

Local NGOs Know How to Unite the People

The dramatic situation in Pakistan shows that, "Only the popular organizations, the emerging and the established, in each community, are able to build strong bonds between distant and different communities."

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As is widely known, the situation in Pakistan is dramatic. Millions are affected by floods and landslides, thousands have died and the risk of epidemics and starvation is serious. Naturally, the international community, the UN organizations and even, with great difficulty, the Government of Pakistan, are mobilizing to respond to this disaster: broken families, lost crops, ruined infrastructure, lack of power, and so on.

However, there are towns and entire regions where institutional support will not arrive or will arrive too late. I refer especially to many localities in the region of the Karakorum: roads are blocked, there is a lack of food and fuel ...

In particular, I want to talk about what happened in the town of Thalís, in the region of Baltistán. On August 6 the Thalís people were dedicated to the traditional tasks of the village, like any normal day: picking up the last apricots and dried wheat, gathering firewood, caring for their animals. It was time to store food for the gruelling winter ahead, when temperatures in the foothills of the Karakoram drop to 15 to 20 degrees centigrade below zero.

During the afternoon and evening it rained and, at two o'clock on the morning of July 7, a flood of mud and huge rocks, many the size of houses, swept half the town away. There were shouts from those who first heard the noise and tried to alert the rest but unfortunately fifteen people were killed and five others were missing.

Thalis is a mile from Machulo, where I live. When we went there the situation was more horrifying than we could have ever imagined. We tried everything we could to rescue and care for the injured. In total, more than fifty houses were destroyed and more than 400 people affected. They have been left with no housing, no land, no crops, no fruit, nothing to store.

The same day, on the initiative of the Felix Iñurrategi Foundation, a local NGO working in the Hushe valley where Thalis is located, and in tandem with the Felix Baltistan Foundation, which is located in the Basque country, my friend Ibrahim Rustam organized fifteen cooks from Machulo to prepare hot food for everyone in the village of Thalis. Afterwards, the Foundation opted to use much of their funds to buy basic food to ensure supplies for a month. It also set up a field hospital and twenty-five shops.

The Foundation is now taking responsibility for the process of rebuilding Thalis and six other villages affected by floods in the vicinity of the same valley. We are coordinating with other NGOs working in the area, local authorities and the mullahs of each village. and will take over the coordination for the next six months to channel aid arriving from many different places.

The response to both these events requires a brief reflection on solidarity between the peoples of the earth. What happened demonstrates the strength and effectiveness of civil solidarity. It

affirms the need to give more prominence to NGOs arising from the local society, who deal with development cooperation and who can provide direct aid in emergency situations. This applies not only when, as in the case of Thalys, it was the only possible response, but also in other social situations where these organizations could promote international cooperation with all institutions.

Only people's organizations, organizations set up and rooted in each community are able to feel, to live, the solidarity between peoples. They are able to build close, strong affections between distant and different communities. I know that the Basque people strongly support our call for aid, but I want to appeal once again to your traditional solidarity and ask you to help us: To go even further. Visit the website of the foundation (www.felix-baltistan.org). They know what needs to be done. Thank you with all my heart.