

**Statement of John F. Tierney
Chairman
Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
U.S. House of Representatives**

Hearing on “U.S. Contributions to the Response to Pakistan’s Humanitarian Crisis: the Situation and the Stakes”

As Prepared for Delivery

June 16, 2009

Good afternoon and welcome. Today the Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs continues its sustained oversight of U.S. efforts in Pakistan by examining the significant humanitarian crises currently unfolding in that country.

Over the last seven weeks, the Pakistani military has maintained an intense offensive against Taliban militants in the North West Frontier Province. According to the military, they have now succeeded in clearing the militants from much of the area and have reclaimed towns and cities that had been controlled by the Taliban. Unfortunately, the Pakistani military’s offensive has been marked by conventional military tactics – heavy artillery and air strikes – that are particularly hard on the civilian population.

According to some sources, war conditions have led to the displacement of as many as three million civilians. While accurate assessments of the exact number of displaced persons is difficult to obtain, 1.9 million registered IDPs have been already been verified. This marks the largest migration of people in Pakistan since partition from India in 1947. Hundreds of thousands more civilians are still trapped in areas where the fighting continues, unable to flee due to on-going attacks, military-imposed curfews, and landmines laid by the insurgents.

The majority of those who have been able to flee are currently staying with host families, including relatives, friends, or even strangers. In some cases, hosts have taken in enough people to double or triple the size of their households. This tidal wave of humanity significantly strains host communities and further threatens the stability of the region.

A smaller number of uprooted people are living in camps, and still others are staying in schools, mosques, and hospitals. The United Nations, the International Committee for the Red Cross, and numerous NGOs are working to ensure that camp residents have food, shelter, and adequate medical supplies, but camps can only be a temporary, and most unsatisfactory, solution.

One of the fundamental challenges is Pakistan’s failure to establish the central government’s writ over many parts of the country. Pakistan lacks a basic civil governance compact between the people and the state in which the state provides physical security and establishes a system of justice in exchange for the government’s right to tax and enforce the law.

In many parts of Pakistan, including the North West Frontier Province and Federally Administered Tribal Areas, the central government does not collect taxes or provide for justice and has been quick to cede control at the first sign of challenge. Hence, the populace is extraordinarily suspicious of the central government now that it has finally come to the rescue. Without a baseline level of trust between the government and the people, it will be very difficult for Pakistan to succeed in its campaign.

We must recognize that this major displacement presents an opportunity for extremists to exploit. There are numerous reports that extremist groups are seeking to make political inroads with the displaced population by providing humanitarian services.

This presents Pakistan's government with a unique test: will it provide for its people at their time of need or will it cede that responsibility to its overburdened civil society or, even worse, the Taliban or other extremist groups?

The latest reports from Pakistan suggest that much of the civilian population currently supports the Pakistani military's efforts against the Taliban. Pakistan must not take that support for granted, and it must deliver effective relief to its citizens in distress.

For years now, I have been encouraging, prodding, and cajoling the executive branch to fashion the U.S.-Pakistan relationship around long-term, people-to-people connections that would help support Pakistan's democratically-elected civilian government deliver on its promises.

Therefore, the current crisis also presents the United States with a unique test: will we and our international partners assist the Pakistani government in providing relief during its time of need? The United States is working closely with the organizations on the ground in Pakistan to respond to the humanitarian crisis, and our financial contribution to these organizations has been more than four times greater than that of the European Union or any other national donor so far. We need to ensure that our funding translates into effective assistance on the ground.

Our hearing today will delve into the current conditions facing the internally displaced population as well as what can be done to bring stability to the region and allow the displaced population to return to their homes. In addition, and in advance of Thursday's opportunity to question Ambassador Richard Holbrooke and Undersecretary of Defense Michele Flournoy, we will discuss what continued role the United States can play to alleviate current suffering and to support increased security and stability in the region.

Clearing the North West Frontier Province of Taliban militants is only the first step. The current operation cannot be considered a success until the immediate needs of the displaced population are met and they can safely return to their homes and rebuild their communities. The underlying crisis of militant extremism will not be addressed, however, without sustained Pakistani military resolve, effective provision of services by the Pakistani government in concert with the international community, and improved trust between Pakistan and its people.