



CRWRC
CHRISTIAN REFORMED
WORLD RELIEF COMMITTEE

Geo and Toni in Pakistan

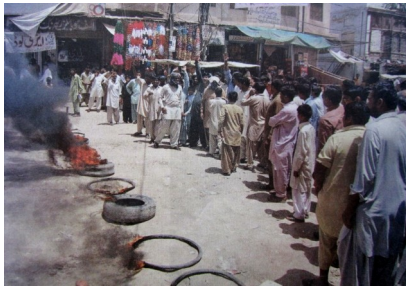
May 20, 2011

CRWRC Disaster Relief Pakistan Flood Project



Our last week in Pakistan. From near freezing temperatures when we first arrived, we are now experiencing temperatures in the 40s. The last few weeks the many Jacaranda trees in Islamabad were bursting in purple flowers. First oranges and strawberries and now watermelons, peaches and cherries can be bought from street vendors and soon mangos will be ripe. Women are wearing lighter weight shalwar kameez (long top with trousers and shawl) and are excited about the newest fashions and materials (lawn). The men have shed their blanket shawls and vests and are now wearing lighter weight shalwar kameez (long shirt with baggy trousers) although many men are still wearing suits to the office complete with ties. Demonstrations continue with the latest ones held to protest the increase in load shedding which occurs when not enough electricity is being produced to meet the needs of the people.

Power may be cut off for 4 or more hours a day and in Karachi (a city of over 15 million people) there has been no power for four days in the old city areas. In the heat, people are not only suffering from power shortages but the electrical rates have seen steep increases along with the prices for essential food staples. The lack of electricity is also impacting the industries as factories grind to a halt, employees are unable to earn an income and contracts are lost as owners are unable to meet the deadlines. Apart from all these worries, there is also the constant threat of terrorist activities especially in certain provinces as the backlash to Osama's death and anger towards the American presence continues. Here in Islamabad it has been very quiet and although ex-pats were keeping to their offices and accommodations, we noticed that more were out in the markets this past



weekend. Pakistan faces a long journey ahead in its fight not only for peace but to reach goals of enabling the 80% of the population living in poverty to be able to have access education (only 50% of school aged children are attending school - 63% are boys), to health care, to safe drinking water and sanitation, and to electricity.



Lunch with staff in Mardan office

Although George was able to visit the field office in Mardan, he was not able to receive the required permission from the government to visit the beneficiaries in Nowshera, the district where CRWRC is working. Our implementing partner I-LAP has a wonderful team working in Nowshera where, despite the bombings and violence in towns in the area, they have managed to keep the project on track. With the help of the recently formed CBOs (Community Based Organizations) they have completed the registration of 2,000 farmers who own or share-crop one to five acres of land in the many small villages in Nowshera. The next step will be to ensure the farmers receive assistance in preparing the land for the maize or corn crop. Tractors will be hired where

needed (some fields are still packed due to the floods and need blading) and small tools (hoes, spades, rake, digger, sickle, axe) will be provided to each farmer as well. Pakistan enjoys two crop seasons—Kharif or spring planting and Rabi or fall planting and relies heavily on its extensive irrigation system. During the flood, many of the irrigation canals were damaged and/or silted over and the CRWRC project includes a cash-for-work component where the farmers will be hired to clear out the canals leading from the primary and secondary canals and into their fields. The cash will assist the farmers in supporting their families while waiting for the harvest in September.

Besides the seed and cash-for-work program, 4,000 households in Nowshera will be receiving the last of 4 half month food distributions which were provided to supplement the food supplies of these flood affected families as they seek to get back to where they were before the floods - be that recovering from lost harvests, recovering small businesses or being able to continue their employment. As the floods destroyed many businesses, schools, hospitals, etc. many people were not able to return to work until their employers were re-established. CRWRC has also been able to continue to provide support for the medical clinic that I-LAP has established; important as health problems continue to occur especially with lack of access to clean drinking water aggravated now with the coming of the hot summer months.





Pakistan is one of four countries in the world where polio still impacts lives. A few years ago, the government refused to enforce vaccination of children as rumours spread that the vaccination was a ploy of the USA to poison their children. Last year, the concerned parents of children in northern rural Pakistan refused to allow health workers to administer polio vaccinations, mostly due to rumours that the polio vaccine was an American plot to sterilise innocent Muslim children. The disinformation - spread by extremist clerics using mosque loudspeakers and illegal radio stations, and by word of mouth - has caused a sharp jump in polio cases in Pakistan and affected global efforts to eradicate the debilitating disease. Thankfully the government has been able to dispel this belief and this month there has been a nation-wide polio vaccination blitz where the goal is to reach 30 million children. Although there have been a few reports of polio in the country, hopefully this disease will soon be eradicated.

When Pakistan became an independent country about 60 years ago, the vision of its founders was to create a pluralistic democracy for its 97% Muslim population. In the late 1970s the government takeover by a military junta led to changes in the constitution in order to appease the Muslim extremists who were gaining power due to the Soviet/Afghanistan war. One of the changes was to make it illegal (punishable by death) to convert from Muslim to any other faith as well as introducing a blasphemy law where a person defaming the Islam faith could receive the death penalty. I-LAP (Interfaith League Against Poverty) our partner in Pakistan, was founded to create understanding among the various faiths and Muslim groups of Pakistan. The chairman, besides having staff take turns giving the blessing at lunch, loves to bring up controversial subjects where lively dialogues about Christianity and Islam occur. Just as Westerners have opinions and ideas about Islam most of them through news media and email, so the Muslims have opinions about Christianity based on their media and clerics and opportunities to discuss and to engage in dialogue can reveal how Islam and Christianity has more in common than it has differences. Many beliefs that are attributed to Islam are due to custom and cultural activities with no foundation in Islamic faith or the Koran. One of our challenges as we work in Pakistan is how to ensure that those we help know we are there not to condemn the Muslim faith or life but to be the kind of witness exemplified by the life of Jesus. Our five months here have allowed us to come in contact with a large number of Muslims and not once did we experience any sign of hatred and many went out of their way to give a smile or to let us know that they were peace-loving and grateful for the work of CRWRC in Pakistan.

Quote from local newspaper reflects the opinion of many Pakistanis especially as they fear an increase in violence after the death of Osama bin Laden - *What is strategic for Pakistan? For it to be at peace with itself, as a country where, despite the social challenges and poverty, its people can sleep peacefully; where parents can send their children to school without fear; where there are no traffic jams because of police road-blocks; where politicians can reach out to the people without fear of being blown apart; where the images of shredded human bodies are a thing of the past; where international sporting events are frequently held once again, where cultural events can be held without body frisks at security gates. In short, Pakistan should no longer be chasing Al-Qaeda' ghosts in Waziristan at the behest of the US. As against 3,000 innocent US citizens killed on 9/11, 52,000 innocent Pakistanis have lost their lives and over 100,000 have been injured. If the US policy is to protect US citizens from perceived and potential threats, do we have a similar policy to protect our citizens? Or do we continue to allow our soldiers and innocent civilians to be turned into cannon-fodder in pursuit of the policies of self-serving rulers and prejudiced opinion-makers?* (Akbas S. Babar)

- The ants of Sri Lanka must have followed us back to Pakistan or the increase in temperature brought them out - a bit of juice left in a glass will attract so many tiny ants that you won't even want to touch it to rinse it out. They also attacked any crumbs left in the sofa and chairs that made it impossible to sit in until they cleaned it up. So no eating in bed!!
- The wild cat that slept in front of our window surprised us one morning by showing up with three kittens but quickly escaped when we went out to take her picture.
- The variety of fruits and vegetables in Pakistan is incredible however prices are out of the reach of the poor who exist mainly on a diet of rice, naan bread and dried beans. Pakistanis eat with spoon and fork using the fork to fill the spoon - the food is fantastic.
- Tradition has men use henna to cover their grey hair - they also say that it makes them feel cooler. The trend is changing and now men and women use hair colour which comes in small packets for about 25 cents. There are also skin lightening products including suntan lotion!
- We were amazed at the colourful trucks in Haiti but the Pakistani trucks outdo them as they not only paint the trucks but also decorate with chains, metal, wood, mirrors and lights; spending up to \$3,000 to proudly mark the truck with cultural and personal details.
- Winter and summer you can always spot boys and men playing cricket



Relaxing during Sri Lanka stay



Decorated Pakistani truck



Pick-up game of cricket



A henna beard