

# Media Update

13 August 2015

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## UNHCR

NEWS STORY

### A refugee separated from his mother but uniting a community

ATTOCK, 13 August 2015: Pakistan, Aug 10 (UNHCR) – Abdur Rehman was just four years old when his father died and he found himself separated from his mother. As years went by, he lost all hope of ever seeing her again. But while living with foster parents, more than a decade later the then-15-year-old Rehman had a breakthrough. Somebody knew where his mother was and took him to meet her.

"I couldn't recognize her," the 46-year-old recalls, thinking back to the day when he met with a group of women in Jowzjan province. "Women left one by one, but only one stayed back. She was my mother and I met her after 11 years."

Rehman's mother told him she had cried every day since their separation. "My reunion with my mother was a miracle," he smiles his eyes welling up at the memory.

During the early 1980s, amid intense fighting in Afghanistan, Rehman and his foster parents were forced to flee their home. They sought refuge in Pakistan, but with his mother remarried, she stayed behind and Rehman was once again forced to say goodbye.

Today, they are finally reunited. Rehman has a family of his own and lives with his mother in Pakistan's Attock city, after spending seven years in UNHCR's Swabi refugee camp. However, he finds it hard to escape the sadness linked to the forced separations.

"My foster parents died in Pakistan and my mother's second husband died of illness in Afghanistan," he said.

Rehman is now among noted elders of the Turkmen community, which includes around 5,000 families who reside in Pakistan. Tradition dictates that men who marry must pay over a million rupees (US \$10,000) to the parents of the bride.

Rehman could not afford that much and so he went to Karachi and married to a Bengali girl. He paid 30,000 rupees (US\$300) to her family. But he didn't know that his wife had been smuggled to Karachi by her uncle in 1988 from Bangladesh.

Having himself faced the pain of separation, Rehman sent his wife back to Bengal and re-united her with her parents. "I could feel her pain as I myself had gone through the same," he recalled.

Rehman is now working to save future generations from similar fates to those suffered by himself and his wife.

"This practice should end and I am trying to persuade the community members to break the status quo so that girls could easily get married without financial exchange," he said.

In addition, Rehman runs four schools, where 1,200 students study. "I want my people to get an education so that they can play a positive role in rebuilding Afghanistan," he said.

His own children are among those leading the way. "My children are studying in different colleges," he said, beaming with pride. "One of my daughters will be the first qualified female physician in the Turkmen community in Afghanistan and Pakistan."

Having spent so many years displaced and separated from his mother, Rehman hopes that his efforts will help the situation in Afghanistan to improve. "My grandfather was refugee," he says. "I am a refugee but I don't want to see the next generation become refugees."

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**ILO**

PRESS RELEASE

## **The ILO reaffirms its commitment to support its constituents in Baluchistan Province**

Quetta, September 11 2015: As part of his concluding visits to the four provinces in Pakistan the International Labour Organization (ILO) Country Director-Mr. Francesco d'Ovidio, met with Secretary Labour Baluchistan, Mr. Hamid ul Karim, to reaffirm ILO's commitment towards the promotion of decent work in Pakistan and Baluchistan Province in particular. A tripartite stakeholder consultation organized by the Department of Labour (DoL) in Quetta Baluchistan also provided an opportunity to highlight the province of Baluchistan's specific employment and labour issues.

During his meeting with the Secretary of Labour and Mr. Saeed Ahmed, Director Labour, Mr. d'Ovidio appreciated the commitments made by the provincial government and social partners to improve the welfare of the workers in the province through various actions. He also commended the notification of Provincial Tripartite Consultative Committee (PTCC) in Baluchistan which is an important social dialogue platform that can facilitate the realization of the provincial labour commitments including labour legislation processes in, labour policy development, and issues of workers in the context of mining, fisheries and informal sector.

During the stakeholders' meeting hosted by Directorate of Labour Welfare, Mr. Francesco d'Ovidio shared ILO's role towards supporting preparation and planning stages of Baluchistan Development Vision and Strategy. This framework defines the provinces strategy for creating 1.5 million "decent" jobs and reducing the unemployment rate to less than 5%. The stakeholders provided a number of suggestions including expanding the work of ILO to informal workers in light of the recent Recommendation 203– the first ever international labour standard specifically aimed at tackling the informal economy, minimum wage setting, technical and vocational education, and adequate representation of workers of Baluchistan at relevant international and national forums. Participants of these meetings highlighted the overarching challenges Baluchistan faces including weak physical and social infrastructure, difficult law and order situation, persistent natural disasters, depletion of ground water as well as slow industrialization.



Mr. Saeed Ahmed-Director Labour, informed the stakeholders of the technical support that the ILO has provided and all the areas of collaboration in Baluchistan including the formation of a Decent Work Labour Inspection toolkit, drafting of labour laws as well as programmed support for addressing Child and Bonded Labour in the Province.

The ILO's Country Director stressed that the people of Baluchistan need to realize the goal of decent work for all and to achieve its development vision.

Mr. Francesco d'Ovidio said "It is time to choose the high road to inclusive development in a competitive world – we want to take it with you"

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