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Pakistan

Pakistan's floods – 'This is not a natural disaster'

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The 2011 floods were the worst in Pakistan's history. Twenty million people were affected and about 2000 lost their lives. Now there is record flooding for the second year in a row. "This is not a natural disaster", Farooq Tariq, the national spokesperson for the Labour Party Pakistan, told Green Left Weekly. He was referring to widespread and unprecedented monsoonal flooding that has hit Pakistan over the last few days, already killing hundreds of people and making nearly a million homeless.

And this is just the beginning of the monsoon season.

Farooq Tariq will be one of the guest speakers at the Climate Change Social Change activist conference in Melbourne, over September 30 to October 3.

"There have been big debates about the changing global climate and its effects on Pakistan", Tariq said. "This latest rain wave is unprecedented. Looking at the history of our weather, it is reported that once in seven years there has been a bad flood. But this has changed. This is second year in a row that there is a devastating flood."

The 2010 floods inundated a fifth of Pakistan, directly affected about 20 million people – mostly by destruction of property, livelihood and infrastructure – and killed about 2000 people.

After that disaster, aid groups had warned the Pakistan government to invest in prevention measures to mitigate against seasonal rains, avoid a repeat of last year's experience. But it failed to act.

"The government failed miserably because they never care about people. The warring 'partners' in the Sindh state government were too busy to kill each other in Karachi through out the Ramadan. The Sindh government was busy trying to save itself from collapse because all the four partners of Sindh government were fighting each other. More than 2000 were killed in Karachi during August alone. So despite all the warnings there were no precautionary measures taken.

"Now there are very heavy rains in Sindh, in particular. Hundreds have been killed and 10 millions on the roads again. There is an emergency situation in most of the Sindh districts. There is a total collapse of the civil life. The military has been called in and they are doing some relief work and rescuing people.

"I just saw on television hundreds of starving flood victims attacking a government food store and looting everything. People are desperate. The Labour Relief Campaign sent 300,000 rupees [more than \$3500] yesterday to our Sindh comrades to buy medicines for the flood victims.

"We have set up camps in Hyderabad to collect funds. The Labour Relief Campaign committee is meeting this evening in Lahore to discuss further relief efforts."

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