

Pakistan flooding; Catholic Relief Services responds

By Laura Sheahen, CRS staff in Asia. Photo by CRS staff.

“I was offered a glass of the brown river water yesterday,” says Lisa Beyl, a Catholic Relief Services program manager in flood-stricken northern Pakistan. “It literally looks like mud. It is the dirtiest water I have ever seen in my life.”



“I can’t believe that people are drinking it, but they are, out of necessity.”

Children collect drinking water in a flood-affected area in northern Pakistan, where swollen rivers destroyed water pipes along with homes, roads and bridges.

As rains continue to pour down on the flooded country, hundreds of thousands of Pakistanis have been left homeless. Worse, they have no access to drinkable water.

“We have to drink water from the river but it is so dirty. But we have no other options because the floodwaters damaged our water source and washed away our pipes,” says a man in the northern town of Besham whose home and land were swept away. “My family is getting sick. Today, I took my 15-month-old son to the hospital because he has diarrhea and a high fever. If the water problem is not solved, I do not know what I will do.”

Catholic Relief Services is readying kits that include water purification tablets for thousands of people who cannot access clean water. “We’re telling people to filter water through cloth and then treat it with the purification tablets,” says Carolyn Fanelli, acting country representative for CRS Pakistan. The kits also come with cookware for boiling water, and oral rehydration salts for those who suffer diarrhea.

CRS will also get at the root of the problem—broken water pipes. CRS has years of experience building water systems in mountainous regions of northern Pakistan, having helped villages after a 2005 earthquake destroyed pipelines. “About 100 water systems in the regions of Kohistan and Shangla are damaged,” says Fanelli. “We’re in the process of repairing five right now—one is almost fixed.” In coming weeks, CRS engineers will fix more. “Villagers come to the CRS office daily asking for help to fix their water systems.”

CRS has already distributed the kits to hundreds of people in Balochistan. Over the next week, CRS will distribute over 1500 shelter and hygiene kits to newly homeless families in the areas of Swat, Shangla and Kohistan. The kits contain plastic sheeting for shelter, kitchen supplies, bed mats, soap, and more, along with the water purification tablets and rehydration salts. Preventing waterborne diseases before mass outbreaks occur is key. In addition, in Swat, CRS is planning cash-for-work projects to rebuild essential infrastructure for agriculture.

Those wishing to contribute to CRS for Pakistan relief efforts may send checks to CRS, Archdiocese of Seattle, 710 9th Ave, Seattle WA 98104. Or one may donate online at www.crs.org.

Source: Missions Office/CRS, Archdiocese of Seattle, www.seattlearch.org/missions.