

Media Update

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UNHCR

Press Release

25 years of higher education for refugees

German-funded DAFI scholarships open up a world of opportunity for Afghan refugees in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD: The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the Government of Germany today marked 25 years of the German-funded Albert Einstein Academic Refugee Initiative (DAFI), that provides means for refugees to pursue a higher education.

Since 1992, the programme has provided financial support scholarships to refugees to study at universities and colleges in the countries where they have sought refuge. DAFI is the only global programme helping refugees access higher education.

In Pakistan, some 1,200 Afghan refugee students have benefited from the scholarship. There are currently some 115 DAFI scholarship holders studying at different universities across Pakistan. These students are enrolled in courses covering agriculture and forestry, social and behavioural sciences, commercial and business administration, computer science, medical science and healthcare, natural sciences, engineering, law and mass communication. Enrolment process for the 2017 scholarships programme begins in August.

The DAFI scholarships have made a substantial contribution to the education and development of many young, talented refugees, enabling them to expand their horizons and explore their full potential.

Riaz Dermal, Director of Water Supply, Sewerage and Environmental Affairs in Kabul, Afghanistan, a former DAFI student says: "As a refugee it is always challenging to pursue higher education, DAFI eased my tension in carrying out higher studies smoothly."

Sadruddin, Agriculture Specialist at Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) in Kabul, Afghanistan was also a DAFI scholar in Pakistan. “The socio-economic vulnerabilities caused by continuous conflict in Afghanistan were such that without a scholarship I would not have been able to pursue higher education.” Sadruddin added: “The academic achievements in life have subsequently paved the way for me in getting a position with reputable organisations. I owe my success to DAFI scholarship that I had received.”

Tamanna, a current DAFI student who studies dentistry in Peshawar says: “I borrowed money to continue studies as we couldn’t pay for college fees. But now I don't have to worry about fees as this scholarship will cover my expenses for four years.”

To commemorate the 25 years of DAFI, UNHCR organised an event in Islamabad attended by former and current DAFI scholarship holders; German Ambassador to Pakistan, Ina Lepel; Arshad Mirza, Secretary for States and Frontier Regions; Chief Commissioner Afghan Refugees, Dr. Imran Zeb Khan; United Nations Resident Coordinator in Pakistan, Neil Buhne; UNHCR Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, Volker Türk; UNHCR Country Representative, Indrika Ratwatte and representatives from embassies, civil society and educational institutes.

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Scholarship programme gives hope to Afghan refugee girl

PESHAWAR, 26 April 2017: An Afghan girl expresses her feelings through paintings and to soothe away the pain she has endured. She has gone through a lot in her short life, but she does not give up, she pushes herself forward every day.

18-year-old Tamanna’s only support is her mother who raised her with many financial and social challenges. Her father was killed in Afghanistan in 2007 and her younger brother has been missing for the last three years.

"I got expelled many times due to non-payment of my school fees," said Tamanna as tears roll down her cheeks. "But despite this, I studied until 12th grade and will continue to study to achieve my goals," she added.

Her father, her mother and stepmother along with three children fled Afghanistan due to war in 1992 and moved to

In 2007, her father, Amin, along with the whole family returned back to Afghanistan. After few months, he was tragically killed in Wardak in a tribal feud and the family returned back to Pakistan in 2008.

"After the death of my husband, it was very difficult to make ends meet. Those were the worst times of my life," Nooria Siddique, mother of Tamanna said. Holding a bachelor degree in social science, Siddique struggled to pay to educate her daughter. She had many jobs, such as tailoring, teaching, a job with an NGO. "I couldn't afford to enrol Tamanna in any school, but I could see light at the end of the tunnel and knew that soon our miseries will lift," she recalls.

Nooria Siddique started working with an NGO in Peshawar as well tailoring and sewing clothes at the Nasir Bagh camp. "I would earn Rs 4000 (USD 40) per month which was not enough to pay for the house rent," she said. When working outside, it was difficult to leave behind three-year-old Tamanna as her step-brother would beat her at home. Her husband's first wife and their three children were also living with Nooria Siddique.

"After some time I lost my job in the NGO and started teaching at a school which paved the way for me to bring along Tamanna with me," she recalled. "Amid many challenges, I supported my daughter to study," she said. "In a society where women usually rely on men for protection, it was difficult for us to survive without male support. It's hard to express in words what we have gone through during these years," she says while taking a deep breath.

Tamanna now works as assistant to a dental surgeon in Peshawar, the capital city in the north-west of Pakistan and is studying to be a dental technician at one of the local colleges. "We borrowed money to continue my studies as we couldn't pay for college fee," Tamanna said.

When she heard about the DAFI scholarship programme, she felt this could change her life. Tamanna applied and was selected. "Now I am relieved as I don't have to worry about fees as this scholarship will cover my expenses for four years," she said.

Founded in 1992 by the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany and implemented by UNHCR, the DAFI (Deutsche Akademische Flüchtlings Initiative) programme has awarded over 9,300 refugees in higher education scholarships since it began. In Pakistan, UNHCR has been implementing DAFI scholarships since 1992 and has supported more than 1,200 students.

The scholarship covers a wide range of costs from tuition fees and study materials, to food, transport, accommodation and other necessities. Preparatory and language classes based on students' needs, as well as activities encouraging peer support are some of the other resources available to DAFI students. When Tamanna first got admission to the dentistry institute, she was hesitant to compete with the male students as she was the only woman in her class. "My male classmates would make fun of me, but I surprised them when I secured the top position in my first semester," she said, beaming with pride.

Tamanna's only dream is to become a dental surgeon or a medical professor. "I know becoming a doctor costs a lot which I can't afford. But I believe dreams come true when a person is devoted," she said. "I will make it possible and this is my *Tamanna*." The name Tamanna means 'desire' in Urdu.

During times when she is stressed, she tries to alleviate her past painful experiences through her paintings and calligraphy. She also reads books and bake cakes.

"I want to achieve my goals and extend support to students like me who are in need because I have gone through so much," she says.

By Qaiser Khan Afridi in Peshawar
