

**United Nations Press Conference 31 August 2010**  
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*Theme: Concerted Action by the UN System to Save Lives and Rebuild Communities Affected by the Floods*

I have just this morning returned from Swat Valley where I witnessed first hand the devastation wrought by the terrible floods that have been afflicting this country for the last several weeks. I later visited Kandhar camp near Nowshera where lives have been forever changed as homes, schools and livelihood sources have been destroyed. I saw entire families living in the open waiting for support from the international community. I have seen your distress and immense human need. I have not had a chance in this short visit to go to Punjab and Sindh but I am well aware of similar scenes of devastation there. This is still an unfolding tragedy and clearly, we are fighting against time to save lives. But we are also moving to rapidly put in place the foundations for recovery – in the short, medium and long term. This is an emergency that we know will take many years to recover from.

I am here together with my UN colleagues to express UNESCO's friendship and solidarity – with families who have lost their close of kin, with communities that have seen their entire surroundings washed away, to the Government of Pakistan that is struggling to cope with this unprecedented natural disaster.

We are with Pakistan around the clock. I am personally chairing a task force of senior experts at our headquarters in Paris, while our offices in Bangkok and Tehran are also being harnessed to provide all possible technical and human support to our team here in Islamabad.

We know that coordination is one of the keys to an effective response. We are an active member of the ONE UN partnership for early recovery efforts. We are present in all the emergency coordination hubs in three most affected provinces.

We are not an agency that deals in providing day-to-day relief items. We are present to help rebuild the education system, to protect your country's rich cultural heritage, to get vital information to isolated populations and to share with you our scientific expertise to manage and avert such risks in the future.

Last week a multidisciplinary team of six most senior science experts from UNESCO and associated centres of excellence met at length here in Islamabad with the leading scientific figures and heads of institutions. As a result of this mission an integrated nationally owned scientific plan has been developed for short and long term enhancement of the country's capacity to manage floods and related geohazards. These actions include integrated flood and watershed management; groundwater resources for emergency situations, land slides and ground instability, and; education and capacity building. UNESCO will be working closely

with Pakistan institutions to put this scientific plan into action. Four priority early action areas have already been identified:

- A study of the current floods to try to explain scientific reasons why they became the worst in living memory and to identify ways in which such a disaster may be averted or minimized in the future
- Restoring degraded early warning systems especially for forecasting flash floods
- Identifying locations for safe groundwater extraction in flood affected regions
- Identification of landslide risks in relief camp areas to guide community recovery

Education must be an integral part of the recovery and reconstruction effort. Today more than six thousands schools are being used as emergency shelters. Thousands of other school buildings have been destroyed or damaged. We are working closely with national authorities and Education Cluster members to ensure an integrated education response. It is crucial that we work at all levels of the education system, hand in hand with the Government as we did after the 2005 earthquake in Muzaffarabad, to ensure the provision of quality education, in this emergency phase, and well into the recovery.

We are currently building on programmes that are already in operation in a dozen or so of the most affected districts. The coverage of Nonformal Education Learning Centres now running in Sindh province and in Punjab will be expanded. These centres offer training in literacy and different aspects of public health and hygiene. Training materials for psycho-social rehabilitation and health education, originally developed in the aftermath of the 2005 earthquake, are being adapted for use by teachers in today's emergency.

An additional 1000 teachers in flood affected areas will be trained in:

- Helping children in camps to emotionally adjust and cope with loss and trauma
- Assisting parents and local communities in disaster management
- Health and Hygiene Education
- Life skills based Education

Education will be linked with other activities in the fields of culture, science and communications to maximize our impact, whether through public awareness campaigns or community mobilization. We will encourage attention to the area of disaster risk reduction and preparedness through education – working with teachers, students and communities.

In Culture, our World Heritage experts stand ready to assist Pakistani authorities. We are particularly concerned at the moment about the historic monuments at Makli, Thatta, as thousands of people seek refuge there from the flood waters. Let me take this opportunity to underline the importance of campaigns to protect heritage. If the ancient site of Moenjodaro appears to be close to secure, despite risks, it is in large measure the direct result of the large-scale international campaign – one of the longest in UNESCO's history – that was completed

in 1997. It notably comprised of groundwater control through the installation of tube wells, and the conservation of structural remains, in close cooperation with local communities. The latest satellite images show that the last flash tide was too close to the height of mud embankment and we are closely monitoring and assessing threats to protect one of humanity's most ancient cities.

In the field of communications, we are working with local and national radio stations to ensure access to life saving messages and information for flood-affected populations. We want to enhance the content of such communications as time goes by to help people improve their livelihoods in the rebuilding phase. As soon as it is possible, UNESCO will support the production of radio serial broadcasts, and informational theatre.

It may seem premature to speak about this, but communities that have lost vital agro-based livelihoods will need to find new sources of income. We run a project in the Swat valley and three districts of Punjab province that focuses on creating livelihoods for women and their families by using traditional knowledge and skills of local crafts for income generation and enhance market opportunities. We will be assessing damage to this project but also working with communities and other partners in flood-affected areas to develop income-generating activities in the field of traditional craft and design because these have the potential to empower villagers, especially women.

These are still early days. We are working with all our UN Partners to assist Pakistan in assessing needs. But it is a whole human, social and cultural fabric that has been affected and calls for our attention. Our most urgent responsibility is to give hope in the future to the millions of children, women and men who have been affected by the floods – this is the only assurance of a peaceful recovery that we are all determined to build.