

Better facilities needed to promote girls education

Dawn

By Asad Najeeb

ISLAMABAD, Oct 23: Contrary to popular belief, most parents in Pakistan understand the need to educate their children, and are willing to do so, if they are assured certain facilities.

This was said by Mr Francesco d'Ovidio, Director of International Labour Organisation (ILO) while addressing the seminar "Girls' right to education" at Crown Hotel Plaza here on Tuesday. The seminar organised by INGEI (UN Girls' Education initiative), was presided over by Senator Farah Aqil, and included UNESCO representative Dr Kozue Kay Nagata and UN Resident

Coordinator Mr Timo Pakkala.

Mr Francesco presented a succinct summary of the problems faced by children, especially females, in acquiring an education. He said teachers had low-wages and lacked social protection, because of which the standard of education was low.

He dispelled the notion that parents lacked the will to educate children, saying that if security and transport issues were resolved, parents would be willing to educate their children.

He also said that women in Pakistan lacked a role model, a claim that was denied by

Ms Aqil in her speech. She maintained that Pakistanis had role models in the form of Fatima Jinnah, Hazrat Ayesha (RA) and recently Malala Yousafzai.

As the conversation shifted to Malala, the senator said she was grieved by the role of the media in the incident. She said the media had initially created hype around the incident, but was now distorting it by presenting superficial explanations for it.

Ms Farah said "Talibanisation" and lack of funds make it arduous for girls to pursue an academic career. She blamed previous governments for the lack of a

uniform education policy, adding that Article 25-A, which ensured free compulsory education, would be implemented soon.

The speakers proposed several solutions to the imbroglio, including an increase in the education budget, provision of security and transport to females, and the empowerment of mothers in Pakistan. The focus was laid on increasing the budget from the current 2.3 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Ms Mehnaz Ansar, deputy country director of an NGO, told *Dawn* that the polio campaign by Dr Shakeel Afridi which led to the killing of

Osama bin Laden had made people sceptical about the role of NGOs.

She said it was essential to win the trust of the locals, adding that by winning their trust, her NGO had been able to provide mobile education to girls in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK).

While discussing the importance of seminars in rural areas, participants said seminars in urban areas were not very useful, but it was important to create awareness around the plight of uneducated children. They said security issues in rural areas were also a huge hindrance in organising public seminars.