

10 October 2006

---

## **Pakistan: tens of thousands displaced by army operations against insurgent groups**

---

*Army operations targeting insurgent groups in Waziristan and Balochistan are the main causes of conflict-induced displacement in Pakistan today. There is no official information on the number of people displaced and access of journalists and aid workers to the affected areas is tightly restricted. But best estimates from the media and aid agencies are that at the very least many tens of thousands of people have been forced to flee their homes in both areas, though most of these will have returned home within a matter of weeks.*

*In Balochistan, the fighting has been between tribal rebels and the army. Apart from longstanding demands for increased political autonomy, development projects are fuelling the current conflict in Balochistan as the local population demands increased control over and more benefits from the exploitation of natural resources. The current unrest started in 2003 and has intensified during 2005 and 2006, bringing 40,000 army troops to the region to fight local militant groups. Estimates of the number displaced at its peak are as high as 200,000.*

*In Waziristan, a government-led operation started in March 2004 against militants connected to Taleban and al-Qaeda hiding on the Pakistan side of the border. Since then, search operations and fighting between rebel groups and the army have displaced an unknown number of civilians. As many as 80,000 army troops are deployed along the border with Afghanistan. The presidents of the two countries swap accusations of not doing enough to prevent Taleban and al-Qaeda activities along the border.*

*Despite the large numbers displaced due to the conflicts, humanitarian aid from outsiders has been rejected so far. As no one is allowed in to assess the situation in the conflict-affected areas, it is not possible to verify the little information that has trickled out about the displaced populations. However, both national and international actors must insist that the conflict-affected populations be granted basic assistance and protection during displacement, as well as a safe and voluntary return to their homes when the situation permits.*

## Map of Pakistan



More maps are available on <http://www.internal-displacement.org/>

## Internal displacement in South Waziristan

**Waziristan** is divided into two "agencies", North Waziristan and South Waziristan, with estimated populations (as of 1998) of 361,246 and 429,841 respectively. North Waziristan is mainly inhabited by farming Wazir tribes, and South Waziristan by two Pashtun tribes, Wazir and Mahsud. Waziristan belongs to the seven Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) bordering Afghanistan. The tribal areas are indirectly governed by political agents – a system that was created by the former British rulers. In practice, central government rarely exerted direct control beyond the main roads and towns, with traditional tribal structures ruling everywhere else in the territory. The Waziri tribes have maintained close relations for centuries with other Waziris living across the British-drawn border in Afghanistan. Sources: Rediff.com, 7 April 2004; Wikipedia Encyclopedia

The conflict in Waziristan began in March 2004 around the South Waziristan capital of Wana, some 20 kilometres from the border with Afghanistan. As part of the US-led "war on terror", the Pakistani army launched attacks to eradicate remnants of the Taleban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan believed to be hiding in the area. The army operations in turn triggered armed resistance by local tribesmen. During the offensive, some 70,000 troops were deployed in the border region and between 5,000 and 7,500 troops were directly involved in the fighting (AI, 1 April 2004).

The use of both light and heavy artillery against the militants and an intensive search for collaborators among the civilian population led to many civilian casualties and the demolition of

hundreds of houses, and forced thousands to flee their homes. Estimates of the number of people forced out by the military and paramilitary troops during the March operation vary, with some saying the number of displaced was at least 30,000. Amnesty International reported that a wide range of human rights violations were committed during the two-week operation (IRIN, 8 September 2004; Al Jazeera, 20 March 2004; AI, 1 April 2004).

A peace agreement was signed with local tribes in April 2004, but collapsed in June when Pakistani authorities maintained that certain clans in South Waziristan were still protecting foreign Islamist fighters. Clashes erupted again around the mountainous areas of Shakai, Santoi and Mantoi close to the border with Afghanistan, leading to displacement of thousands of people (IRIN, 8 September 2004; Dawn, 14 July and 20 July 2004). One newspaper reported that 12,000 people fled to North Waziristan during this period (The News, 10 July 2004; IRIN, 19 August 2004).

Military operations continued especially in areas inhabited by the Mahsuds, leading to an unknown but massive displacement of civilians. Mahsud families fled to the Frontier Region Jandola or further away to Tank, Dera Ismail Khan and Karachi, which has the largest concentration of ethnic Pashtuns in Pakistan. As of September 2004, one estimate said that up to 50,000 people had been internally displaced by the fighting in South Waziristan (BBC, 24 September 2004). A fact-finding mission by the Peshawar High Court Bar Association (PHCBA) in September

2004 also concluded that thousands were displaced, apart from civilian casualties and human rights abuses (Dawn, 22 September 2004). Closure of camps for Afghan refugees was also part of the operation in order to destroy possible hiding places for militants. A peace agreement was signed with the Mahsuds in February 2005, but tensions continued to run high in the region.

In April 2005, the United States stated that foreign fighters were still infiltrating Afghanistan from Pakistan and asked Pakistani authorities to reinforce military action against remnants of Taleban and al-Qaeda operating from bases in Waziristan (Mir, 2 May 2005).

During 2005, the Pakistani government switched the focus from South to North Waziristan where officials claimed up to 1,000 militants were protected by local tribes. The government also sent more troops to the border region, increasing the total number to 80,000. Hundreds of civilian casualties, including women and children, have been reported as a result of the fighting.

Thousands of people were reported to flee fighting around the town of Miranshah in North Waziristan during March 2006 as a result of military operations against militant positions around the city. Most of the displaced returned to their homes after two weeks (Reuters, May 2006). Many more are likely to have been displaced due to army operations during the course of 2005 and 2006, but no other information has been found about their numbers and living conditions. Information-gathering is also complicated by the fact that the displaced often live with relatives and friends. In September 2006, the Pakistani

government concluded a ceasefire with pro-Taleban militants in North Waziristan, but violence has continued on several occasions (COE-DMHA, 5 and 21 September 2006).

Little is known about the conditions for returnees. While blocking all journalists and humanitarian organisations from entering, Pakistani military authorities have denied all reports of a humanitarian crisis and displacement in Waziristan and say there is a proper framework for providing assistance to the affected population. Also, the authorities have consistently denied the shortage of food or items of daily use that has been reported by the media.

### **Massive displacement reported from Balochistan**

**Balochistan** is the largest of Pakistan's four provinces. It covers 43 per cent of its land area, but is inhabited by only six per cent of Pakistan's population, or around 8 million people. The Baloch make up 54.7 per cent of the population while 29 per cent are Pashtun. Although Balochistan is Pakistan's richest province in terms of energy and mineral resources, it is the most under-developed province, with half of its population living below the poverty line. Sources: ICG, September 2006; IRIN, 26 April 2006

Tension has been simmering for decades in Pakistan's south-western Balochistan province. Tribal militants in the area have been demanding greater political autonomy and protesting against the fact that natural resources in the province are controlled by the federal government while the region receives only what they perceive as minor royalties or compensation. While the province

accounts for 36 per cent of Pakistan's gas production, close to half of Balochistan's households live without electricity, for example.

While local militant groups have clashed with government forces since the 1970s, the current unrest has intensified during 2005 and 2006. The Pakistani army has launched a major offensive, particularly against the Bugti, Marri and Mengal tribes, each believed to be controlling thousands of militiamen. However, the local political support for the uprising goes far beyond these three tribes (Saghal, 1 June 2006; ICG, 14 September 2006, p.10). The first reports about major displacement due to fighting appeared in April 2005 when some 300 government troops were surrounded by thousands of tribal militants in the town of Dera Bugti, located close to Pakistan's largest gas reserves. The fighting was reported to have displaced around 6,000 people and killed scores of civilians (COE-DMHA, 29 April 2005; ICG, 14 September 2006, p.8). Militants have continued to target gas pipelines, railway lines and electricity networks, and have launched rocket attacks on government buildings and army bases, followed by retaliation and search operations by the military (Reuters, May 2006). The security situation for the civilian population has severely worsened due to the use of landmines in parts of the Dera Bugti and Kohlu districts both by rebel forces, in particular the Balochistan Liberation Army, and by the Pakistani army. As of April 2006, more than 50 civilians had been killed by landmine explosions since the beginning of the year (IRIN, 26 April 2006). The army has used heavy artillery and launched air strikes against insurgent bases; this has also killed and maimed

civilians. By December 2005, about 90 per cent of the population in the town of Dera Bugti was reported to have fled and displacement was also reported in the district of Kohlu. During subsequent fighting, thousands of civilians were reported to have fled several areas in the neighbouring Jaffarabad and Sibi districts (AHRC, 21 July 2006).

The situation deteriorated further in the wake of the killing of Baloch tribal leader Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti in August 2006 which was followed by bloody riots. Several have warned that the conflict will go on escalating if the government continues its harsh military response against political opposition groups in the region (ICG, 14 September 2006).

There are no official or UN estimates of the extent of the displacement due to the fighting. One regional human rights organisation says 200,000 people were displaced as of July 2006. The displaced had at that point fled to relief camps or towns in safe areas of Jaffarabad, and the Nasirabad, Quetta and Khuzdar districts of Balochistan, as well as to the Sindh and Punjab provinces (AHRC, 21 July 2006). No other source has verified this figure. Another media report says 50,000 remained displaced due to military operations as of July 2006 (Dawn, 13 July 2006).

By early summer 2006, President General Pervez Musharraf said that life had returned to normal in Dera Bugti and that those displaced by the violence were now returning to their homes. No reports have been found on the number and conditions of return, however. In July 2006, military operations were still reported to be affecting more than 15

districts in Balochistan. Also, the government has been accused of deliberately fuelling unrest in the violence-affected area by supporting local tribes who are in conflict with the Bugtis (AHRC, 21 July 2006; IPCS, 28 June 2006).

Several reports have testified to the critical living conditions for the displaced who moved to relief camps as well as a general apathy demonstrated by the Pakistani authorities vis-à-vis the displaced civilian population. Although the media have not been allowed to move freely in the areas most affected by the violence, deplorable conditions and lack of assistance to the displaced in relief camps have been reported since the onset of the conflict. In May 2006, assistance had not yet reached the camps. The displaced were reported to be living in the open in baking hot weather without food and other facilities. Provincial opposition leaders appealed to international and national humanitarian organisations for assistance (IRIN, 26 April 2006; Dawn, 16 April 2006). The displaced were still reported to be living in temporary settlements without provision for water, sanitation, food, schooling and health care. A local human rights group reported that the displaced had to carry water from at least one to three kilometres away. No medical help was being provided to them. Most of the displaced are children and women and they are reported to suffer from diarrhoea, dehydration and malaria. Some cases of deaths have been reported but not confirmed by any hospitals (IRIN, 31 August 2006; AHRC, 21 July 2006).

The government is accused of deliberately blocking access to the

displaced populations and has stopped efforts to provide health services in the camps. Official sources said to a newspaper that the displaced were well off and not in need of assistance (Dawn, 13 July 2006).

### **Internal displacement in Pakistan-administered Kashmir**

Pakistani-controlled **Kashmir** is divided into the Northern Areas with a population of 1.5 million under direct Pakistani administration, and in the south Azad Kashmir with a population of 2.8 million. The latter is often also referred to as Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), and enjoys a certain level of autonomy, although it is still technically under Pakistani government control. Source: Knudsen 2002, p.34

Cross-border shelling due to the dispute over Kashmir between India and Pakistan used to be the main reason for conflict-induced displacement in Pakistan. Estimates of the number of displaced due to the fighting vary, but it is documented that at least 50,000 were displaced due to the conflict both in Azad Kashmir and in the Northern Areas (IRIN, 3 February 2005; IR, 12 June 2002).

The territorial dispute with India over Kashmir has been the root cause of displacement in Pakistani-controlled Kashmir. Pakistan did not recognise Kashmir's accession to India in 1947 and sticks by the 1948 UN decision that the mainly-Muslim Kashmiris themselves should be allowed to decide whether to opt for India, Pakistan or independence. This has been the cause for two wars, in 1947–48 and 1965, and a period of intensified fighting in 1971. In 1972, the

Line of Control was demarcated as an official ceasefire line. Since then, the two countries have mobilised for war on four occasions (1986-87, 1990, 1999 and 2002). Each time war has been avoided after international diplomatic efforts. However, despite repeated ceasefires, regular exchanges of artillery fire across the Line of Control have caused thousands to flee their homes on both sides.

A ceasefire between India and Pakistan concluded in 2003 has encouraged thousands of displaced in Pakistani-controlled Kashmir to return to their home villages. An HRCP fact-finding mission in August 2005 found that some people displaced during the 1999 conflict were still living in camps in other parts of the Northern Areas (HRCP, January 2006).

On 8 October 2005, an earthquake measuring 7.6 on the Richter scale struck northern Pakistan and affected large tracts of Pakistan-administered Kashmir and the North West Frontier Province (NWFP), displacing millions of people. The earthquake left some 73,000 people dead and two million people in need of relief and rehabilitation. Over 300,000 displaced people spent the winter in relief camps. As of September 2006, this number had been reduced to 35,000 people, a number which is expected to rise again with the onset of winter. Most of the remaining displaced have become landless due to the earthquake and landslides, or they have physical handicaps (IRIN, 7 September 2006; COE-DMHA, 21 September 2006).

## **Humanitarian Access**

Journalists, humanitarian actors and observers have consistently been denied access to violence-affected areas in Pakistan. After the army launched attacks against the militant hide-outs in Waziristan in March 2004, access to the affected population was categorically denied (OneWorld South Asia, 26 March 2004). The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) did a small-scale humanitarian assessment, but could not draw any conclusions as large areas were inaccessible (IRIN, 19 August 2004).

In Balochistan, there are reports that the government has denied access to the displaced populations also for local organisations who wanted to secure medical facilities in the relief camps (Reuters 2006; AHRC, 21 July 2006).

## **Sectarian violence increases risk of displacement**

Another worrying development is the rise of sectarian violence in Pakistan. Amnesty International reports that over recent years, hundreds of people have died in attacks carried out by different Muslim sects or groups on each other and by the Muslim majority against members of religious minorities (AI, 16 April 2006). Such violence could lead to further displacement in the country unless steps are taken to protect religious minorities from persecution. Attacks against the Shia minority by Sunni extremist groups have increased sharply, as have attacks against the Hindu, Christian and Ahmadi religious communities. Shia groups have also been responsible for several episodes of religiously motivated killings (ICG, 18 April 2005; AI, 16 April 2006). Within

the first five months of 2005, 120 civilians lost their lives, and 286 were injured in 30 incidents of sectarian violence (Mir, in SAIR, 6 June 2005).

### **Development-induced displacement**

Development-induced displacement is on the rise in Pakistan, with several large dam projects in the pipeline. In Azad Kashmir, the raising of the height of the Mangla Dam may displace up to 44,000 people. The government says the affected population will be compensated by a package including building of new towns and cash assistance. Other forthcoming projects include the Chotiari Dam project in the Sanghar district of Sindh province and development projects in the Gwadar area which may displace 70,000 people. At the same time, the issue of compensation for those affected by previous development projects such as the building of the Mangla Dam nearly four decades ago, and the Tarbela Dam in the 1970s, remains unresolved.

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan has recommended that a survey should be launched to assess the precise numbers of those displaced by development schemes or natural disasters so that a strategy to rehabilitate them can be finalised, and that compensation must be adequate (HRCP, February 2005, pp. 287-288).

### **National and international responses**

The Pakistani government does not have a national policy addressing conflict-induced displacement, and does not even recognise the fact that thousands of

people have fled from their homes due to fighting in Balochistan and Waziristan. There have been no reports of any systematic governmental assistance to the internally displaced.

However, there are several previous examples of government support to IDPs. People displaced due to conflict with India in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir were entitled to a modest monthly cash payment and were provided with short-term life-saving assistance by Pakistani authorities, although longer-term humanitarian aid was insufficient and sporadic. The government has also been providing assistance to IDPs after natural disasters such as the Kashmir earthquake.

The ICRC is one of the few international humanitarian organisations which has focused on the conflict-affected populations in Pakistan. In Kashmir, ICRC carried out food and non-food item distribution, monitoring, shelter assistance, support during the return phase and promoted the permanent solutions. Between 2000 and 2003, ICRC provided assistance to five IDP camps housing 5,200 people (Exchange of information with ICRC, June 2005). As for Waziristan, international aid agencies have expressed concern about the situation, but all requests to carry out independent assessments have been denied by the Pakistani authorities on security grounds. UNHCR has made it clear that it is not willing to assist the internally displaced from South Waziristan, arguing that this falls under the responsibility of the Pakistani government (Daily Times, 19 August 2004).

The plight of the conflict-affected populations during the years of conflict with India was largely ignored by the international aid community. Fewer than 50 military observers from the UN Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP) monitor the Line of Control. This UN presence, however, was never accompanied by UN humanitarian assistance, either in Pakistani- or in Indian-controlled areas (ICG, June 2004).

In order to minimise the suffering of the civilian population hit by internal conflict, the Pakistani government has to recognise its responsibility and ensure an adequate response. The government should as soon as possible address the humanitarian situation, ensure that a survey is undertaken to map the extent of problems facing the displaced and allow aid agencies to start operations targeting the conflict-affected population.

*Note: This is a summary of the IDMC's country profile of the situation of internal displacement in Pakistan. The full country profile is available online [here](#).*

## Sources:

**Aljazeera**, 21 March 2004, "Frustrated Pakistani army looks to negotiate"

**Amnesty International (AI)**, 13 April 2006, Pakistan: Concern about escalating sectarian violence (ASA 33/010/2006)

**Amnesty International (AI)**, April 2004, Human rights abuses in the search for al-Qa'ida and Taleban in the tribal areas (AI INDEX: ASA 33/011/2004)

**Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC)**, 21 July 2006, General Appeal: Urgent help is needed for 200,000 displaced victims of military operations in Balochistan province

**BBC News**, 24 September 2004, "Pakistan army accused of abuses"

**Center of Excellence in Disaster Management & Humanitarian Assistance (COE-DMHA)**, 21 September 2006, UN says more funds needed for Pakistani earthquake relief

**Center of Excellence in Disaster Management & Humanitarian Assistance (COE-DMHA)**, 29 April 2005, Clashes reported in tribal area of Pakistan's southwestern Balochistan province

**Center of Excellence in Disaster Management & Humanitarian Assistance (COE-DMHA)**, 21 September 2006, Afghanistan and Pakistan exchange barbs over security

**Center of Excellence in Disaster Management & Humanitarian Assistance (COE-DMHA)**, 5 September 2006, Pakistan signs peace deal with pro-Taliban militants in tribal areas

**Daily Times (Pakistan)**, 19 August 2004, "UNHCR declines to relieve dislocated Wazir tribesmen"

**Dawn**, 13 July 2006, When pride stands in the way of tears

**Dawn**, 13 July 2006, Decades of unease with the Centre

**Dawn**, 13 July 2006, Decades of unease with the Centre

**Dawn**, 22 September 2004, "Thousands displaced, civilians killed: Bar commission's report on Wana action"

**Dawn**, 14 July 2004, "Tribal elders split over penalizing militants"

**Dawn**, 21 July 2004, "Jets, gunships pound militants' positions: 'Several mountain posts secured'"

**Human Rights Commission of Pakistan**, 2006, State of Human Rights 2005

**Human Rights Commission of Pakistan**, February 2005, State of Human Rights in 2004 - Refugees

**Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN)**, 3 February 2005, Pakistan: Solution needed for displaced in Pakistan-administered Kashmir

**Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN)**, 2 February 2006, PAKISTAN: Focus on the conflict in Balochistan

**Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN)**, 31 August 2006, More fighting in Balochistan, but no aid in eight long months

**Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN)**, 26 April 2006, PAKISTAN: Humanitarian situation in parts of Balochistan deteriorating

**Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN)**, 19 August 2004, PAKISTAN: Growing concern over humanitarian situation in tribal area

**Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN)**, 8 September 2004, "AFGHANISTAN-PAKISTAN: Displaced in Wana say they are receiving little support"

**Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN)**, 14 September 2006, Landmine toll increasing in restive Balochistan

**Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN)**, 7 September 2006, Interview with UN Humanitarian Coordinator, Jan Vandemoortele

**International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)**, 9 June 2005, Exchange of Information with ICRC

**International Crisis Group (ICG)**, 18 April 2005, The State of Sectarianism in Pakistan

**International Crisis Group (ICG)**, 24 June 2004, India/Pakistan Relations and Kashmir: Steps Towards Peace

**International Crisis Group (ICG)**, 14 September 2006, Pakistan: The Worsening Conflict in Balochistan

**Islamic Relief (IR)**, 12 June 2002, Initial Need Assessment & Disaster Preparedness Plan for AJK (For LoC Emergency)

**Mir, Amir**, 6 June 2005, Pakistan: Sectarian Monster, in South Asia Intelligence Review, vol. 3, no.47

**Mir, Amir**, 2 May 2005, War and Peace in Waziristan, in South Asia Intelligence Review, Volume 3, No. 42,

**One World South Asia**, 26 March 2004, "Media Blackout in Pakistan's Tribal Areas Triggers Outrage"

**Pakistan Census Organization (at Geo Hive Global Statistics page)**, July 2001, Pakistan

**Rediff.Com**, 7 April 2004, Pakistan's Wild West Frontier

**Reuters AlertNet**, May 2006, Violence escalates on western border

**Saghal, Amrish**, June 2006, The Balochis of Balochistan

**South Asia Tribune**, 26 September 2004, "Is the Pakistan Army Using Chemical Weapons in Wana Operation"

**The News**, 10 July 2004, "Partial ban lifting has little impact on tribesmen's lives"

Note: All documents used in this profile summary are directly accessible on the [List of Sources](#) page of the Pakistan country page.

## About the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, established in 1998 by the Norwegian Refugee Council, is the leading international body monitoring conflict-induced internal displacement worldwide.

Through its work, the Centre contributes to improving national and international capacities to protect and assist the millions of people around the globe who have been displaced within their own country as a result of conflicts or human rights violations.

At the request of the United Nations, the Geneva-based Centre runs an online database providing comprehensive information and analysis on internal displacement in some 50 countries.

Based on its monitoring and data collection activities, the Centre advocates for durable solutions to the plight of the internally displaced in line with international standards.

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre also carries out training activities to enhance the capacity of local actors to respond to the needs of internally displaced people. In its work, the Centre cooperates with and provides support to local and national civil society initiatives.

For more information, visit the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre website and the database at [www.internal-displacement.org](http://www.internal-displacement.org).

Media contact:

**Jens-Hagen Eschenbächer**

Head of Monitoring and Advocacy Department

Tel.: +41 (0)22 799 07 03

Email: [jens.eschenbaecher@nrc.ch](mailto:jens.eschenbaecher@nrc.ch)

**Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre**

Norwegian Refugee Council

Chemin de Balexert 7-9

1219 Geneva, Switzerland

[www.internal-displacement.org](http://www.internal-displacement.org)

Tel: +41 22 799 0700

Fax: +41 22 799 0701