

Oct. 13, 2005. 01:00 AM

Pakistan: Please give till it hurts

RAHEEL RAZA AND TAREK FATAH

As we sat over a Thanksgiving meal last weekend, we were overwhelmed by a deep sense of gratitude as well as guilt. Gratitude for the peace, joy and security we enjoy in Canada, but guilt for not being able to share our good fortune with the victims of the earthquake that hit India and Pakistan.

Our hearts also went out to the victims of the immense tragedies that have unfolded this year. From the tsunami to New Orleans; from Darfur to Guatemala, the losses are heart-rending. But nothing has so profoundly touched us as the earthquake in Pakistan. After all, it is the country of our cherished childhood.

Today, Pakistan beckons.

Pakistan, the land of our birth, the country of high mountains and mighty rivers, calls on its sons and daughters for help. For Pakistan is no ordinary nation. What other nation has opened its arms to all and allowed a refugee child to become its president?

Home of the K2 Mountain, where rivers link China to the Arabian Sea, whose soil gave birth to a 5,000-year-old Indus Valley Civilization, a place where philosopher Sa'adi met poet Mirza Ghalib, the land that gave birth to the Sikh religion, where Lord Buddha walked, whose majesty arrested Alexander the Great, where mystics and saints introduced Islam as a faith of beauty and peace, where the great Mughal Emperor Jahangir rests forever, where poet Sachal Sarmast rose against orthodoxy while singing on the banks of the mighty Indus.

That country created in the name of Islam, which, for all its faults, has never asked for anything from us, today is calling us. Yet, we hesitate, feeling helpless as we wonder how best we can reach out to soothe its wounds.

Emotions aside, there are urgent practical issues we have to face. The first and most vital need is cash. The consul general of Pakistan made an impassioned plea to Pakistani Canadians to donate to credible organizations.

Even at this critical time, there are unethical people who could channel these sincerely donated funds to support extremist, terrorist groups to further sectarian violence.

Within a few days, everyone and their uncle has become a fundraiser for Pakistan. Common sense needs to prevail and donations should be made through internationally recognized agencies like World Vision, IDRF or the president of Pakistan's Relief Fund.

Our plea to Pakistani Canadians is not to restrict their efforts to small-time religious outfits because this is not a time to become holier than thou. Remember, England was the first country to send help, followed by Turkey and many other non-Muslim states.

We need to donate generously by giving to organizations that will get the funds to the right people at the right time and right place. This is urgent.

Millions are homeless, tens of thousands dead, even more injured and wounded. We have to help them, not just because it is the right thing to do, but also because it is our duty. It's from the ashes of this tragedy that stories of bravery and heroism are emerging. We need to hear more of these stories as aid slowly pours in.

The sky is the limit. Imagine, if every Pakistani in just the Toronto area — 200,000 strong — gave \$1,000 each. Imagine what we could do to turn the tide. Let's give until it hurts; for if it does not hurt, you haven't given enough.