



DISPLACED BY CONFLICT

The humanitarian crisis in Tirah Valley

An HRCP fact-finding report

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Human Rights Commission of Pakistan

Introduction

Residents of Tirah Valley in District Khyber have endured prolonged insecurity, deteriorating law and order, and recurring armed confrontations, particularly over the past two years, due to the presence of militants. Local communities consistently maintained that restoring peace and security was the state's constitutional responsibility. They resisted demands from authorities to either evacuate their ancestral areas or organize peace committees or '*lashkars*'. During this period, affected communities protested and engaged in negotiations with the district administration, security forces, and local militants to avoid displacement and further escalation.

Fear, insecurity, and continuous threats to life reportedly compelled many families to leave their homes and seek temporary shelter in various parts of districts Khyber and Peshawar. In January 2026, a mass exodus occurred from Tirah Valley amid harsh winter conditions, with reported deaths, especially among children and the elderly. The displaced families reportedly faced multiple humanitarian challenges, including inadequate shelter, limited access to healthcare and education, disrupted livelihoods, and economic hardship. Concerns were also reported regarding their safe return, compensation for losses, and the restoration of normalcy in the affected areas.

Mission's terms of reference

Given this context, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) decided to conduct a day-long fact-finding mission to Bara, District Khyber, and to the office of the deputy commissioner in Peshawar on 19 May 2026, to:

- Assess the human rights implications of the displacement from Tirah Valley.
- Examine the circumstances leading to the evacuation of civilians.
- Document the humanitarian concerns of the affected population.
- Gather the perspectives of relevant stakeholders, including government officials, law enforcement authorities, media representatives, and members of the local community.

The mission comprised Akbar Khan (vice-chair, HRCP Khyber Pakhtunkhwa), Dr Sarfaraz Khan, Mati ul Haq, Manzoor Afridi, and Masood Shah (HRCP members), and Hanif Afridi and Isma Khan (HRCP staff members). The mission met with people from the displaced community, local journalists, NADRA and hospital staff, and officials from the police and district administration.

Meeting with displaced persons

During its meeting with representatives of the affected community from Tirah Valley at a protest camp in Bara, District Khyber, the mission was informed that the security situation in the area had deteriorated over time. While the people at the camp acknowledged the presence of militants in Tirah, they believed that security forces had the capacity to contain them. They even questioned whether the militants' presence was being used to justify the evacuation and displacement.

According to those interviewed, the security situation began to deteriorate in 2023, worsened in 2024, and escalated significantly in 2025. The representatives claimed that in 2024–25, when local communities refused either to vacate the area or form armed peace '*lashkars*', the authorities imposed restrictions on the supply of food and medicines to Tirah, which respondents described as '*inhuman*'. According to them, between 20 and 30 civilians were killed and nearly 400 injured, including women, children, and the elderly, in the conflict between 2024 and 2025. Referring to the more recent displacement in January 2026, they claimed that several newborn babies had died due to the severe cold, snowfall, and inadequate arrangements. The community representatives

termed the displacement ‘forced’ and directly blamed the security forces for the situation, as they believe the forces exercise effective authority in Tirah. They alleged that only around 20 percent of the displaced population had so far received transportation and other assistance packages, while the majority remained uncompensated, with reports of irregularities and mismanagement in the compensation process. According to the representatives, they were initially told the displacement was temporary and would last for two months, with returns expected to begin from 10 April 2026. However, no practical steps for return had yet been observed.



Mission meeting with persons affected by the displacement

The traders’ representatives informed the mission that approximately 3,600 shops, employing nearly 8,000 traders and shopkeepers, were affected, resulting in large-scale unemployment and destruction of goods due to the absence of a proper relocation plan. They complained that no separate market or business area had been established for displaced traders in Bara or any alternative location, and traders were also not allowed to transfer their existing stock. The representatives further stated that livestock and poultry farming constitute the main source of income and food self-sufficiency for the local population, particularly women, and that the inability to relocate livestock during displacement had caused significant economic loss and damage to livelihoods.

Meeting with journalists

During a meeting with representatives of the Bara Press Club, including its president and general secretary, the mission was informed that the security situation in Tirah Valley had progressively worsened since 2021. This deterioration was attributed to the regrouping and return of militants in the merged districts. Journalists reported that local communities repeatedly voiced concerns, but authorities failed to take timely action. This inaction led to an increase in militant gunfire attacks and retaliatory shelling, artillery fire, drones, or quadcopter strikes by security forces, which allegedly resulted in civilian casualties, including women and children.



Mission meeting with journalists at Bara Press Club

The journalists stated that the prevailing insecurity severely impacted education. Enrollment at the valley's only Government High School in Warsak plummeted from approximately 2,500 students to nearly 350 by 2025, raising concerns about the fate of school dropouts. Frequent firing and shelling during school and working hours reportedly instilled fear among civilians. Furthermore, journalists noted that negotiations regarding the situation primarily occurred from mid-2024 to the end of 2025 through a local 24-member committee comprising the six local tribes. Elected representatives (two MPAs and one MNA) were largely absent from this process.

The mission team was informed that displacement began on 5 January 2026. The authority behind this latest phase of displacement has not been clarified. There is a general perception among the populace that security forces desired the evacuation of the area. Journalists believed that security forces maintain effective control, while the civil administration is left to publicly assume responsibility for these decisions and their consequences. (The district administration later confirmed that the displacement occurred under an agreement with a 24-member committee of tribal elders from each tribe.) Interestingly, the provincial government denies any involvement, despite the district administration being answerable to it. The mainstream media's narrative—that the January displacement was not ordered by authorities but was a normal winter migration for Tirah residents—was also contested, as permanent residents are accustomed to harsh winters.

Journalists criticized the administration for assigning the registration process for displaced persons to the district administration instead of the Provincial Disaster Management Authority. They reported that initially, only one registration point was established, which later increased to five due to growing pressure and mismanagement. According to them, poor planning, repeated changes to the master plan, a lack of information desks, and confusion regarding the actual number of affected families created significant difficulties for displaced persons. They claimed that approximately 35,000 households had been registered; however, many genuine Tirah residents were allegedly denied registration because their CNICs carried temporary addresses from Peshawar, Kohat, or Bara, while some non-resident property owners reportedly secured registration through influence.

Journalists also questioned how militants continued to operate despite the heavy presence of security forces and surveillance systems in the area. Regarding the mass displacement in January,

they stated that allowing alternative routes through Orakzai district could have mitigated hardships; however, only one route was permitted. According to them, at least 19 people, mostly women and children, died during displacement due to severe weather, road accidents, and inadequate arrangements, while another 15 were reportedly injured. They also alleged interference by political representatives and their focal persons, as well as the influence of a group identified as Tawheed-ul-Islam, in the transfer and registration process of affected families.

The journalists expressed concern over the designation of displaced persons as ‘temporarily displaced persons’ instead of internally displaced persons and criticized restrictions on humanitarian organizations and limited media coverage of the crisis.

Representatives of the Bara Press Club further stated that local journalists faced advisories from security agencies, threats, and restrictions on freely reporting security-related issues. According to them, the agreed compensation package with the 24-member committee included transport assistance of PKR 22,000 for four-wheel vehicles, PKR 45,000 for six-wheel vehicles, PKR 75,000 for ten-wheel vehicles, PKR 240,000 upon arrival through SIM registration, monthly assistance of PKR 35,000 for two months, and PKR 25,000 as return assistance. (The provincial government had announced a PKR 4 billion package despite claiming to be against military operations and displacement.)

Meetings with NADRA staff, displaced women, and lady health workers

The mission team met with NADRA staff, displaced women, and lady health workers at the registration camp in Bara and at Dogra Hospital Bara.



A registration camp in Bara

NADRA officials informed the mission team that displaced women from Tirah undergo biometric verification through a dedicated registration system, which also uses previous polio vaccination records to help confirm their place of origin. According to the staff, registered families receive SIM cards, assistance in opening bank accounts, a support package of PKR 240,000, and monthly assistance of PKR 50,000. Displaced women reported serious hardships faced during and after their displacement, including registration delays, lack of financial support, poor living conditions,

health problems, food shortages, and uncertainty regarding their return. One displaced woman from Tirah told the mission team that she had been repeatedly visiting the camp for registration while temporarily living with relatives in Kohat (a two-hour journey). She expressed concern over her family's worsening health and the difficulties of traveling in extreme heat. Another displaced woman shared that the experience of displacement was traumatic, that many of her family's animals died during displacement, and that her family was surviving without stable shelter or adequate food despite government announcements of assistance.

Lady health workers at Dogra Hospital Bara informed the mission that while normal deliveries are managed locally, women requiring C-sections are referred to hospitals in Peshawar due to a lack of surgical facilities, leading to delays and complications. They further stated that displacement and insecurity had negatively affected women's health, increased pregnancy-related complications and miscarriages, and deterred people from seeking timely medical care due to fear and movement restrictions in the area.

Perspectives of local authorities

Meeting with DPO District Khyber

The mission met with the district police officer (DPO) of District Khyber. The discussion focused on law and order, security challenges in Tirah Valley, and measures being adopted to maintain peace in the district. The DPO stated that the police are primarily responsible for maintaining law and order, including addressing crimes such as murder, theft, robbery, and routine policing. He acknowledged that while the overall crime rate in Tirah Valley remains comparatively low, except for poppy cultivation, which he described as a common cash crop, militant groups—including the TTP, Lashkar-i-Islam, and other splinter factions—operate in the area. He informed the mission that local communities had raised concerns about the presence of militants throughout 2024 and 2025, after which residents were given the option by the concerned authorities to vacate the area prior to operations. He explained that due to the district's long and porous border with Afghanistan, coupled with difficult mountainous terrain, it was not possible to completely prevent militant infiltration.



Mission meeting with DPO Khyber

The DPO stated that the police had periodically facilitated coordination and dialogue between local communities, civil administration, and security forces to help maintain peace in Tirah. Regarding the police's role during displacement, he stated that their responsibility remained limited

to providing security and admitted that policing operations in Tirah are carried out in close coordination with the military. According to the DPO, no cases relating to serious human rights violations had been reported to the local police during or after the displacement. He also noted that the population of Tirah Valley stands at 286,184 according to the 2017 census, while policing in the area is managed through the single Police Station Tirah (Operations) at Bagh Markaz, supported by integrated ex-Levies personnel, regular provincial police, and eight border and hilltop check posts established for security purposes.

Meeting with ADC District Khyber

The mission met with the additional deputy commissioner (ADC) of District Khyber to discuss the causes of displacement, the administrative response, and measures taken for the relief and rehabilitation of displaced families. The ADC informed the mission that the administration had remained in continuous negotiations for nearly one and a half years with a 24-member committee. He repeatedly maintained that the displacement was not forced and was carried out through mutual consultation. According to the ADC, while the administration initially estimated around 20,000 households, approximately 33,000 households were later registered in the NADRA database, of which nearly 13,000 had so far been verified and provided assistance. He explained that the first registration point was established at Paindi Cheena with five counters for all tribes. However, due to the increasing number of displaced families and pressure on the registration process, four additional registration points were later established in Bara for separate tribal facilitation.

The ADC acknowledged challenges related to CNIC codes, address verification, harsh weather conditions including snowfall, and logistical difficulties, which caused delays in registration and the movement of families. He stated that a grievance redressal committee, including members of the 24-member committee, had been constituted to review pending cases and facilitate the registration of remaining families as temporarily displaced persons. The ADC further stated that the local 24-member committee had presented demands relating to infrastructure development, water supply schemes, and livestock support to ensure sustainable conditions upon return. He claimed that around 95 percent of registered households had received assistance packages, while the remaining cases were under verification and grievance review. Responding to concerns regarding delays in the return process, the ADC stated that the phased movement of families was carried out in accordance with the operational plan, security clearances, and ongoing development works, adding that families were also provided cash support for house rent and relocation expenses.

Observations

The fact-finding mission observed that the displacement from Tirah Valley had occurred amid a deteriorating security situation, a growing militant presence, and subsequent security responses in the area. Meetings with journalists, community representatives, displaced persons, health workers, and other stakeholders revealed serious concerns regarding civilian protection, humanitarian hardships, administrative preparedness, and transparency in the displacement and registration process. While the administration maintained that the relocation was carried out in consultation with a 24-member tribal committee and was not forced, many affected individuals and independent stakeholders described the displacement as compelled by insecurity, fear, and a lack of viable alternatives. The mission noted a visible absence of the provincial government in decision-making on security matters.

Stakeholders interviewed by the mission believed the displacement was linked to an anticipated or planned security operation. However, the administration's indication that displaced families might return in two to three months created uncertainty about how the security situation would improve

so rapidly. As of May 2026, when the mission was conducted, the on-ground situation was not conducive to the safe return and rehabilitation of the population.

The mission identified significant challenges related to registration, verification of affected families, delays in compensation, and difficulties faced by women, children, the elderly, traders, and other vulnerable groups. Concerns were also raised regarding civilian casualties, restrictions on humanitarian access, disruption of education and healthcare services, alleged irregularities in registration and compensation, and limited space for independent reporting by local journalists.

The situation urgently demands a transparent, rights-based, and people-centric approach to displacement management, rehabilitation, and long-term peacebuilding in the Tirah Valley.

Recommendations

- The Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and relevant authorities should ensure the safe, voluntary, dignified, and informed return of displaced families as soon as possible, ensuring the area is secure and basic services are restored in the Tirah Valley.
- The transparency of the verification process should be improved to identify all genuinely affected families, including those facing CNIC address-related issues, to ensure no deserving family is excluded from assistance.
- All pending compensation should be released without unnecessary delay, and a public mechanism should be established for grievance redressal and complaints regarding irregularities or manipulation in the registration process.
- Authorities should ensure accountability and impartial investigations into allegations of civilian casualties, shelling of populated areas, destruction of property, and other reported human rights violations.
- Special attention should be given to women, children, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and vulnerable segments of the local population by ensuring access to healthcare, maternity services, food, shelter, education, and psychosocial support during displacement and return.
- Health facilities in affected areas, including hospitals in Bara and Tirah, should be strengthened with emergency medical services, surgical facilities, ambulances, and maternal healthcare support.
- The government should develop a comprehensive rehabilitation and reconstruction plan for affected communities, including the restoration of schools, markets, roads, water supply schemes, livestock support, and livelihood opportunities for traders and daily wage workers.
- National and international humanitarian organizations should be allowed to assist affected populations in accordance with humanitarian principles and in coordination with relevant authorities.
- The provincial government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa should ensure that elected representatives, local communities, civil society organizations, women representatives, and affected persons are meaningfully included in all future negotiations, rehabilitation plans, and policy decisions relating to Tirah Valley.
- Freedom of expression and independent reporting should be respected, and journalists should be able to report on humanitarian and security-related issues without intimidation, threats, or undue restrictions.
- Long-term peace and stability in Tirah Valley require strengthening civilian governance, rule of law, access to justice, development initiatives, and community trust-building measures.