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Pakistan Pleads for Aid as Plight of Displaced Pakistanis Grows

Pakistan appealed Thursday for millions of dollars of urgent aid to relieve the growing crisis posed by the displacement of 1.5 million people who fled its blistering offensive against the Taliban, an opposition group in the country.

The United Nations launched a formal appeal on Friday to raise what Pakistan hopes will be half a billion dollars after tens of thousands of people flooded into camps with hundreds of thousands more staying elsewhere.

"There is an urgent need for a joint and comprehensive response to this issue by all those who are committed to fighting terrorism," Pakistani Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani told a meeting of international donors and quoted by AFP.

"We have to win the hearts and minds of the people. We need to do something concrete and visible," Gilani said.

As the conflict ploughs on with no end in sight, concerns are mounting about how to cope with the displaced, uprooted in what rights groups have called Pakistan's biggest movement of people since partition from India in 1947.

The United Nations said around 1.5 million people left their homes this month and registered with authorities, joining about 550,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) who fled previous bouts of fighting in the northwest.

The military ordered the offensive last month under US pressure to crush militants in the northwest, which Washington said threatened the existence of the Muslim country and posed the greatest terror threat to the West.

A senior US military official based in Islamabad said the crisis could last until December because authorities expect large numbers of displaced people to remain at temporary camps to the end of the year.

Pakistan's military says up to 15,000 troops are taking on 4,000 well-armed fighters in Swat, where Islamabad has ordered a battle to eradicate militants who advanced to within 100 kilometres (60 miles) of the Pakistani capital. The military says more than 1,050 militants and more than 60 soldiers have been killed since forces launched the offensive, but it has not been possible to confirm either that toll or civilian casualties independently.



Pakistani displaced civilians clamour for relief at the Chhota Lahore camp in Swabi district, northwest of Islamabad. Pakistan has appealed for millions of dollars of urgent aid to relieve the growing crisis posed by the displacement of 1.5 million people who fled its blistering offensive against the Taliban. (AFP)

General Ward Assures Leader Africom to Stay Out of Africa

The President of the African Union Muammar Al-Qathafi received on Thursday the Commander of the US Africa Command General William Ward during a visit to Tripoli.

General Ward informed Al-Qathafi that the US assures him

that it would not position any military command on African soil and no American military presence in the continent, the Libyan news agency JANA reported on Thursday.

Jana also reported that General Ward assured the AU

President the Africom would stay outside Africa.

General Ward informed Al-Qathafi America's desire to see cooperation in the fields of training, information, humanitarian aid between Africom and the AU.

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