

Media Update -2

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ILO

PRESS RELEASE

Efforts Launched to Combat Child Labour in Punjab's Brick Kilns

Nankana: Over 600 brick kiln workers and their families witnessed enrollment of their children under Chief Minister Punjab's initiative on child labour free brick kilns in collaboration with the International Labour Organization [ILO]. The first batch of 35 out-of-school children of brick kiln workers from Nankana Sahib District were enrolled in Government Model Primary School Chokhiyanwala, Nankana Sahib. This initiative will cover all the brick kilns in Punjab Province.

Mr. Raja Ashfaq Sarwar-Minister for Labour and Human Resource Department, Government of Punjab along with Mr. Francesco d'Ovidio-Country Director of the ILO, Members Punjab Assembly, Senior Government Officials of the line departments, Brick Kiln Owners, Representatives of Civil Society, NGOs and Media participated in this mega event held on Tuesday 25 August, 2015 at Nankana Sahib.

The Minister for Labour announced that the Government Punjab will provide free education, school bags and books to the brick kiln children enrolled in schools under this initiative. Its sustainability will be ensured through strict monitoring and regular follow-up by the District Vigilance Committees (DVCs) which are already functional in all 36 districts of Punjab. He commended the continued support of the ILO to the Government of Punjab in the elimination of child labour. The ILO's collaboration and expertise to conduct the South Asia Labour Conference helped the government devise concrete policies and come up with action plans like this, said the Minister.

In his remarks during the event, Mr. d'Ovidio, ILO Country Director, said the move towards the elimination of child labour was a promise fulfilled by the



Punjab Government. “The initiative of the Chief Minister Punjab is highly appreciated as it will sustain the successful pilot interventions made under ILO’s previous and current projects”, said Mr. d’Ovidio. He also highlighted that this was just the beginning and the government would have to ensure the availability of financial resources for many years to come and develop a solid monitoring system. Mr. d’Ovidio reiterated ILO’s commitment to support the efforts of the Government, Employers, Workers and other stakeholders in eliminating child labour in Pakistan.

The Parliamentary Secretary Mr. Rana Arshad-Government of Punjab, Mr. Mubashir Hussain- Additional Secretary, Labour and Human Resource Department, Dr Javaid Gill-Director, Punjab Integrated Project and representatives of Employers and Workers Organizations were also among the key speakers on this occasion.

The ILO developed a pilot project under “Strengthening Law Enforcement Responses & Actions against Bonded Labour” in 2012 which was implemented in collaboration with the District Labour Office, Nankana Sahib in brick kiln sector. Key interventions included: establishment of Non-formal Education Centres, Support to get birth certificate and national identity card and birth; registration with social security, health screening, and linking female brick kiln workers with the government social protection programme. A brick kiln worker, who was one of the ILO’s project beneficiaries, received a marriage grant of Rupees 100,000/ from Workers Welfare Board to get her daughter married. An independent evaluation confirmed that this pilot intervention achieved its intended targets.

The current support of the ILO builds on its previous interventions on child labour and bonded labour in Pakistan and will largely provide support to: develop policies and programmes on child and bonded labour; implement the recently launched Government of Punjab’s Integrated Child and Bonded Labour Project wherein the ILO is recognized as a Technical Partner and will provide consistent advice on the elimination of child labour and measures to address bonded labour; and formulate the right approach to address child labour in the province of Baluchistan.

For more information, please contact:

Muhammed Benyameen
National Project Coordinator
benyameen@ilo.org

UNHCR

PRESS RELEASE

50,000 Afghan refugees from Pakistan returned this year under UNHCR voluntary programme

ISLAMABAD: The UN refugee agency has facilitated the return of over 50,000 registered Afghan refugees from Pakistan so far this year under the agency's largest and longest running voluntary repatriation programme.

As part of its facilitated group return (FGR) initiative, UNHCR on Wednesday assisted a group of 550 registered Afghan refugees return to Herat from its voluntary repatriation centre in Baleli, Quetta, bringing the total number of refugees returned through Balochistan to 9000, so far, this year, which makes 10 per cent of the total returns from Pakistan.

From Khyber Pakhtunkhwa this year, some 25,900 registered Afghan refugees opted to return; 11,300 from Punjab, 4,000 from Sindh and 2,800 from Azad Jammu Kashmir.

Of the total 50,433 registered refugees who returned with UNHCR assistance, the majority, 34 per cent returned to the northern region of Afghanistan, followed by the 31 per cent who went to the central regions while 19 per cent of the Afghan refugees returned to the eastern region. Only 9 per cent of the total returns were to the south east while return to the southern regions remain the lower at 5 per cent where security remains a challenge.

In Quetta, Dinesh Lal Shrestha, Head of UNHCR, Balochistan, while bidding farewell to the members of the facilitated group return said, "voluntary repatriation is a cornerstone of the Solution Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR)." Mr. Shrestha hoped that with the formation of the National Unity Government and gradual political stability and better livelihood prospects in some parts of Afghanistan more refugees might opt to voluntarily repatriate to Afghanistan.

Forty-five-years old elder of the returning group to Herat, Ghulam Sakhi said, he and his group mutually agreed to go back to Afghanistan and to take part in the rebuilding of their country. He said he believed there would be sufficient job opportunities upon return.

Like the majority who have opted to return to Afghanistan, Sakhi too is optimistic about the future of Afghanistan. “I and my family chose to return because the law and order situation and livelihood opportunities have considerably improved in my area (Herat)” he said. Sakhi along with his extended community had been living in Loralai, Balochistan for the last 25 years.

On 21 August during the 26th meeting of the Tripartite commission in Kabul, the governments of Afghanistan, Pakistan and UNHCR once again reiterated their commitment to the voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees, in safety and with dignity, based on considerations regarding the absorption capacity of Afghanistan. The parties agreed that voluntary repatriation continued to be the preferred durable solution for Afghan refugees in Pakistan.

Indrika Ratwatte UNHCR’s Representative in Pakistan commended the continuous generosity of Pakistan for extending support to the millions of Afghan refugees in the country and highlighted the need for repatriation to be voluntary, in safety and dignity to ensure sustainable reintegration.

“Afghanistan is rich in human resource, youngsters aged 12 to 30 constitute 44 percent of the total registered refugee population in Pakistan, with great potential to excel if provided the right conditions.” Said Mr. Ratwatte and added that, that it is therefore important for all the stakeholders to invest more in the sectors of education and skills training to enable these youngsters to play a productive role in the development of Afghanistan once they return to their country.”

With the voluntary return of approximately 3.9 million Afghan refugees since 2002 until to date, Pakistan remains home to some 1.5 million Afghan refugees which is the world’s largest protracted refugee population.

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Media contact

Duniya Aslam Khan - +92 300 5017939 - khand@unhcr.org

Kaiser Khan Afridi - +92 300 5018696 - afridiq@unhcr.org

Javaria Tareen - +92 334 7808091 – tareenj@unhcr.org

WHO

PRESS RELEASE

Meeting on Scaling up Preparedness and Awareness Raising for the MERS-CoV Prevention

A two day meeting on Scaling up Preparedness and Awareness Raising for the MERS-CoV Prevention was held in Ramada Hotel Islamabad on August 25-26, 2015 organized by World Health Organization in coordination with Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination and National Institute of Health (NIH). Participants of the meeting included National and Provincial focal points for International Health Regulations (IHR); Provincial Director Generals of Health, Provincial Directors Communicable Disease Control (CDC) & Public Health, Laboratory Personnel and Health Communication experts from related health departments.

WHO Country Representative Dr Michel Thieren, earlier in his opening remarks, highlighted the importance of preparedness and capacity enhancement in dealing with MERS-CoV and similar health issues that can pose a threat to the health of people of Pakistan. Dr Thieren said that health system in Pakistan has become more resilient and one such example is of dealing with the threat of Ebola Virus Disease last year where the federal and provincial health departments worked in coordination and were able to develop and implement the SoPs to deal with EVD. Dr Thieren, while talking about MERS-CoV said that this virus is new and there is very less knowledge available about the disease and virus. He emphasized that knowing the disease and its virus is important and the fact that MERS-CoV is not Ebola although it also presented with high mortality and also it is not as contagious as other airborne diseases like Measles. He said that we believe that not only scientific facts are important in this case but also the way we can understand in its context and most importantly how we communicate it. It is critical to involve the doctors, the scientists and the media.

Dr Thieren shed light on the history of the virus and shared with the participants that the disease was first reported from Saudi Arabia in 2012 and Saudi Arabia is the reservoir of this virus and MERS-CoV has been reported from 26 countries so far and all cases showed direct or indirect link with

Arabian Peninsula. He urged National and Provincial health representatives for developing core capacities, required under IHR, and enhancing skills of departments and officials who are involved in fight against deadly communicable diseases like Ebola and MERS-CoV. Dr Thieren urged National and Provincial participants to focus upon six pillars of Preparedness including Leadership & Coordination; Improved Vigilance at Health Facilities; Enhancing Surveillance and Contact Tracing; Infection Control; Enhanced Laboratory Capacity and Risk Communication for Public Awareness. He briefly explained the steps and measures that WHO has taken globally regarding control and containment of MERS-CoV infection. In his remarks, Dr Thieren said that though Pakistan has not reported any case of MERS-CoV so far but due to its regular travel linkages with Saudi Arabia and other Arab states, there are high chances of infection transportation especially on the onset of Hajj season, this may be the high time to remain prepared and vigilant. He praised the seriousness and efforts of Government of Pakistan that are being carried out in the implementation of International Health Regulations (IHR) and control of communicable diseases in Pakistan.

Dr Malik Muhammad Safi, Director Programs Ministry of NHR&C on behalf of Federal Ministry commented that MERS-CoV is a new and an emerging disease with a high mortality rate and Pakistan needs to be well prepared for this challenge. Hajj season has commenced and this is the right time to come up with a common risk mitigation plan in coordination with other stakeholders including Ministry of Religious Affairs. In his remarks, Dr Malik briefed on the steps that Federal and Provincial Governments are undertaking in controlling communicable diseases and implementation of International Health Regulations (IHR). He emphasized upon coordinated efforts among all the provinces and National institutes involved in implementation of IHR and CDC activities. He discussed the initiatives that the Government of Pakistan has taken for preparedness against diseases such as Ebola and MERS-CoV.

Director Programs Dr Malik Muhammad Safi, acknowledged the continuous and valuable support of WHO Pakistan to the Health ministry and thanked them for timely arrangement of this two day meeting in which all stakeholders and provinces participated.
