PRESS RELEASE:

“Literacies for the 21st Century”

Islamabad - 8th September 2013: “Literacy is much more than an educational priority – it is the ultimate investment in the future and the first step towards all the new forms of literacy required in the twenty-first century. We wish to see a century where every child is able to read and to use this skill to gain autonomy,” Ms. Irina Bokova, Director General, UNESCO Paris, made these points in her message circulated globally on the occasion of the International Literacy Day, September 8, 2013. This day is being celebrated in Pakistan with the organization of remarkable events in provinces and areas across Pakistan that have upheld the spirit of the global campaign on doing away with illiteracy. As in previous years, UNESCO Islamabad has taken a lead in celebrating the International Literacy Day and holding a nationwide campaign to advocate and nationally communicate the essence of this year’s theme “Literacies for the 21st Century” in Pakistan.

Like every year, UNESCO Islamabad has supported relevant federal, provincial and areas governments and NGOs working for the promotion of literacy and non-formal basic education to organize meaningful events in their respective constituencies to mark this year’s International Literacy Day. A total of 21 events (2 seminars in Karachi, 3 seminars in Lahore, 2 in Quetta, 2 seminars in Peshawar, 1 Literacy Walk each in Islamabad and Peshawar, 1 seminar each in Sialkot, Muzaffergarh, Rahim Yar Khan, Multan and Hafizabad (Punjab), and 1 seminar each in 5 districts of Balochistan, namely in Pishin, Ziarat, Nushki and Qilla Saifullah, are being organized by relevant stakeholders with UNESCO’s support. These events include advocacy campaigns on LED digital screens (electronic hording boards) in Islamabad, literacy walks, seminars, speeches and arts competitions, and seminars of the teachers’ associations. About 9 events are being organized in the rural communities in order to mobilize the communities to send their young children (boys and girls) to schools.

On this occasion, speaking to a gathering in the province of Punjab, Dr. Kozue Kay Nagata, Director UNESCO Islamabad drew on the point made by UNESCO Director General and highlighted its relevance to Pakistani context. She underscored, “Illiteracy in Pakistan has fallen over the two decades, thanks to the government and people of Pakistan for their efforts working toward meeting the Millennium Development Goals. Today, 70% of Pakistani youths can read and write. In 20 years illiterate population has been reduced significantly.” However she also emphasized on the need to do more to improve literacy in the country and said, “the proportion of population in

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Pakistan lacking basic reading and writing is too high. This is a serious obstacle for individual fulfillment, to the development of societies, and to mutual understanding between peoples.”

Referring to the recent national survey carried out by the Ministry of Education, Trainings and Standards in Higher Education with support of UNESCO, UNICEF and provincial and areas departments of education Dr. Nagata pointed out that, in Pakistan today, although primary school survival rate is 70%, gender gap still exists with only 68% of girls’ survival rate compared to 71% for boys. Specifically in the case of Punjab, she said, primary school survival rate today is better with 76%, but not without a gender gap of 8 percent points with 72% girls’ survival rate compared to 80% for boys. She also pointed out the better average per student spending in primary level (age 5-9) in Punjab, i.e. Rs. 6998, compared to the national average.

In Balochistan, although almost the same amount (Rs. 6985) as in Punjab is spent per child, the primary school survival rate is only 53%. Girls’ survival rate is slightly better with 54% than that of boys which is 52%.

The data of the survey shows that in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, primary school survival rate is 67% which is lower than the national average of 70%. Furthermore, gender gap also exists with only 65% of girls’ survival rate compared to that of boys which is 68%. Per student education expenditure in primary level (age 5-9) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is Rs. 8638.

In Sindh today, primary school survival rate is 63%, with a gender gap of only 67% of girls’ survival rate compared to 60% for boys. Per student education expenditure in primary level (age 5-9) in Sindh is Rs. 5019.

Talking to the gathering in Lahore, Dr. Nagata made reference to the survey report and mentioned that the most common reason in Pakistan for children (both boys and girls) of age 10 to 18 years leaving school before completing primary grade is “the child not willing to go to school”, which may be related to quality and learning outcome. She said, however, and sadly, for the girls living in rural communities the second highest reason for dropout is “parents did not allow” which might be related to prejudice and cultural norm against girls.

“Literacy is the key for acquiring knowledge, interpersonal skills, expertise and the ability to live together in community—all skills that are the foundations of modern society in the 21st century, more than ever before, literacy is the cornerstone of peace and development,” further added by Dr. Nagata, Director UNESCO Islamabad.

UNESCO is a lead agency of United Nations in Pakistan with the mandate of Education for All.

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