

## Earthquake Aftermath in Northern Pakistan

### THE DANGER FROM PAKISTAN'S EARTHQUAKE IS NOT OVER

*The World Conservation Union (IUCN), the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) and CARE International warn against further risks from environmental hazards in Northern Pakistan.*

The worst earthquake in Pakistan's history has killed an estimated 58,000 people, wounded another 77,000 and spread devastation over nearly 30,000 square kilometers, as well as leaving at least 3.5 million people homeless. Rescue and reconstruction efforts have been seriously complicated by the quake's destruction of communications networks and roads. The World Conservation Union, the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) and CARE International warn now that many more people may die unless the aid organizations pay attention to the environmental hazards resulting from the quake.

The imminent onset of brutal winter conditions makes getting shelter and supplies to isolated quake victims at high altitudes an urgent priority, but in the rush to beat the winter deadline, it is important not to forget the ongoing dangers resulting from the quake. The most critical of these risks and how to deal with them are:

**Aftershocks** will continue for some time. They are not predictable and can occur at any moment. There is a high risk that buildings with structural damage will collapse. Even without aftershocks, damaged buildings may collapse with the onset of seasonal rains, snow and melting ice. The public should avoid entering or staying in damaged structures, or even coming close to them.

**Landslides** are likely to result from more aftershocks and heavy rains and melting snow will trigger mudslides. Shelters and roads on foothills and steep slopes are especially at risk. Temporary camps should avoid steep slopes and stream and river beds where they may be at risk from **flash floods**. Floods are an increased hazard as rivers, blocked by landslides, can break free. Roads are likely to be blocked by new landslides and snow.

**Disease** is expected to spread from poor housing and sanitation, especially in urban areas and new emergency settlements. Providing safe drinking water from clean sources, and providing proper sanitary conditions, should be a top priority.

**Debris** from collapsed and damaged buildings has created garbage that now poses health hazards as well as environmental concerns. The provision of relief items has added to the problem of waste that needs to be cleared. The clearing process needs to focus on re-use and recycling as much as possible. The debris which cannot be reused needs to be disposed off in an environmentally sound manner.



*Agony in Balakot*

**Forests** that were carelessly destroyed or left in bad condition before the earthquake took place might have helped to reduce the damage and loss to life from the quake. The need for shelter, firewood, and wood for reconstruction, by millions of people affected by the quake now poses a new threat to the surviving forests. Forest products are critical to the survival of disaster victims in the coming winter. However, unsustainable exploitation of the limited forest resources will add to the risk of landslides, erosion, droughts and floods. It is essential that measures be taken to manage the forests in a sustainable manner for the benefit of the earthquake affected people and to provide alternatives that will protect them from destruction.

In this situation of unimaginable misery and human suffering, it is crucial to focus on sustainable recovery and to prevent such new risks that might leave the earthquake's survivors even more vulnerable.



*Landslides in Muzaffarabad*

