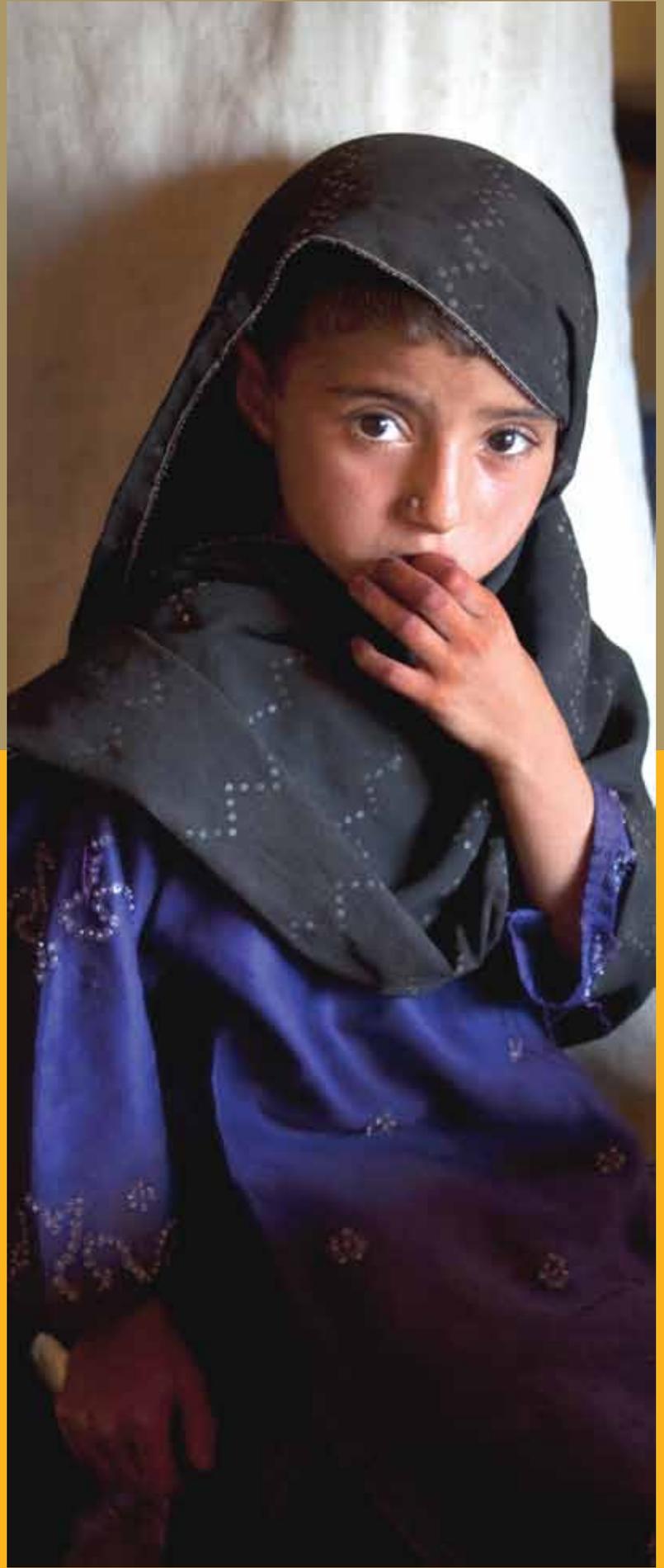


A cry from the Valley

Narrations by the
people of Malakand



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Omar Asghar Khan Foundation

Established in 1999, Omar Asghar Khan Foundation is creating opportunities for people, particularly the vulnerable, to collectively secure human and livelihood rights by strengthening their asset base and making institutions and policies pro-poor. The Foundation's work is primarily based in NWFP. Its advocacy of pro-poor policies and actions has a national focus. The Foundation has offices in Islamabad, Abbottabad, and Mardan.

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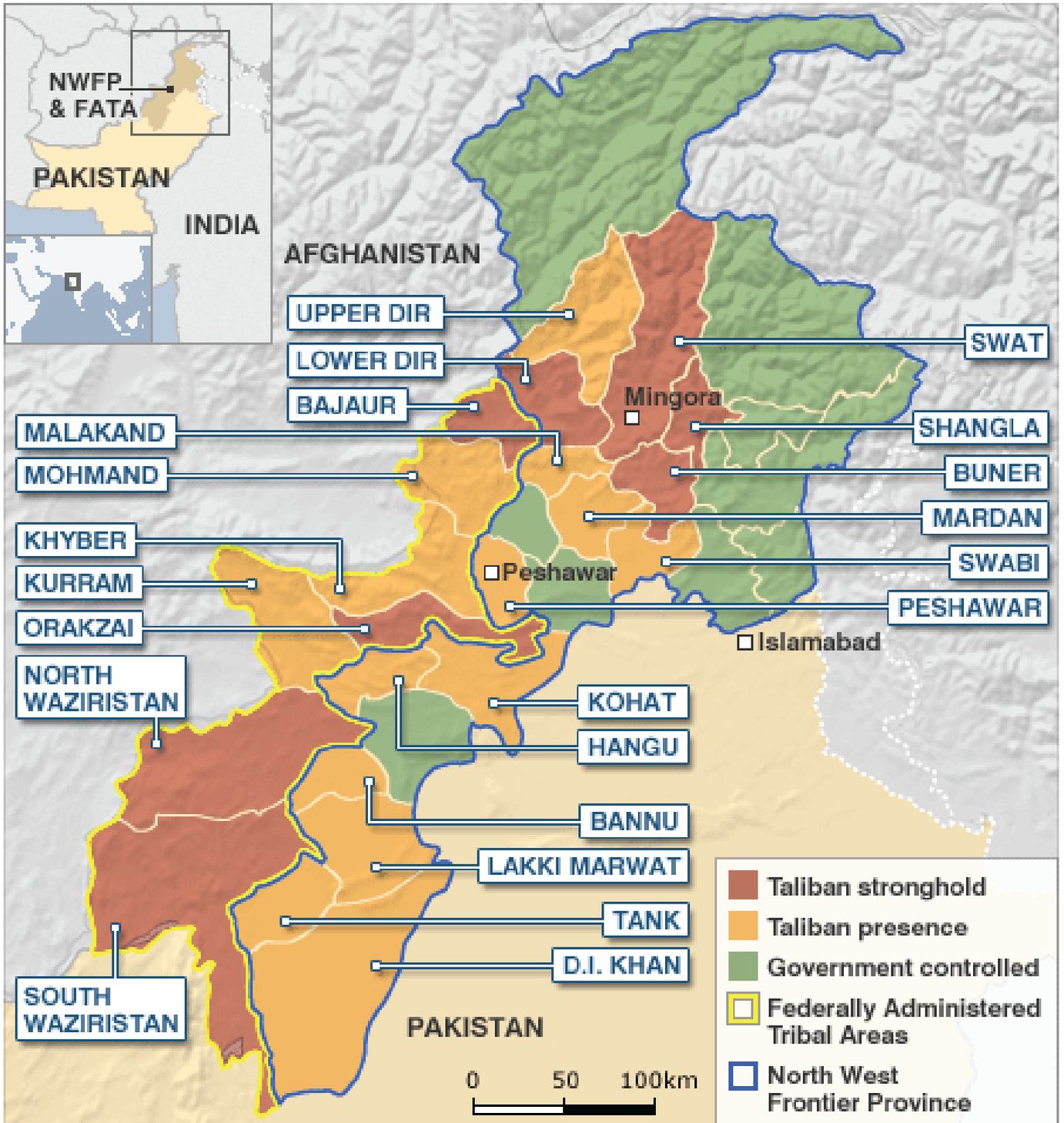
Acknowledgements

This publication documents the narrations and views of 464 women and 423 men displaced by the armed conflict in north western Pakistan. Taking shelter in Mardan, they belonged to different parts of Malakand including Mingora, Faizabad, Swat Khas, Kotha, Shamoza, Thana, Saidu Sharif, Dir, Maidan, Amankot, Haji Baba, Matta, Dheri, Buner, Pir Baba, Kanju, Malam Jabba, Khwazakhela, Kabal, Mangalwah, and Kala Killay. They presented the realities of their lives and defined their priorities for post-conflict rehabilitation. Their contributions, interest, time, and patience are gratefully acknowledged.

The narrations were facilitated and documented by three field teams of two women and two men each. Coordination support was provided by Mr. Naeem Sabir. Their diligence and dedication are duly acknowledged. The report was edited and compiled with support from Mr. Nick Fielding. His contributions are also gratefully acknowledged.

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Source BBC

Introduction

No-one knows for sure how many people from north western Pakistan have been forced to leave their homes in the last few months. Anything up to around three million is the latest guess. As Pakistan's military began its Operation Rah-e-Rast (Path of Redemption) in Malakand, entire villages were often given just hours - usually through warnings broadcast on the radio - to leave behind their properties and businesses, fields, livestock and livelihoods and flee.

Many of those that did not immediately take heed of the warnings to leave became victims of the massive firepower unleashed by both the military and the militants as they engaged each other in bloody combat.

The military claims to have killed around 1,600 militants in Malakand alone in the first two months of its Operation Rah-e-Rast. How many civilians have been killed is unknown. Even before the military offensive began, civilians were being butchered by the Taliban in the name of Islam and left in public places as a warning to others.

Life for those fleeing Malakand and other regions affected by the fighting has been hard. The lucky ones have been living with friends and relatives, but hundreds of thousands of others have had to find shelter anywhere they can - in abandoned factories and schools or under canvas in makeshift camps.

Towards the end of July 2009 the Omar Asghar Khan Foundation sent three teams of researchers to engage the displaced in a dialogue.

The dialogue was framed around four key questions:

- **What were the conditions at the time of displacement?**
- **What were issues around relief assistance?**
- **What are views and concerns around repatriation?**
- **What are key post-conflict policy?**

Our team of researchers went to eight of the 72 Union Councils in Mardan District, the main area in which the displaced were sheltering. Each team was made up of two men and two women.

In each of the Union Councils, at least five per cent of the total number of adult displaced people was interviewed. Thus if there were 6,000 displaced people in one Union Council, of whom half were adult, then interviews were conducted with 150 people, half of them men and half women. Those interviewed included half aged between 16-25, with the remainder over 25 years old.

We make no apology for the fact that some of these interviews - even though the interviewees are not identified - make harrowing reading. Who could fail to be moved by these often terrible and dramatic stories? If anything our report underestimates the scale of human suffering inflicted on the people of Malakand and other areas of north western Pakistan.

Section 1: Displacement

- **Why did you leave?**
- **What state did you leave your home?**
- **Was anyone left behind? Have you been in contact with them?**

For the great majority of respondents, armed conflict between the military and the Taliban was the main reason for leaving home. This included heavy shelling and mortar fire as well as the military-imposed curfew.

Many experienced and despised the Taliban brutalities, but they did not leave their homes for this reason. It was only when the military action started that they decided to leave in hundreds of thousands.

“Taliban kay zulm par na zameen phattee, na aasman roya – phir bhi na atey lakin hukumat ki fauj-kushi nay hamay ghar chhornay par majboor kiya.”

“The ground did not split open nor did the sky shed tears at the atrocities inflicted by the Taliban. We would still not come here if it was not for the military action that forced us to leave our homes.”

“Hum jang say nahin – qiyamat say bhag aye hain.”
“We fled from doomsday -- not the war.”

“Humaray bache neem pagal hain. Woh bookh payas say nidhaal ho chuke thay.”
“Our children are traumatized and were exhausted by hunger and thirst.”

“Hum janat mein dozakh ki zindagi guzar rahe thay.”
“We were living the life of hell (despite) living in heaven.”

Swat was a place of beauty just like the heavens. Tourists would come here from all over the world. A few years ago, there were no Taliban and there were no atrocities.



Nature's beauty - Swat

“Perhaps our enemies were envious and so they destroyed our heaven. We don't know where our enemies - the enemies of our religion and the enemies of our nation - came from. Before we knew it, the whole area was filled by Taliban. They committed extreme violence in the name of Islam and robbed us of our peace of mind. If the people of Swat had not provided financial help and sanctuary in their homes, this state of affairs would not have spread to Buner and other places.”

Most had little warning before being forced to leave. Some were eating a meal, others were watching television or involved in daily chores. Many people felt that they should have been given more warning before the hostilities began. At least they could have left after securing their homes and their assets.

“We fled to save our lives. We brought only our money and jewellery. Many were not even able to lock their house. We left as we were fearful of what may happen if we stayed. We grabbed whatever was at hand.”



Fleeing armed conflict

The majority left as the military announcement of impending military action was made on 6 May. In some cases the military announcement was made at midnight. Others got information through announcements made through mosques and or from text messages on mobile phones from relatives.

“Due to the curfew we did not have any food or any income or livelihood. And so we left. Artillery shells were coming down like rain. We collected five kilos of steel in our home due to the shells. Even the imam could not call out the azan for prayers.”

“We were given three hours’ notice and by the time we left intense shelling was going on.”

There was little food because the markets were closed and no electricity or water or gas for two weeks, so people realised they would have to leave. Where food was available, the prices began to rise. A 20 kg bag of flour was being sold for Rs.2,000. Normally it would cost around Rs.550.

Some of the women in this traditional society said that they ran in such haste that they left without chadors – and they had to be given chadors by others.

“I was taking a shower and heard a loud bang. I was so frightened, I ran out without a dupatta. I am mortified that my father saw me in such a state.”

The journey was very difficult and very long. When we reached a vehicle the driver asked for Rs.700 per person. We tried to plead and also protested, but they were adamant and so we had to pay the exorbitant prices. Such prices were out of reach for the poor and very poor – and so they were much worse off. The journey was long and difficult – we could not even stop for water.

Bakht Jan bibi, an elderly woman from Barikot, Swat

“The Taliban would fire from near our homes and flee – and then the military would bomb the place. So many of our family had already died from mortar shelling, we left so that those that have survived would not be killed.”

One person said that the government announced that all should leave and that those left behind would be considered to be Taliban. There was very little choice. People had to leave. Some people saw a ticker on the television asking people to leave their homes. Some were eating their meals or preparing them. They left their homes in God’s care.

In Maidan (Dir) people were surprised by the military offensive as they believe that the Taliban were not operational there.

“A mortar shell killed my neighbour – it instilled such fear and mental tension that we all also left.”

“We were visiting an ailing relative outside our village. There, people said there was no point in going back, so instead of returning home we left in search of a safe place. We don’t know what happened to our homes. We stopped at Kabal but the fighting reached there as well and so we had to leave that too.”

One person said that the Taliban, the police and the military are the same and that they were making money while the common people were suffering. The military would fire at the Taliban who would come into populated areas which would in turn lead to what is known as “collateral damage”, namely civilian casualties.

“The military was searching people, ordering them to lie face down without their kameez and also beating them – checking whether they were Taliban or not.”

“The Taliban took our money and our jewellery in the name of Islam. During the armed conflict, Maulana Fazlullah made a speech on the radio that said the women of Swat have given some small jewellery but soon the time would come to give the larger pieces.”

“The khans misused the police and other government services and resources to exploit people, which is why the Taliban rose in numbers and popularity.”

“The Taliban had blown up schools and also destroyed houses. There was no business. They inflicted a lot of destruction. Many people were killed or injured during the armed conflict between the Taliban and the military.”



A destroyed school in Swat

“Those that were involved in petty crime and drugs became the Taliban. But they keep their faces covered so we don't know who they are.”

My 13-year old daughter went out to play. When she did not return home, I waited frantically. I also made a commitment to sacrifice buffaloes worth Rs.500,000 if she came home safely. On the fourth day I went out searching for her and found her decapitated head under a rock near the site of a bomb blast. People advised that I should bury her head, but I could not do so and instead kept it safely with myself and left it in my home before leaving. I hope it is alright. I am not concerned with the rest of the house.

Zulaikha Bibi, Mingora, Swat

Some were not able to bury their dead and had to leave the corpses of dead family members in their homes before fleeing. They were deeply affected by the fact that their bodies had not had a proper funeral.

“We were told to leave for a safer area, but the safe areas were under curfew. And the journey to the safe areas was very difficult, especially for the elderly, the ill and the very young. I hit my five-year old son and so did my husband because he wanted to be picked up and could not walk further. But we could not pick him as I was already carrying one child and my husband was carrying another.”

Most people left their cattle behind and are not sure what has happened to them. Some brought their cattle along but have been forced to sell them for a pittance. Others could not afford to bring their cattle because of the transportation costs.

“Kahan ka ghar – kaisa ghar? Hum tau aik veraan khandar chorh kar aye hain. Humara to sara ghar tabah ho chukka tha.”

“Which home – what house? We have left behind ruins. Our homes are completely destroyed.”



Destroyed homes

In most cases everyone left the family homestead. No-one was left behind to guard the homes. In a few cases young men and the elderly were left behind. Some said they were afraid that the Taliban may take over their homes. They make the more difficult trip between Mardan and Swat via an alternate, but longer and more difficult route, to check on homes and belongings. They have had little, if any, contact with those left behind. There is very little information. Some did not know how those left behind were – whether they were alive or not.

“Even if we had not left any one behind, others would let us know what was going on. Those left behind often had trouble using mobile phones (because all communications is jammed). The mobile phone cards that are normally Rs.100 were being sold for Rs.150. We have heard from others that the Taliban have looted the homes we left behind and took away whatever money was there.”



Mourning the dead

My brother's son, a policeman, was kidnapped by the Taliban. We kept calling on his mobile but there was no answer. After many attempts the phone was answered by a talib who said that my nephew was alright and would come home soon. Later some people saw his beheaded body lying in the green chowk (square). When we went to get the body there was a note ordering that the body must not be removed for three hours, as it must serve as a lesson for others. Due to curfew, there was hardly anyone present at his funeral. I did not even see his face.

Amina bibi, Mingora, Swat

The Taliban in our neighbourhood would invite us to join them. But we were not willing to do so. They kidnapped one of the people from the neighbourhood. Their beheaded body was later found in the green chowk (square) with a note saying that if any one dared to lift the dead body, their dead body will be found in the same place the following day.

Hussain, Mingora, Swat

Section 2: Relief and assistance

- **What support did you need and did you get it?**
- **What are your current most urgent needs?**
- **Who provided the most effective support?**
- **Were you satisfied with the government's relief assistance? How could it be improved?**

For most, the journey to security was long and arduous. There was also much tension as the armed conflict between the military and militants was all around those attempting to flee to safety.

"We were hungry and thirsty after our long and very tough journey to safety. We desperately needed food and water - cold water. Local people en route provided food, water and even gave toffees to our children."

As is to be expected, food and shelter were the priority needs of people. Those forced to leave their homes acknowledged with deep gratitude the support provided by the people of Mardan and also from other parts of the country.



Food - a priority need

"When we reached Mardan, we heaved a sigh of relief and thanked God by bowing our heads in gratitude that our lives had been spared. But having reached safety, we still had to deal with many problems. But at least we are alive."

"Yeh socha keh idhar maut aye gee tau janaza to parha jaey ga aur qabar mein duaon key sath rakha jaey ga."

"At least here we will get a proper funeral and we will be placed in our graves with proper prayers."

One woman said that as she had walked long distances and also had to carry luggage, she had feared a miscarriage. When she was able to access a doctor on the second day, it was confirmed that she had had a miscarriage.

"We reached Mardan at 1:00 am and were given food by the local people. They continued to feed us for two weeks, and also provided us basic necessities."

"We needed food and shelter as the highest priority. Everything was available but only from private sources. The government did not do anything. Local organisations helped a lot. Some political activists from the Awami National Party helped us."

"When we reached a safe area we needed immediate shelter as our family is a large one and we could not all stay with our relatives, so we then moved to a nearby public school."



Queuing for food

People helped us with everything – food, charpoy, and utensils, etc. They helped us wholeheartedly. Some even offered shelter to strangers. Local people have done so much, but they are also now tired. Now we send children with utensils to homes to collect food. We eat what they collect from other homes. Sometimes we are able to eat and if not we go to sleep hungry. When the children wake up, we tell them to go back to sleep as there is no tea or gas.

Naseeruddin, Matta, Swat

“NGOs also played their role – their services are applauded. NGOs extended help from door-to-door and we are happy with them. Yet despite all the efforts of local people and NGOs, our needs are still not met. Like the US we are also demanding that they do more.”



Food distribution by an NGO

People expressed dissatisfaction with government relief assistance and also its distribution. Some were grateful that the government at least gave some support. One person said that they would not even ask for any cash if they were able to go home and if the government helps them get to their homes.

“We are dissatisfied with the government. It has not given enough. It has given misleading information on the schedule for accessing money and other support which has often been incorrect or changed, causing confusion and frustration.”

“Government support - if any - came only after two weeks. The government has given us food rations twice in two months, but that has met less than half our needs – so we are both satisfied and dissatisfied with the government. We believe that distribution should be the responsibility of people with integrity as those in-charge of distribution, including the local maulvi (religious leader) and councillor, retain half of the goods for themselves.

The Nazim provided 10 sewing machines for the displaced in a high school in Mardan Khas, but they were usurped by the school’s headmaster. Inequality in distribution of aid is rampant. There were no checks or accountability or oversight.”

“We had suffered 21 days of curfew back home. We had no food and after several days, some of our menfolk made their way to the local food market, but were only able to get some overripe bananas. As there was nothing else, we fed our children these bananas. We then left our homes with nothing and had hoped to get some support when we reached safety. But even here we were disappointed by the government. We are 113 persons, we have received rations twice, and some have received it only once. We wonder why we are being punished by Allah. We are constantly praying to ask for His forgiveness.”

“We also believe that many did a lot for us and some of it did not reach us. The government has done very little. It is only giving us Rs.25,000, which is nothing compared to the losses we have incurred. Some people have not even got the Rs.25,000. This is also due to a flawed registration process.”

One person claimed that he paid Rs.1,250 for his registration. People also said they had problems accessing cash from ATMs and would have preferred receiving the Rs.25,000 as a check.



"Rs.25,000 is given as if it is Rs.25 crores (Rs.250,000,000)"

Some used the Rs.25,000 from the government for food rations as they had not received food from any other source. Some said they needed milk and clothes for children as they had only received some support once and were now left with nothing. People also faced many problems in the registration process. They were unsure where to go and what to do and were not adequately guided by the government.

Many people complained about corruption in government relief distribution. Some claimed to have received Rs.5,000 from bait-ul-mal, but that this was not given to everyone. Others believe that they have been "sold" to attract dollars and aid from other countries.

"People from across Pakistan helped. But neither the federal nor the provincial governments came to our aid."

"Mein apne shohar say kehti hoon kay awaz uthao, woh kehta hai kay kissay kahun? Khuda hum ko apne watan janay ka keh dey ab."

"I tell my husband to raise his voice, and he says who should I speak to? May God allow us to return to our homes now."



Homeless and uncertain

Health facilities were not very accessible and often of poor quality. Those who sheltered with host families needed medicines, and felt that they should have made a greater effort to reach the medical centres set up by the government within camps. One person claimed that her father-in-law died due to lack of medicines. Some people said they had to bear their own healthcare expenses including surgeries. The government should have set up committees for health, cleanliness, food and other necessities and included local people that had respect and integrity so things would have been much smoother.

"Meri beti bemar hui, tau mein nay shohar say kaha uss ka ilaj karao, kisi say karz ley lo, kyun kay kisi doosray kay watan mein. maut bhi koi maut hai?"

"When my daughter fell ill, I told my husband to arrange for her treatment. I said he should get a loan or do whatever needs to be done. What kind of a death is it if it is away from home?"

"My son and I are both ill, we have prickly heat. I got medicines from the school, but they didn't work. I then consulted a private doctor who told me that the medicines were expired. We are poor, what do we know?"



Healthcare - urgently needed

Many felt that local people and others provided everything they needed but some felt that they did not receive as much assistance as they required. Many also said that they have received the government cash assistance through Smart Cards, but that the size of transfer was insufficient. Some felt that the government should provide shelter and housing if they are unable to return to their homes.

“We just want to go home. People are tired and exhausted by their unfortunate conditions, and are concerned that conditions may worsen. We need peace and stability. Our trials increased our anxieties beyond imagination. We are upset, tense, and frustrated. Children and adults are both afraid of any bang – we are even afraid of firecrackers.”



Tired and hungry

Even relief promised by political parties was ineffectively delivered or not delivered at all. For example, one political party announced cash grant of Rs.10,000 per family, in reality this meant that a number of families - not all - received just Rs.5,000, half of what was promised.

One woman recounted that her son, Mujahid, was picked up by soldiers a few days previously. He has not yet returned. She said that other people have also been picked up. She said that unless her son and the sons of other people returned, they would not go home.

Section 3: Repatriation concerns

- **What do you think of the government's repatriation plan?**
- **Are you willing to return according to this plan?**
- **What conditions do you expect if you return now?**
- **What minimum conditions are essential for a safe return?**
- **What should be done to achieve the desired conditions?**

Generally people are both critical and sceptical of the government repatriation plans. They are desperate to return home, but don't want to face the possibility of continuing violence, food shortages, destroyed houses or lack of employment.

Many say that they didn't want to return while there was still a curfew. Others say that the government should provide food for up to three months because of high food prices and the fact that many of the crops on which people depend for income have either rotted in the fields or been destroyed in the conflict.

"We want to go home, and our urgent need is finance for transport which is about Rs.7,000-Rs.10,000 (for a vehicle carrying 4-5 persons)."

"We don't know how we will face our beautiful watan (homeland) again which has mercilessly been destroyed."



Swat-serenity lost

"Humaray, pyaray, pyaray log jis aziyat ki maut maray hain aur jis tarha humaray murday wahan par dafan honay say reh gaey ya gharoon ya kamroom mein dafnaya hain – aisay mein bahla humaray dil mein hukumat say mutaliq kiya khush-fahimi ho sakti hai – hum hargiz hukumat key iqdamat say mutmayeen nahin hain."

"Our dear ones died a painful death, and their corpses are left in homes and rooms without a proper burial. So what expectations can we have from the government? We are not at all satisfied with government measures."

"We don't know what steps have been taken by the government for repatriation. But we know that big contingents of people are returning – which is a good thing. If there is adequate security for return then this is a good thing. We found out about this through the TV. But there are still many areas that are under conflict. Therefore some areas are still not open and those from such areas are still in Mardan. Some of these belong to Charbagh – where the operation is still going on."

Many people were worried that they were becoming a burden on the families and friends who had been sheltering them for weeks and months.

"We don't want to be a burden on our hosts anymore. We're ready to return to our homes as directed by the government but we're unsure of the conditions on reaching our homes. We fear that shelling and mortars may have destroyed our homes and schools and colleges. We are still afraid and apprehensive. Our children are particularly scared. If they send us back accompanied by a military escort then we will feel more confident. We are also fearful that the conditions back home may return to lawlessness or be worse than before. We have been assured by the government that conditions will not deteriorate and that we will be able to live peacefully as before."

"We fear there will be nothing for us to eat. We hear that tomatoes are sold at Rs.150/kilo in Swat – if that's true, how will we be able to feed ourselves?"

“We don’t know about government arrangements for return. They should just give us money so we can return on our own. We are being told to vacate the schools in which we are living by 25th July. But why should we leave, they have not even registered us as yet? We have no transport, our homes are destroyed and we hear that the fighting is still on as is the curfew.”

to return until there is peace. What will happen if we go back and there is no peace? Will we come back here?

“Government must make transport arrangements and must tell us where they are taking us, and if they are taking us back home they must assure us that there is peace. The government must give us food stock for 3-4 months on our return as the conditions back home are still uncertain.”



The long journey home

“We need assurances that we will be safe back home and also that there will no harm en route – only then will we go. Security must also be provided inside our vehicles so that no talib is able to come back with us. We must have proper military escort – on the road and also with helicopters. We have heard that there is adequate checking – they are checking for arms and to see if there are any talibs amongst those returning.”

“Hukumat ko pur-aman wapsi key sath sath, pur-aman swat bhi wapas dena hoga.”

“Along with peaceful return, the government must also return a peaceful Swat to us.”

“We don’t want to return at this time, as there is still curfew and also problems with earning an income. We are not willing

“We’ve been told by people back home that the government has made camps for us there and that we will live in camps on our return. We’ve also heard that the government has announced that people must remain in their homes and also keep their lights on in the night. Anyone who leaves their homes will have the risk of Taliban taking their homes.”

“The government must provide adequate information on repatriation and also set up information centres to facilitate citizens returning home.”

“The government has mistreated us here and also back home.”

Section 4: Post-conflict priorities

- **What should be the government's policies on law enforcement, livelihood, social services?**
- **What role should the government play? What responsibilities does it have?**
- **What are the responsibilities of citizens?**

Generally, there is huge dissatisfaction with the way in which the government has responded to the social crisis caused by the mass displacement of hundreds of thousands of people from Malakand and other areas of north western Pakistan. The overwhelming desire is for peace and security. People are concerned about how they are going to educate their children, how they are going to earn a living, the state of their housing. Many want compensation for the privations they have suffered. They believe that the way aid has been handled has been corrupt, with some even suggesting that they are simply being used as a way of raising aid funds from the international donor community.

"The government must conduct a survey to assess losses, and ensure that adequate compensation is paid. We have suffered immensely and deserve a peaceful return with due facilities and support. We should be given cash, income sources, and housing when we return to our homes. We also need medicines, clothes and other basic necessities."



"We need security and need to feel safe from talibs"

"The government must unveil a long-term strategy and ensure that the rights of the citizens are protected. Pakistan and the world must focus on us – we have given supreme sacrifices for peace in the region and the world. They must unite to work with and for us."

"We don't trust the government. We want to go back but are not sure why the government is sending us back before the conditions have normalized."

"Government needs to focus on education which has been affected for more than two years. As the Taliban have destroyed schools, tent schools should be set up so that pupils can immediately get back to lessons until new schools are rebuilt. School fees should be waived. Children have been traumatized, and need psychosocial support."

"NGOs should be given a due role in Swat's rehabilitation. They will do the work properly. Nazimeen (mayors) should not be given any role as they will support their favourites. Local committees should be formed to oversee rehabilitation and ensure the involvement of local people."

"We want peace. There should be no bombs, no murders or looting. While leaving home, there shouldn't be the fear of whether we will return home or not. We just want a decrease in our anxieties. We want a mediated resolution between the military and the Taliban so that the conflict ends and both the military and the Taliban leave this area."

Compensation and a desire to become economically productive was a constant theme.

"If we are compensated for our losses, we may have some peace of mind. This may take some time, but we are hopeful that with the Grace of God we will get some support."

"We have incurred huge losses – our homes, our livelihoods, our livestock and even infrastructure like roads have been destroyed – all this must be rehabilitated and compensation provided for losses."

"When we return, our menfolk will need to focus on rebuilding homes. So how will they take care of livelihood? What can be done if roads, markets and other infrastructure have been destroyed? Where will we get any capital? Even if some is given by the government or others it will be distributed among relatives and others will be left out."

"The government must help us rebuild our homes and also provide immediate shelter. It should also rebuild schools, health facilities including hospitals and other infrastructure destroyed so that we can live peacefully. Agricultural loans must be written off, interest-free loans should be provided, and electricity/gas bills should be waived. Healthcare should be given free of cost."

There was an overwhelming sense that the army should protect those returning home and learn to distinguish good citizens from bad.

“Government should build military cantonments and retain a military presence to ensure our security from people perpetuating violence and so that extremists are not given a chance to regroup and fool people again in the name of Islam. We feel that the perpetrators cannot be Muslims as Muslims cannot treat other Muslims in such a base manner. The military should patrol our areas on a daily basis and work with citizens to improve conditions and to ensure that Talibanization does not happen again.”

“Our military personnel are our brothers and we are prepared to work alongside them. Curfew must be lifted. The military needs to rebuild its image and regain its credibility among citizens by treating them well and with respect. Many innocent people were picked up and also killed by the military on the pretext of being Taliban. The military must act judiciously. Our enemy and theirs is the same. The military must act with due responsibility.”



“Military should be able to distinguish ordinary people from the Taliban”

“Earlier, there would be a military checkpoint and then a Taliban one close by. This must not be allowed to happen again. The tussle between the Taliban and the military must conclusively end.”



Taliban station in Matta

“Some people believe that the majority of extremists are Afghans and that arms and ammunition are provided by India. They use Islam to befool innocent people.”

“The military should be used for extending rehabilitation support as we do not trust the government. But the military is not the answer for all ills. We cannot depend on the military for everything.”

“The local thana (police stations) should be rehabilitated, and better and more responsible staff should be appointed so that they may perform their duties well. They must be given proper salaries. For proper training, retired police personnel should also be drawn in.”

As well as the rapid restoration of policing, people want functioning courts - one of the reasons why there was some initial support for the Taliban is because they promised swift justice.

“The judiciary should be restored. And pending cases in the courts should be vacated.”

“Law enforcement must be strengthened, and access to justice must be improved. The military should train the police. People must feel confident to approach the police and the courts for resolving their problems. Staff must be better trained and not like their predecessors who were responsible for spreading lawlessness. They should work with local affected people so that we can collectively fight the enemies of the state and start rehabilitation work.”

“The government must take measures to ensure that our wounds are healed. Just like the wounds of Lal Masjid/Jamia Hafza led to the creation of the Taliban, we do not want the wounds of Swat to result in anything that may be even more dangerous.”

“The government must compensate us for our losses, especially the loss of loved ones, homes, shops, hotels, etc. They must rehabilitate all of this. Our harvest was destroyed and we are in debt. Our household possessions have also been destroyed, for which the government must provide due compensation. For this it must give us a reasonable deadline. Within one year we want our Swat, and our conditions to be what they were before the operation and the Taliban.”

*“Hum sifar say zindagi shooro kar rahe hain,”
“We are beginning our lives again from naught.”*

“Monthly stipends and other facilities like healthcare should be provided to orphans and other destitute people.”



Any means of transportation

“We worked hard for 20-30 and even 50 years and had also suffered the problems of living away from our homes to establish ourselves and help improve the future of our children. Now all this is lost. Some of us have become mental patients.”

“Government must consult us and include us in decisions. We do not just want government statements and announcements.”

Cash to help rebuild lives needs to be combined with the rapid restoration of basic services such as power and water, education and health care.

“Water, electricity, and food should be restored immediately. The government must focus on the judiciary so that justice provision is accessible, affordable, and prompt. Development work should be expedited, including road construction.”

“Teachers should be reinstated, and their salaries paid in arrears. Those teachers that are close to retirement should be given due support.”

“New colleges should be constructed to make good education easily accessible to the people of Swat. Those students that were affected due to disrupted examination schedules should be given special support like fresh examination schedules, so that these children can have a secure future.”

“Health facilities including hospitals should be rehabilitated. Doctors should be instated, and also given mobile facilities so that people can access them.”

“Children that are 18-years old should also get compensation. If they are able to cast their votes, they should also be eligible for compensation.”

“Policies should benefit people, especially the poor so that conditions do not re-emerge that allow for any kind of talibanization. Rehabilitation must be comprehensive and must be completed in the shortest period possible.”

“The government’s post-conflict role must be to ensure peace and security. The pact with people must be honoured, the lives and property of citizens protected, and enemies of the state not given another opportunity to create past conditions in Swat or Pakistan. Ensure that there is no talibanization and that all existing Taliban are destroyed.”

“What can we expect the government to do? It has failed everywhere.”

“Post-conflict citizens also have a larger role. We now understand that we too made some mistakes and were misled by individuals and certain organizations which is why we brought this tragedy onto ourselves. Now we want to work alongside our military brothers on rehabilitation. We have now learnt our lesson that we will not support any group or organization like the ones that snatched the chadors from our women (idiom meaning disgracing women). Instead if we know of anyone involved in increasing our problems or posing a threat to our nation we will duly inform the military, and will also cooperate with the military. However, citizens are so traumatized that they will need support to be able to play any positive role.”

Naseeruddin, Kanju, Swat

“Hum Pakistani hain aur humaray uppar Pakistan ka qanoon lagoo hota hain. Humay aik achay Pakistani honay ka saboot deyna hoga.”

“We are Pakistani, and the laws of this country apply to us. We have to prove that we are good citizens of Pakistan.”

“We must be united and not be misled by any talib, any maulvi, or any mullah. We do not understand law enforcement. We just want peace, we are not concerned whether it is an Islamic state or a military state.”

A brief history of the conflict in Swat

In 1995 radical cleric Sufi Muhammad, leader of Tehreek-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi (TNSM) in the Swat Valley, demanded the imposition of Islamic law in the area. Violence followed as the Frontier Constabulary, a paramilitary force, began an operation against Sufi Muhammad and his followers. Tourism, a major source of income, was disrupted and 13 militants died in fighting.

After the operation, the NWFP government agreed to enforce Shariah law in Malakand Division. TNSM's main demand - the replacement of regular courts with Islamic courts - was partially met, but arguments over the peace deal led to sporadic violence.

In 2001 Sufi Muhammad took a force of some 10,000 people from Swat and the tribal areas to fight against US forces invading Afghanistan. Nearly 3,000 were killed, while others were jailed in Afghanistan or sent back to Pakistan, including Sufi Muhammad, who was imprisoned (partly for his own protection). The TNSM was banned by the government.

In 2002 Sufi Muhammad's son-in-law, the firebrand cleric Maulana Fazlullah, emerged as a force in Swat and set up his headquarters at Imam Dehri. Linked to the militant Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), he stepped up efforts to impose his version of Islam.

In January 2003 violent incidents began to increase in Swat. The Afghan writer Fazal Wahab, whose work was viewed as being critical of Osama bin-Laden and the Taliban in Afghanistan, was shot dead in Swat by unidentified assailants.

Between 2004 and 2007 Maulana Fazlullah set up at least 30 illegal FM radio stations to get his message across. Girls' education and any active role for women in society was opposed. Several schools, music shops and barbers' businesses were attacked. It was a harbinger of things to come.

Timeline on the Swat conflict 2007

July 2007 Violence in Swat increases after Fazlullah urges his followers to launch 'jihad' (holy war) to avenge an operation carried out by the Pakistan military against the Lal Masjid (Red Mosque) in Islamabad, where clerical leaders were accused by the government of harbouring "terrorists".

4 July 2007 Four civilians are killed and two police wounded by a roadside bomb. In a separate incident a policeman is killed and four others injured in a rocket attack on a police station in the Matta area of Swat District.

12 July 2007 A suicide bomber kills three police.

13 July 2007 President Pervez Musharraf approves a plan to deploy paramilitary forces in Swat to crush growing militancy. Troops are positioned in Swat.

15 July 2007 At least 13 paramilitary personnel and six civilians, including three children, are killed and more than 50 people injured at Matta in Swat District when two suicide bombers ram two cars packed with explosives into an army convoy.

August 2007 NGOs and international humanitarian organisations are asked by the administration to leave Swat after threats by militants. Attacks on several girls' schools are reported.

30 August 2007 Seven security forces' personnel are killed as militants attack a checkpoint in Swat. Owners of video centres and barber's shops receive threatening letters.

21 September 2007 Maulana Fazlullah urged his supporters to attack government officials after a demand to release three militants held after a hotel bombing incident was rejected by the authorities.

October 2007 Fazlullah sets up his own Islamic courts.

21 October 2007 Eighteen soldiers and two civilians die and 35 others, including nine civilians, are injured in a bomb blast aimed at a vehicle carrying paramilitary personnel at Nawan Killi, about 1km from Swat city.

26-29 October 2007 Fierce clashes erupt between troops and militants in Swat, leaving at least 29 dead. Thirteen security personnel are executed by militants.

1-2 November 2007 Fighting resumes after a brief ceasefire. 60-70 people die after a clash in Khwazakhela town; 48 troops who surrendered to militants are paraded in public.

3-6 November 2007 Militants extend their hold over Swat, capturing key towns including Madyan and Kalam.

November 2007 The Pakistan military intensifies its operation in Swat. Helicopter gunships pound villages. Thousands flee the valley. There are conflicting accounts of casualties, but dozens are feared dead.

28 November - 6 December 2007 Security forces say militants have been forced out of Swat and many key leaders arrested. Key centres such as Imam Dehri are seized. Hundreds are feared dead in the operation; 500,000 of Swat's 1.8 million people are reported to have fled.

23 December 2007 Fourteen die in a suicide attack on a military convoy near Mingora, Swat's main city. Sporadic violence continues in Swat, including attacks on shops, schools and government buildings.

Timeline on the Swat conflict 2008-2009

January 2008 Low-level violence between troops and militants continues in Swat.

29 February 2008 Forty killed and more than 75 wounded when a suicide bomber targets the funeral of a police officer in Mingora.

1 March 2008 Militants behead a 22-year-old man accused of passing on information to the security forces.

April 2008 NWFP government launches a fresh peace process, setting up a committee to initiate dialogue with different groups of militants. Militant leaders, including Fazlullah, re-enter Swat. Maulana Sufi Muhammad of the banned TNSM, who has been in prison since 2001, is released.

21 May 2008 Taliban militants operating under Fazlullah in Swat District sign a 16-point peace agreement with the NWFP government and agree to disband their militia; they also denounce suicide attacks and stop attacks on the security forces and government buildings.

June-July 2008 Attacks on schools and other buildings continue in Swat. Militants say the government refused to keep its part of the peace deal by retaining troops. At least 50 girls' schools are reported to have been attacked by militants in 2008. Thousands of girls quit school, fearing for their safety.

27-30 July 2008 Fierce clashes erupt again, after incidents involving the killing of military personnel.

August-December 2008 The military moves tanks, heavy artillery and helicopters into Swat to combat militants. Hundreds are reported killed in heavy clashes. Reports of atrocities by militants increase - including the killing of women who refuse to stop work and public beheadings of those accused of spying. Human rights activists say 60 percent of Swat's 1.8 million people have fled. Thousands of homes are reported to have been damaged and 150 schools destroyed.

December 2008 Press reports say the militants control 75 percent of Swat. Fazlullah announces a ban on education for girls.

29 January 2009 Pakistan's government announces a new strategy to combat militancy in Swat and pledges to ensure girls resume schooling. Schools for girls remain closed in Swat after the winter break leaving 80,000 girls out of school. Militants are reported to have seized control of almost all of Swat.

31 January 2009 Fazlullah, leader of the TTP in Swat, says he will relax the ban on education to allow girls to attend school up to grade 5. The ban had been met by a nationwide outcry.

February 2009 Renewed military offensives are reported against militants as the Pakistan Army pledges to regain control of Swat. Mingora said to be under government control. Fierce fighting continues and more people flee.

16 February 2009 Ameer Hussain Hoti, the chief minister of NWFP, said a bill had been signed that would implement Islamic Sharia law in the Malakand division, which includes Swat. This would mean a separate justice system from the rest of the nation. The Taliban reacted by announcing a 10-day truce and said they would examine the document before ending hostilities permanently.

2 April 2009 A video shot on a mobile phone and showing a young woman being flogged by the Taliban emerges and is met by protests all over Pakistan. The video dramatically changes public attitudes towards events in Swat.

6 May 2009 When it becomes clear that Taliban are attempting to extend their influence into Buner and other neighbouring areas, the Pakistan government authorizes a full military offensive against the Taliban in Swat. It results in hundreds of thousands of people leaving their homes and fleeing the Valley.

