

Muslim Aid Australia on the ground in Pakistan

Between the 3rd of September and the 7th of September, Tanvir Uddin, International Programs Manager at Muslim Aid Australia, an international development agency, visited the flood-affected areas in the Khyber-Pakhtunkwa (KP) Province (formerly North-West Frontier Province) in Pakistan. As a committed NGO to serve humanity through channelling charitable funds to improving the poor and destitute regardless of race or creed, MAA was the first and only reported Muslim charity in Australia to send a staff member to assess the situation, the relief efforts and to develop future project plans.



From visiting various severely-affected districts in KP, Tanvir commented “We all read about the figures of millions of people affected and billions of dollars in damage, however it was only when I met people on the ground and saw the destruction to houses, public infrastructures, businesses and people’s livelihoods that I was able to really grasp the scale of the disaster.” Tanvir visited two particularly affected districts, Nowshera and Charsadda which were two urban centres that were first affected by the flash floods from July 27th. Whilst the living standards were not high amongst the communities in these districts, most families have their own income sources and were able to maintain their basic requirements. However, the flood has taken everything that they had furthermore destroyed the means for livelihoods. For instance, the crop fields are covered by mud and the higher water table makes working the land near impossible. Also, many households lost farm animals (a valued asset in these regions) and other sources of income such as businesses and equipment. With regards to basic needs, water wells are clogged with muddy water and people are suffering from the lack of water.

MAA’s work with AKF

Muslim Aid Australia (MAA) was one of the first charity organisations to mobilise for the Pakistan flood appeal in late July. With generous contributions from donors (especially during the month of Ramadan), much funds were collected for the relief and rehabilitation of the flood affectees. With its first instalment which Tanvir saw the implementation of, MAA distributed 500 tents in several districts and also funded food packages. After meeting with the partner NGO and assessing the ground-situation, Tanvir was able to recommend further funding for a range of relief projects in several flood-affected districts. The second intervention stage which has already started will address health, water and food concerns. Tanvir also held meetings with MA-Pakistan, Help in Need and Rural Health and Development Foundation to discuss relief work in other areas of Pakistan and to initiate long-term development projects.

Tanvir noted that he was overwhelmed by the scale of the disaster which was “much more than I had imagined in terms of crippling communities entirely”. He also agreed that “the flood was truly a ‘silent tsunami’ as UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki Moon had stated”. The big question that one would need to ask is where does one begin in repairing the damage and rebuilding people’s lives? Furthermore, as not all aid will go out to every person immediately, how does one prioritise and rationalise between beneficiaries or even between those households who will receive the benefit?



For Tanvir, this was his first visit to a natural disaster site and he was able to appreciate how difficult the work can be in such locations. He also realised that although many organisations had intervened to varying degrees initially, few were providing ongoing support and relief in the really far-flung, isolated locations.

Despite the scale of the disaster and the challenges in assisting everyone, Tanvir was optimistic about the possibility for rehabilitating many households. He was impressed by the work of



MAA’s partner NGO, Al-Khidmat Foundation, which had already mobilised relief to numerous districts across the KP, Sindh, and Punjab provinces. With ongoing contributions from the international community and with carefully-thought of development projects, the flood affected families can benefit from livelihood, water security, healthcare and education projects.

The definitive experience for Tanvir was realising that the flood affectees are not lazy and aid-dependent; they had their own established livelihoods and are keen to restart. They may have been poor but they were satisfied as they had a shelter, enough food and clothes. Yet the flood has destroyed all that they had built and many are left with a few scattered possessions and the clothes on their backs. Hence, their humble request to the worldwide community is just to assist them to get back on their feet. This is the responsibility for everyone, especially in developed countries, to assist those in need, not by their own cause, to pick themselves up once again.