

UNESCO hails passage of Right to Free Education Bill by the Senate:

Provincial Assemblies to follow suit

Islamabad, 10th July 2012: UNESCO, which is specialized Agency of the UN system for Education, Science and Culture, has lauded the Senate of Pakistan on the passage of Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act yesterday, on 9th July 2012. Dr. Kozue Kay Nagata, UNESCO Representative to Pakistan, in her statement has felicitated all Senators on tabling and approving the multi-party bill for provision of free and compulsory education to all children of aged 5 to 16 years in Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT). Dr. Nagata expected that passage of this historical bill by the Senate will generate an emulative effect for the Provincial Assemblies to initiate similar legislation for out of school children in their respective areas. Among the 30 million out of school children of age 5 to 16 years in Pakistan, over 29 million are in the four provinces and FATA and Gilgit Baltistan, where access to education needs to be expanded through legislation and incentives.

It is worth mentioning here that on the request of Senate of Pakistan, UNESCO extended technical assistance for the preparation of draft bill on Right to Free and Compulsory Education, supported consultative meetings of stakeholders for fine-tuning the draft bill, and organized advocacy events to sensitize parliamentarians, media, and civil society to mobilize public support for the passage of this Bill. UNESCO is coordinating Education For All (EFA) movement in Pakistan and other developing countries. In Islamabad, over 70, 000 children of age 5 to 16 years are out of school and Capital Administration and Development Division (CADD), and Federal Directorate of Education (FDE) in Islamabad will have to launch special drive and increase their education budget to expand educational facilities in rural areas and urban slums and motivate parents to send their children to schools.

UNESCO, as part of EFA movement, is also extending technical assistance to the Department of Education in Sindh for the preparation of similar bill as education indicators in rural areas of Sindh are dismally low. Recently, Sindh Education Minister, Pir Mazahar ul Haque has given one month deadline to the Education Department for the preparation of Right to Free and Compulsory Education Bill for the province. Over 15 million children of age 5 to 16 years are denied their right to free education in Sindh and about 78% rural women in this province are illiterate. Dr. Kozue Kay Nagata hoped that Sindh which has been the birth place of great civilizations of the world and has produced eminent leaders, scholars, poets, and Sufis, will take the lead in passing Right to Free Education Act on priority basis.