

# Media Update-2

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## United Nations

Press Release

### Rights of transgender people voiced by United Nations and High Commission of Canada

Transgender activists, government representatives, community representatives, diplomats and UN experts gathered on Thursday at the UN Information Centre to discuss the educational, economic and health issues facing the transgender community in Pakistan.

The event was jointly organized by the High Commission of Canada and UN Information Centre and was followed by the screening of documentary “Kumu Hina” which features the real story of Hina Wong-Kalu, a native Hawaiian transgender.

The event was attended by Ambassador of the European Union Jean-Francois Cautain, Resident Coordinator of UN Neil Buhne, Country Director of UNESCO Vibeke Jensen, Country Director UNAIDS Mamadou Sahko, Director UNIC Vittorio Cammarota, corporate sector and community representatives and transgender activists from Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Haripur, Lahore and Peshawar.

The event featured two panel discussions. The first panel focused on education and economic empowerment for the transgender community, while the second panel revolved around healthcare and protection.

Trans community representative Maya Zaman said, “Education is the only way forward to enhance the potential of the community and have their valuable contribution to the economy.” Maya further added, “We need a national action program for all the marginalized communities to engage them for socio economic development and we cannot have economically strong



and socially sensitive Pakistan until we achieve full inclusion of all communities, including the trans community.”

Another transgender representative, Anaya Malik said that usually family members are the first ones to abandon transgender people, leaving them vulnerable and unprotected. “The families need to be sensitized so that they accept their children’s identity.”

Speaking on the occasion, United Nations Resident Coordinator in Pakistan, Mr. Neil Buhne, said that Pakistan is ahead of many other countries in legally recognizing trans people as a third gender but still has a long way to go in recognizing their rights. “They are subjected to harassment and sexual violence. The Social Welfare Department needs to focus on this community as it is the most marginalized, and we need to do more in safeguarding their rights starting with education, access to health and social protection,” he said.

Perry Calderwood, High Commissioner of Canada said, “I am pleased that we can contribute to the dialogue about transgender rights and empowerment so that transgender Pakistanis can fully participate in this vibrant society.”

Member of the National Commission for Human Rights Ch Muhammad Shafique said that the state provides services according to the demand. “If society raises voice about transgender rights, the state would be compelled to respond and this is a wonderful forum to start that debate,” he said

The Director of United Nations Information Centre Vittorio Cammarota said, like the rest of the world, transgender people in Pakistan face alarmingly high levels of discrimination and stigma, as well as violence, unemployment and poverty. “The aim of this event is to foster a debate on human rights issues that trans people face, and the priority actions required to secure trans people’s right to dignity, education, equality, health and security,” he said.

EU Ambassador to Pakistan Jean-François Cautain drew parallels between the situation of trans genders in EU and Pakistan. “I think on this issue the EU and Pakistan can learn from each other,” he said.

Though officially accepted and even recognized in the identity cards, the transgender community in Pakistan suffers from serious stigma and discrimination. Often rejected by their families, transgender people have very little access to the labour market and proper healthcare. Therefore transgender people end up living in very difficult conditions and are frequently



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subject to violence in many different ways.

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