

## **Pakistan: protests and violence do not tell the full story**

To Christians in Rome, facing many challenges, Paul wrote, “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope” (Rom 15:13). In this he reminds us that in the end, God will birth a new unity among all people who are in Christ Jesus. Until then we cling to the hope of Isaiah 11:10 that “The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in him.” Pakistan is in great need of hope today and our partners there are faithfully bearing witness to this hope!

### **A brief overview of the current unrest**

The current unrest is a reflection of the lack of hope in the nation. Recently there has been a government crackdown on the members of a political party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf. Protests erupted when the leader of the party and former Prime Minister, Imran Khan, was arrested on corruption charges. He was ousted from office in April 2022, but historically no Prime Minister in Pakistan has served a full five-year term!

The real problems run much deeper than politics. In January, Pakistan's international debt stood at 62.5 trillion rupees (\$219 billion USD). This combined with an inflation rate of 26% and consumer price index of 36.4% (April 2023) has created a destabilizing economic situation. 900,000 people with education have left Pakistan for other countries creating a significant gap in leadership and investment. Also, over the past two years, Pakistan has endured a flood of refugees from Afghanistan (estimated at 3,000,000) and the most severe flooding in its history. Neighboring Afghanistan, now ruled by the Taliban, has grown far more radical in its Islamist leanings and this is spreading into Pakistan.

Educationally, Pakistan has the most children out of school, anywhere in the world, a staggering 22.8 million children, which is 44% of that age range. Women do not experience justice or value and bond slavery is common practice, which further increases debt.

With all this, a feeling of helplessness and hopelessness has taken root, which is being abused by those in power. Since March 2022 there have been a number of largely peaceful protests though some turned quite violent with military homes and bases being attacked. Pakistan has a long history with the army taking over control of the government or being in control behind the scenes so the anger with the military is coming from that history.

With elections scheduled for October 2023, the government has been arresting many people, and until recently the internet was blocked and people could not meet in groups of more than four. Currently, relative peace has emerged, but it is very tense, and we don't receive much reliable word from our friends in country due to monitoring.

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