

How two very different CMF members are serving people in dire need in Pakistan's earthquake zone. **John Martin** reports

Balakot... eight homes in 10 destroyed.

# Love + service

## key points

**T**he Kashmir earthquake on 8 October killed over 85,000 people and left more than 4 million others directly affected. Winter snows are now meaning further casualties through hypothermia and pneumonia.

Two Christian hospitals in the heart of the earthquake zone were left virtually untouched and CMF members working there have been able to play a major part in responding compassionately to the practical and health needs of a largely Muslim community.

With the help of an on-line appeal which raised over £75,000 from UK members, CMF has been able to support these efforts to provide tents, blankets, household items and medical care to families devastated by the disaster.

**E**very day since 8 October people waiting at the outpatients entrance of Kunhar Christian Hospital read a sign bearing words from Psalm 46: 'God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea.'

Kunhar is the closest Christian hospital to the epicentre of the 7.6 Kashmir earthquake, a disaster much greater than the Asian tsunami. The Pakistani government's official death toll was 87,350. Some

estimate it could reach over 100,000. Reuters reported at least 74,500 people dead. The UN says more than 4 million people are directly affected and winter snows mean certain casualties through hypothermia and pneumonia.

For Dr Haroon Lal Din, CMF member and founder-director of Kunhar and his staff, Psalm 46 has become a huge source of encouragement and inspiration. On 8 October it was fulfilled in their ears. Remarkably, while outbuildings were damaged the main Kunhar Hospital complex stands intact with just

## Response to the crisis

**I**n response to what we were seeing in the news and hearing from two of our members in the area (see article above), we felt that we should respond specifically to the Kashmir disaster and channel what help we could through the hospitals at which our members were working. Bach and Kunhar hospitals in the heart of Pakistani administered Kashmir, the most affected region, had miraculously withstood the earthquake, while all around had been devastated, and were working at beyond full capacity to deal with the huge number of injuries. However, they were also finding nowhere to discharge patients to, so were also trying to get people settled with tents, food,

and recently with more durable, winter worthy shelters.

CMF put out an appeal to its membership to support this work on 24 October. Using the *GivenGain* website that we were using on a trial basis at the time, we sent out an appeal to all members for whom we had email addresses. (some 4,300 in total of which about 1,000 bounced!). The initial response was huge, and within ten days more than £30,000 had been donated online or through cheques and charity vouchers. Online giving eventually came to nearly £40,000. With other giving, and Gift Aid to be reclaimed the total raised currently stands in excess of £70,000.

a few cracks. All around are scenes of devastation. Tent villages beyond the Kunhar perimeter fence are home to hundreds of displaced persons waiting with trepidation for the onset of winter. Balakot town 12 miles away is a pile of rubble.

Earthquake over Haroon, who qualified in Pakistan and later studied at Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, made a quick inspection and gathered staff on the roof of the main building. To the sounds of drums the Kunhar community, all of them Christians, repeatedly sang Psalm 46 in public witness to the deliverance of God.

15 minutes later the first casualties began to appear at the gates. It was 36 hours before Haroon could return to his house to snatch a rest. A month on he was still working 12-hour days and hadn't taken a day off. Outpatient numbers have shrunk to 200 a day, still twice Kunhar's normal workload. In an overwhelmingly Muslim district Kunhar is proof positive that Christians care.

Yet less than three months ago the future of this Christian hospital was under a cloud. In early June a woman died there during childbirth. Her Muslim husband who had been far too long seeking medical help blamed Haroon. He stirred up local mosques with misinformation and circulated petitions to the government to try to get Kunhar closed. Clean water is very scarce in the region. Haroon's response was to arrange for a well to be dug in the man's village. It's one of five wells he's recently provided as part of Kunhar's outreach.

Kunhar was founded 17 years ago with a vision to be an indigenous medical mission. Haroon sees 8 October as an important turning point in its life. 'The whole atmosphere has changed. It's certainly true of local relations, including the man who wished Kunhar so much ill. Now the Christian churches of Pakistan are realising that they need to be partners in our work and outreach.' The hospital compound has become a distribution point for tents, food and utensils donated by Christians from all over Pakistan.

It was Sean Connery who immortalised the words

'never say never again', but at Bach Hospital further away from the epicentre Ruth Coggan OBE is cheerfully reflecting on an a resolution she once made along these lines. She worked as a surgeon at Bach from 1992-9 as part of 29 years' service to medical mission in the north-west frontier region with the Church Mission Society. Returning to Britain she resolved to give up medicine completely. She even gave away her stethoscope and gave donations to CMF in lieu of her membership subscription.

An answerphone message from a Swedish friend on route to the disaster area prompted Ruth to wonder if, after all, she might contribute something worthwhile. She got a huge encouragement when applying for a visa. The First Secretary at the High Commission in London knew of Ruth and her work. He issued a multi-entry visa free and wrote a long letter that said how wonderful it was to have people like her helping his country.

Equipped with a borrowed purple stethoscope Ruth's day starts at 5.30am with prayers and breakfast, with ward rounds at 7am. 'I'm loving it though I'm aware of my limitations', she says. 'Things have moved on in medicine since 1999. I wait for something that's up my street. If I get a call from obstetrics I leap at it. So far I've done 14 caesarean sections and this frees up the senior surgeons for more complex work.

'Bach needs people,' she explains. 'Ideally they need to speak the language and they need to be able to do a specific job.'

Luke Cutherall is head surgeon and CEO at Bach. It's assembled a small emergency team that supplies a package including tents, utensils and food rations. 'It's not like a war. All the damage was done in 90 seconds. In the acute phase we treated people for immediate injuries, but continuing care is needed. We found we quickly needed to focus. We are a hospital, not a relief agency, but we're here for the long haul.'

**John Martin** is Head of Communication at the Church Mission Society and Associate Editor of Triple Helix



Dr Haroon

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Psalm 46:1-2

By the start of December 2005 we had been able to wire some £35,000 directly to the hospitals and/or their support agencies, and by the time you read this we will have sent £35,000 more. This money has already helped to save lives.

The two hospitals have raised shelters and semi-permanent structures for people. Using local knowledge and resources, they have been meeting the wider needs of the community, as well as providing top rate medical care where few other facilities have been left intact.

In addition to such generous financial support, CMF's members have been generous with their time, and we have had nearly forty enquiries from members wanting to offer their time and skills. Our main channel to send people out has been SIM UK, and a number of our members have

gone with their teams.

There is much to thank God for – the confluence of the right people in the right place at the right time, the miraculous survival of two hospitals (and their staff) when all around was destroyed, having access to web-based systems that enabled an appeal to be set up and sent out in matter of two or three days, the generosity of our members in money time, and service, and the fact that through all of this Christians are showing the love of Christ in a practical, sacrificial way that speaks louder than any words.

Please continue to pray for all those involved. And a very big thank you to all our members who have shown such great generosity of spirit.

**Steven Fouch** is CMF Allied Professions Secretary

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