeks as monsoon rains continued and became more intense. Therefore, the flood crisis may not have captured public attention in the same way.
- More than 200,000 people died in the earthquake in Haiti, a number that would have been deeply arresting for people in developed countries. In contrast (and to date, according to official reports from Pakistan), 1,600 Pakistanis have died in the floods (a number that will surely to grow). The

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amount of people killed in any disaster may have a bearing on whether, or how much, international citizens are moved to donate.

- In many disaster situations, the affected country can rely on national celebrities either living in the country or abroad in countries like the United States. These celebrities are often able to use their international popularity to affectively appeal to the public, governments, international institutions, and aid agencies for relief aid. Pakistan seems to lack such internationally recognized personalities.
- The Pakistan crisis occurred over the summer vacation period in Canada and the Western world when many people were away from TV and radio.
- Donor fatigue (to be distinguished from compassion fatigue) is also cited. Members of the public, only a few months before, gave extremely generously in response to the earthquake that caused massive loss of life and damage to infrastructure in Haiti. The proximity of the Haiti crisis in combination with the lingering global financial recession may have prompted individual donors to be more guarded with their money.
- Haiti is in the same hemisphere as Canada and therefore perhaps better known to Canadians and Americans, while Pakistan is several time zones away, and as a country, is perhaps not as well known.
- Pakistan does not share a common language with Canada as Haiti does.

It is reasonable to assume that some of the reasons listed above (and perhaps a convergence of many) have contributed to the international community's less than robust financial response to the crisis in Pakistan. As Christians and members of The United Church of Canada, however, we are called by God to respond as fulsomely and generously as we can, both individually and corporately.

As of August 26, United Church members had donated \$40,000 to the church's Pakistan Flood Relief Appeal, and we anticipate more donations after Labour Day when church activity tends to resume with vigour. Earlier in August the General Council Office contributed \$65,000 to the ACT Alliance appeal for Pakistan, \$75,000 also to ACT through its membership in the Canadian Foodgrains Bank (an amount that includes CIDA matching funds), and seed money in collaboration with other Canadian churches to attract a grant of \$50,000 from the Manitoba Council for International Cooperation which also will be sent to ACT. We continue to seek other options to generate more funds for relief and reconstruction in Pakistan.

August 31, 2010

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