

**PLACE**

Barmal, Afghanistan

**DATE**

17 December 2022

## UN inaugurates houses in earthquake-ravaged southeast Afghanistan

Less than six months after an earthquake devastated villages in remote southeast Afghanistan, UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, has completed work on hundreds of new homes.

At a ceremony in Barmal district in Afghanistan's Paktika Province on Thursday, community leaders, senior UN officials and the Ambassador of Kazakhstan inaugurated some of the 700 houses being completed this month, part of the 1,300 shelter project UNHCR has underway in the districts of Spera and Barmal.

The June 2022 earthquake killed some 1,000 Afghans, including more than 300 children, and destroyed or damaged 70 per cent of the homes in the worst hit districts of Barmal, Giyan and Spera.

"We came here for the people of Barmal to give you a hand at a difficult time, said UN Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General Dr. Ramiz Alakbarov, speaking at the handover event on Thursday, 15 December. "There was little justice for the people here, no health care, no schools, no employment, but now our colleagues in UNHCR are creating livelihoods for the community."

UNHCR, with its partner, the Agency for Humanitarian and Development Assistance for Afghanistan (AHDA), has finalised some 700 homes built using local labor, providing vital income support to the communities in Afghanistan's impoverished southeast region.

UNHCR's newly built houses, designed following consultations with residents, are equipped with solar panels and batteries for lighting, as well as *bukhari* stoves for heating and cooking. The structures, which have two rooms and a kitchen, also include a latrine.

The agency's earthquake resilient houses are constructed on a metre-wide cement foundation, with stone walls 60 cm thick, with two reinforced concrete ring beams. Reinforced concrete columns support a steel-braced roof.

"When we first came here in June there was a lot of devastation. We are encouraged to see the community has remained resilient amid the devastation and there has been so much progress," said UNHCR Representative Leonard Zulu. "The whole world felt the pain of this village, the world gave you immediate life-saving support."

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UNHCR's emergency response in Afghanistan is supported by a multi-donor group of countries, including the USA, the European Union states, as well as the UK, Switzerland,

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and Norway, alongside Australia, Canada, Japan, Korea, and China. Significant support from the Saudi Fund for Development, Kuwait, Bahrain's Royal Humanitarian Foundation and the UN's pooled funds including the Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund (AHF) and the Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan (STFA) have been provided.

Ambassador Alimkhan Yessengeldiyev of Kazakhstan joined the UN delegation in Barmal to witness the handover of 2,000 household kits, including mattresses and clothing, which Kazakhstan donated to UNHCR for families in the earthquake zone.

UNHCR's Leonard Zulu announced that the affected districts of Barmal, Spera and Giyan have been included in the agency's Priority Areas of Return and Reintegration (PARR) initiative. Alongside road infrastructures UNHCR is currently undertaking to connect villages, it is digging wells and building flood retaining walls. UNHCR plans the construction of health centres and schools for girls and boys commencing in 2023.

In Mavis village, where UNHCR is constructing 60 shelters, village head Mavis Khan said, "We are impressed by progress made by UNHCR so far and that's why we requested you, UNHCR, to build schools for our children, particularly for our girls, as we will allow them to go to school to be educated."

The PARR scheme is an important part of the international effort to provide solutions for Afghans under the [Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees \(SSAR\)](#) which sees UNHCR closely engage with partners including UNDP, UN-Habitat, FAO, UN-Women, ILO, UNICEF, UNWFP, UNODC, AKDN and key donors to support communities while also facilitating the sustainable reintegration of those internally displaced people (IDPs) and refugee returnees who are voluntarily arriving back.

An estimated 3.3 million people have benefited from UNHCR's assistance in the 80 Priority Areas of Return and Reintegration where this year the UN Refugee Agency has implemented 30 water projects, nine health centres, seven community centres, and 21 schools for boys and girls. End

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