Each year from 1966, UNESCO (United Nations scientific, educational and cultural organization) celebrates International Literacy Day on 8 September. UNESCO every year sets the theme of the day. This year theme of the International literacy day is "Education and Peace".

There is a strong relationship between literacy and peace. Literacy ensures development, peace and democracy. It is vital to amalgamate literacy with peace-building processes in order to promote harmony among different sects of a society. Literacy provides youth and adults basic skills they need to live with harmony in a society. No doubt, lack of education propagates psycho-fanatic society and limits the economic opportunities of youth. Illiteracy is an exacerbating factor in promoting extremism, fanaticism, rigidity and terrorism.

The association between literacy and peace reveals from the fact that internal conflicts, sectarian violence, and terrorist activities left Pakistan far behind in the area of education. Small countries of South Asia such as Nepal, Bangladesh and Maldives have literacy rates higher than Pakistan. The World Bank says nearly half the adult population of Pakistan cannot read, and net primary enrolment rates is the lowest in South Asia.

A news report states, "The current literacy rate of Pakistan is estimated to be 49.9% - reading and writing being the criteria. Pakistan ranks 185th out of 204 countries in terms of our literate population. Literacy among female members is a dismal 36%.

Official figures show that literacy rate in Khyber Pukhtoon-Khwa Province (KPK) for both sexes is 35.41%, while for FATA the figures are too low as only 17.42% of people are educated most of whom have got education at the primary level only. Out of this 35.41%, figure ratio of male literacy is 51.49% while that of female is 18% only. Similarly, in FATA, the ratio of male literacy is 18.82% and that of female is 3% only, which is equal to none.

Terrorist activities in tribal and Northern areas forced millions of people to leave their home and destroyed future of their children. According to the media reports, more than 4,000 people have been killed in over 250 suicide attacks, and many thousands more live in fear of the next attack.

Countless boys and girls schools have either been destroyed or threatened by militants. At least 1000 schools alone in the Northern districts of KPK including 231 ruined, while 431 partially damaged only in Swat of which 248 were girls' schools. Girls discouraged by the extremists from going to schools. The destruction of schools has forced millions of girls' students to left the schools and stay at home. In Bajaur, by mid-2008 all girls schools were either destroyed or closed. In North and South Waziristan, 180 girls community schools, established with international assistance, were forced shut.

However, violence and unrest has by no means muffled education in tribal and other conflict ridden areas of Pakistan altogether. There are good number of organisations, institutions and individuals whose efforts contribute to the promotion of dynamic literate society despite of hostile environment. They are working to props up individual empowerment and social advancement. They are committed to reduce the impact of violence, and to bring divided communities together in the aftermath of aggression.

One such programme is The Open Doors Literacy Project (ODLP) which aims to educate and to empower boys, girls and women of deprived areas of Northern region. ODLP is a two-hour programme every day for 100 days consisting of a group of around seven children. This programme is usually conducted in a home, as there are no schools in these villages. At the end of the 100-days of classes, the students are able to do the basic reading and writing as well, keep an account of their moneys.
The project started working in July 2010 by the efforts of a brilliant youth Hassan Saeed, who hit the road to the remote villages in Peshawar, to teach the children of poor villagers. Hassan has been working hard to convince the parents of young boys and girls in villages to study. The selection of villages is based on his personal contacts. This makes it easier to approach parents who otherwise are not forthcoming in even giving this idea a thought. Hassan says that it has not been easy convincing the parents. He has also faced men with arms who have threatened him to not come back and teach in their villages. However, none of this has deterred his determination. With sheer passion and perseverance, Hassan has managed to train nine groups of boys and girls to date.

Hassan says, "The structure of the ODLP has been simple. I started teaching when I was 18. I recruit students from various villages by doing surveys or using personal contacts. Once we have a group assembled, I travel to the respective village daily after university to teach them for two hours a day. We use Urdu literacy workbooks, which consist of letters, sentences, reading, writing and numbering. At the end of the 100-days of classes, the students are able to do the basic reading and writing as well as keep track of their finances.

Gulalai Ismail organised Aware Girls organisation with a group of school friends to change the lives of young women in Pakistan. They began by focusing on women's rights, and now training young activists to become local peace builders, challenging violence and extremism. Gulalai began to recruit and train people of her own age as volunteers. They visit schools, universities and villages with the mission to save the next generation. Gulalai Ismail is working with women and youth to create real change.

She started this work at the aged of just 16 after meeting a woman whose son had become a terrorist martyr. The boy was only 12 years old. Gulalai Ismail says, "Women are not only victims of conflict, they are drivers of peace. Women's voices must be heard if peace is to last."

PAIMAN Alumni Trust (PAIMAN) aims to reach out to women and young people in the conflict-ridden region of the Tribal Areas (FATA) conflict-prone districts of Khyber Pukhtoon-Khwa. The founder and the executive director of PAIMAN Alumni Trust, Mossarat Qadeem says, "we help radicalised youth to be rehabilitated and re-integrated in society through psycho-social therapy, non-formal and formal education, skill building and true Islamic Education. Investing in the young people of the region is the need at this time. We also felt that the conflict and extremism that exist in the society would make its inroads into the minds of the young children and to combat that onslaught we started working on peace education in the province.

Amn Tehrik (Peace Movement) was launched on April 24, 2009 after Political workers, civil society, writers, intellectuals, lawyers, students, women, poets and sensible segments of the society in Peshawar realised the seriousness of the situation and the surge in extremism and terrorism in the region, particularly in Khyber Pukhtoon-Khwa. It emphasised the need of education and awareness to combat terrorism. Amn Tehrik regularly organises seminars and conferences. It has dealt with a range of issues, from the role of armed forces in Malakand to the Afghan-Pakistan policy in relation to terrorism. In addition, the Amn Tehrik has been strongly opposing pro-terrorism clerics.

Taaleem Foundation is a non-profit and non-governmental community support organisation, registered in Balochistan (Pakistan) since 1993. It has launched nine "Grammar Schools" up to elementary Level in the remote areas of Balochistan. The School System has an enrolment of 5000 students approximately. The foundation aims to remove sense of deprivation in various parts of Balochistan by building up the province, and lightens it up with the torch of education and awareness.

To promote peace through literacy and to improve the lives of underprivileged communities of Karachi, an organisation, Pakistan Youth Literary Society founded by Syed Murtaza Hassan Zaidi in 2012. The organisation aims "to 'highlight the social evils such as unemployment, terrorism, overpopulation, drug usage and child labour among the youth and annihilate them from their roots in order to bring about the desired change within the society". 
The PYLS is creating social awareness and civic sense amongst the masses particularly among the long neglected and deprived youth of Pakistan by organising productive and progressive events like theater, photography, painting, short-films, documentaries, essay writing, debates and group discussions regarding to what so ever perplexities faced by the youth of today.

Based in Karachi, another organisation Peace Education Welfare Organisation (PEWO) provides support to schools that have shown commitment to creating and maintaining a culture of peace in Pakistan. PEWO, through its projects, in collaboration with Peaceful Schools International, is focusing on promoting peace in a conflict zone of Karachi "Lyari".

Lyari conflict has negative impacts on children and youth of the area. Dr Zahid Shahab Ahmed a local correspondent of UK based charity project writes, "I visited a PEWO project called "World Learning Grammar School" in Lyari. This school was opened in 2004. The school is a living example of what we can achieve via peace education in conflict zones by providing children with opportunities to not only express their feelings and experiences but also by making them learn peer mediation skills. It is important to know that, not only the students of this school are victims of direct exposure to violence but most of them are also victims of marginalization". The day is a reminder to global community that literacy is a human right and the base of all peace efforts.