



# Trade Union Campaign for relief of earthquake victims in Kashmir and Pakistan

PO Box 52135, London E9 5WR, Britain

## Earthquake disaster - the poorest suffer most. Appeal for funds which are still so urgently needed.

November 2005

Dear comrades and friends,

As you know, on 8 October, whole families, villages and towns were wiped out by the terrible earthquake which had its epicentre in Kashmir. The number of dead announced and confirmed by the government has now gone over 83,000. It could well reach 150,000 if those without shelter and the injured are not cared for immediately. Four million people are still homeless and so many of them are threatened with freezing to death, as the mountains are seized by Winter's grip. Government agencies and the army have still not reached many of the most remote areas.

As an indication of the scale of the death and destruction, when I travelled to Bagh, Kashmir, I found almost no buildings standing and 34 of my own relatives had perished. In Kalam, Batgram and Shangla in North West Frontier Province, the devastation was also horrific. We have now lost seven members of the Trade Union Rights campaign in that area – six killed immediately and one dying from injuries sustained.

### Scandalous neglect

We see that, as with all so-called 'natural' disasters, the worst affected by the earthquake are the poorest in society - workers and poor village people. Neo-liberal economic policies, applied by the representatives of big business in government, have vastly increased the death toll in this disaster. So-called emergency services have collapsed under the strain. Last year the Musharraf government spent 45% of its budget on the military and only 1.3% on the health service! In many places, injured people have been operated on in courtyards as clinics were filled to overflowing. School buildings, left in a dilapidated state for decades, collapsed instantly, crushing thousands of primary and secondary students to death.

**Official figures show that in the areas of Kashmir and NWFP hit by the earthquake, a total of 6,423 schools have been ruined, 2,187 health clinics have been totally destroyed and 634 made inoperable.**

Over the years no serious provision was ever made through government spending for an eventuality like this. Musharraf claims the government is doing everything possible when just a few helicopters have been made available and the military have taken their time doing anything useful. To divert attention from the failings of his regime in the midst of this vast human tragedy, the General complains about the inadequacies of the response of the 'international community'. Compared with the rapid response and big sums donated after the Tsunami disaster in December and the New Orleans devastation in August, he says Pakistan and Kashmir are faring badly. This is unfortunately true, but no excuse for his callous inaction and grossly inadequate mobilisation to aid the grieving, the injured and the homeless.

By contrast, millions of workers and youth in Pakistan and Kashmir, where the majority of people live in poverty, have managed to give food, clothing and money, in a moving show of solidarity with those who have suffered so terribly. The government has nowhere near matched this in terms of action on the ground.

The US government pledged \$50 million in aid when it has spent over \$66 billion on military operations in nearby Afghanistan. They must have hundreds of helicopters in Afghanistan for use against the Taliban yet they initially sent a miserly eight helicopters to help in Pakistan and Kashmir.

### Action and campaigning

It is facts like these which make a response from activists and trade unionists vital. The TURCP in Pakistan and Kashmir has already collected food aid on the ground. It has so far sent a total of 7 truckloads of food, tents, warm

clothing and other provisions to Bagh in Kashmir and Batgram in NWFP. This is a total of 36 tons (40,000 Kg) of supplies. TURC collecting posts have been established in Lahore and other cities and TURC camps, distribution points and clinics in a number of the affected areas.

As in the wake of the Tsunami, many individuals abroad and agencies have been collecting funds and trying to find ways of helping. But, unfortunately, as was the case in Sri Lanka and elsewhere, aid raised for the disaster victims is under the control of the same corrupt government whose policies have caused such suffering, directly through neglect and now through inaction.

In this situation, the TURCP is still appealing for donations which will go, through us, directly to help workers and fellow trade unionists in the areas affected by this crisis - to buy tents and blankets as well as food, water and medical supplies. But some of the money we receive is being used to organise campaigns against corruption and for justice for all earthquake victims. It is also needed to build workers' organisations and rebuild trade unions in the affected areas.

We are urging the working and poor people to elect committees from amongst their number to liaise with elected representatives of working people in the cities. This is to take the distribution of aid and reconstruction out of the hands of bureaucrats, politicians, the military and the religious extremists. These urgent tasks, in the interests of the working class and poor farming people, must be carried out. Capitalists and speculators, large and small, must be stopped from making themselves rich from supplying the needs of suffering people and from getting contracts for re-building homes and public buildings for the population.

### **Your donations still vital**

If you can make a donation or get your trade union, community organisation or group of friends or work-mates to make a donation, every penny (or rupee) will be used to continue this vital work. We will send an acknowledgement for any donation you make and tell you more about how the money is being used. So far we have raised well over £10,000 internationally and 586,000 rupees (£5,860) in Pakistan itself.

A campaign bank account exists for funds from outside Asia. Please make all cheques payable to 'TURCP' and send them to:- **Trade Union Rights Campaign Pakistan**, PO Box 52135, London E9 5WR, Britain. If you are sending money by bank transfer, the details are:- TURCP, Account number: 00574699, Sort code: 30-95-03 Leytonstone Lloyds TSB Branch, 797-799 High Road, Leytonstone. The IBAN number is:- GB70LOYD30950300574699, the BIC Code is:- LOYDGB21500 and the Swift Code is:- LOYDGB2L Please notify us of any transactions on:- [turcpakistan@yahoo.com](mailto:turcpakistan@yahoo.com) or by post to the address above.

On behalf of the TURC in Pakistan and Kashmir I want to thank all those who are expressing their support and solidarity, and making financial contributions.

Yours in struggle,



Azad Qadri,  
Organising Secretary, Trade Union Rights Campaign – Pakistan

### **The Trade Union Rights Campaign – Pakistan (TURCP)**

**The TURCP was set up in April 2005. The aim was to coordinate solidarity and support for workers' struggles against downsizing, privatisation and other neo-liberal policies. The World Bank, International Monetary Fund and imperialism generally has dictated these policies and they have been slavishly followed in Pakistan by the military-dominated government of General Musharraf. We are trade union leaders and activists who have organised ourselves on a radical fighting platform to oppose the massive attacks against Pakistani workers by the government and the big companies which dominate the economy.**

**The following unions in Pakistan have backed the campaign:** *Railway Workers' Union Workshops, PTCL Joint Workers' Action Committee, PTCL Lions Union, Postal Employees' Union, Muthida Labour Federation, Informal Sector Workers' Organisation, Teachers' Union, Commercial Workers' Union Lahore, RMS Employees' Union, Pakistan State Life Staff Union, Agriculture Workers' Union.*