

Mountaineers Respond to Pakistan

- The Felix Baltistan Foundation has raised €50,000 for the reconstruction of Talis, in Northern Pakistan.
- It intends to rebuild 35 homes, as well as ensuring food security for those affected during the winter.
- This contribution still only provides half of the needed reconstruction.

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The Felix Baltistan Foundation is continuing to work on the reconstruction and rehabilitation of Talis, in Baltistan, Northern Pakistan. The town was hard hit by monsoon rains in August. The Foundation has now collected more than €50,000 in aid. These funds are of great use, but they are still insufficient to cover all the necessary objectives.

Following on from the Foundation's immediate emergency response, which involved the delivery of life saving food and tents to the affected population, work is now beginning on the reconstruction of the 35 homes that were destroyed by the avalanche of water, rocks and mud.

Talis Reconstruction Plan

The plan will involve two phases: the first taking place now, before the village is hit by snow in December. The second will be carried out after the winter. For the first phase, FBF has raised €50,000. Funds are not yet available to undertake the second phase.

The first phase will be the rebuilding of the ground floors of the 35 homes before winter sets in. This phase will also ensure food supplies and will provide security for the affected families during the winter. The second phase will be the construction of the upper floor of each house.

FBF will assume the cost of the reconstruction, but the management and monitoring will be done by the local community. A Reconstruction Committee has been formed, with representatives from the village of Talis, Felix Baltistan Machulo, the Iñurrategi Foundation (FIFBM) and the local authorities. Ortiz Akizu (FBF), who has recently returned to the Basque Country, will be the chief coordinator. He has lived in the area and experienced the disaster at first hand this summer.

In addition, the reconstruction will make improvements to the new homes, adding septic tanks, bathrooms, running water and insulation between the ground floors and the animals' pens below. The homes will also have concrete floors to allow proper cleaning. If possible, greenhouses or micro ACS (solar hot water systems) will be included. Wood and the labour for the rebuilding will be provided by the community of Talis.

This first phase of reconstruction will take place before the end of the year, but, as already mentioned, to undertake the second phase in 2011 the Foundation will need to more than double the funds raised so far.

Baltistan, Pakistan Forgotten

In late August FBF, together with the Italian NGO, CESVI, made a request for reconstruction aid to the office of UN humanitarian aid, OCHA. The request was denied on the grounds that Baltistan is not a priority area. This denial highlights yet again the neglect suffered by these isolated people, who appear to be insignificant to both the State and the international community, who both make decisions and act according to an arbitrary criteria based on the size of the population or its political relevance.

The whole of Pakistan has suffered a catastrophe of historic magnitude, which has left a fifth of its surface under water and approximately 2,000 people dead. In this context the situation in Baltistan may appear less critical, however, while the rest of the country enjoys warm temperatures throughout the winter, in Baltistan the temperature will soon drop to more than 20 degrees below zero. Therefore, although the death toll is currently lower than in the rest of the country and water no longer floods the land, the devastation of farmland and homes is, if anything, even more dangerous and still threatens the survival of its inhabitants in the coming winter.

It is important to remember that, in Baltistan, the population must survive on subsistence farming in this arid, high mountain region. The extremes of weather: 30°C in summer and -20°C in winter, mean that the land provides a single crop each year, mainly wheat. The only addition to this is the limited harvest from the fruit trees and the produce from the few cattle they possess.

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