

# Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Pakistan) quake: new building codes largely unenforced

More than 4,000 homes were damaged in Monday's quake

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ISLAMABAD, 27 October 2015 (IRIN) - Pakistan added detailed seismic provisions to its national building code in 2007, two years after an earthquake in the Kashmir region killed more than 80,000 people and destroyed countless constructions. They have gone largely unenforced, compounding the destruction from Monday's tremor.

Although its epicentre was in neighbouring Afghanistan, the latest earthquake damaged 4,392 homes in Pakistan, where 248 people were killed and more than 1,000 injured.

While many of the battered dwellings are "katcha" structures - made of a combination of mud, grass, leaves and bamboo and therefore not covered by the updated code, all masonry buildings and steel constructions are subject to the new rules.

"There has really been no effort to implement this," Qaiser Ali, who played a key role in drawing up the new provisions and is the founding director of the Earthquake Engineering Centre at the University of Engineering and Technology in Peshawar, told IRIN.

"Maybe we do not have the capacity to do so," he added.

According to Pakistan's latest progress report on its disaster risk reduction policy, "the institutional incapacities of the implementing agencies at the local levels is also a big challenge" when it comes to enforcing the building code.

The report also noted that "rampant poverty" was another factor. "The poor segments of the society do not have the financial capacity to build hazard resilient abodes as the observance of building codes entails additional cost of construction," it said.

Shahid Ali lives in the Shangla district of the northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, which bore the brunt of both this week's and the 2005 earthquake in Pakistan.

"I used timber and clay bricks, tin and cement blocks to build a rough house which my family then expanded," he told IRIN.

He said that after the 2005 quake NGOs had distributed guidelines for safer construction but that it "was impossible for us to follow these as we did not have materials, assistance was very slow and we did not really know how to follow the methods they advised."

The director of the Building Control Agency in the Peshawar Development Authority, Arif Khan, told IRIN that "all rules are being followed in Peshawar." Hundreds of homes in this district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were damaged by Monday's earthquake.

Peshawar resident Munawar Ahmad told IRIN that after the 2005 earthquake, no official came to inspect the three-story home he rebuilt with whatever materials he could find.

"This time when the quake came on Monday afternoon, large chunks of plaster fell from the third floor. We were very scared, and I keep wondering if the building is safe," he said.

Local media have reported that several high-rise buildings in Islamabad were badly damaged by the latest tremblor and their residents evacuated. Residents' complaints about the buildings' safety had gone unheeded, according to one local newspaper.

Concerns have also been raised about the structural safety of schools in Pakistan, just as they were after the 2005 earthquake.

"The government school I go to had bricks falling out of some of the walls and there was a virtual stampede because no one knew what to do. Several children were injured," said Zain Ahmad, 16, a student in Kabal, a town in Swat district.

**Kamila Hyat**

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\* "Pakistan quake: new building codes largely unenforced". IRIN Published on 27 Oct 2015:  
<http://www.irinnews.org/news/2015/10/27>