

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

PAKISTAN EARTHQUAKE: “THE JOB IS NOT OVER”

(New York, 8 October 2007): The twelve months of early recovery following the earthquake that totally devastated parts of northern Pakistan, India and Afghanistan two years ago today saw many successes. The 7.6 magnitude earthquake struck South Asia on the morning of Saturday 8 October 2005. The epicentre of the earthquake was located 95 kilometres northeast of the Pakistan capital Islamabad.

The final death toll was over 73,000, with some 69,000 injured. In total 3.3 million people were displaced, and 600,000 houses were lost. Thanks to the efforts of the Government of Pakistan, the Pakistan Army, other militaries, donors, the United Nations, national and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), civil society, and individuals, the relief phase met with overall success. A ‘second wave of death’ was averted. Mortality rates returned to almost pre-disaster situation within one month. No cases of malnutrition were reported.

Early recovery includes the provision of transitional schools until new ones are built; transitional health centres until new hospitals and clinics are ready; massive skills training for artisans to make reconstruction a practical reality; seeds and implements to restart the agricultural cycle. It also covers institutional capacity building; psycho-social support; risk mitigation and preparedness; environmental rehabilitation; and the protection of vulnerable groups.

The United Nations and several NGOs--both national and international – joined Pakistan’s Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority (ERRA) in formulating the Early Recovery Plan. By the end of the 12-month period ending in May of this year, the Early Recovery Plan received funding for 87% of the planned budgets. It achieved over 85% of the targets in sectors such as education, health, water and sanitation, livelihoods and support to the vulnerable.

Under the Plan, almost all health facilities in the affected areas were made functional. Artificial limbs and prostheses were provided to the seriously injured and disabled. Second, all schools re-opened. Children who went to primary school for the first time when living in camps are now attending classes in the school tent in their village; their teachers receive training and adequate teaching material. Third, building codes were adapted to enable owners to build earthquake-resistant houses that were affordable with the grant provided by Government. Fourth, the large majority of the internally displaced people returned to their place of origin in a voluntary, safe and informed manner. The number of camps was reduced from 47 to 15, accounting for less than 4% of the initial displaced population. Some of those who remain in camps include widows, elderly people, tenants living on other people’s lands, and people living on land on which it too hazardous to rebuild.

“Disasters do not only happen, they also unfold,” said Jan Vandemoortele, United Nations Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator for Pakistan. “And the way they unfold is very much shaped by the way national leaders, the army, provincial authorities, and international actors respond to them. The job is not over; it is never over. Old challenges remain and new ones will arise. But the successes of the last two years show that together, in a spirit of genuine partnership, we can meet them all.”