UN bodies highlight plight of Afghan refugee children

Need for educating all without discrimination stressed

OUR STAFF REPORTER

ISLAMABAD — Speakers at a seminar urged the need for educating children, including Afghan Refugee children, without social discrimination, as illiteracy rate is very high among Afghan refugee children.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco) in cooperation with United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) organized a national conference to raise awareness and highlight issues to promote the “Right to education of Afghan refugee children in Pakistan”, here on Thursday.

The aim of the conference was to raise awareness and highlight concerns to encourage stakeholders to achieve the Education For All (EFA) goals by including Afghan refugee children through policy and capacity reform especially in refugee hosting areas, such as FATA, KP and Balochistan.

Country Representative of Unesco, Dr. Kozue Kay Nagata, in her opening remarks said, “We have an objective to assure that education is accessible, specially to the marginalized.

We are geared to set up foundation for the future joint interventions with a common interest of ensuring education reaches Afghan refugee children as we believe all children have right to education and there is no doubt about it.”

Stressing on the need to educate the societies without discriminating them due to their status she urged the stakeholders saying, “Let be practical, we need to face it without being superficial but it is a highly sensitive issue, which can be solved unless we consider the fundamental issue of tackling the education for all in a particle manner specially by including the marginalized groups like refugees in policy reforms.”

Addressing the participants, the Country Director, UNHCR Neil Wright elaborated the situation of the education among Afghan Refugees living in Pakistan.

Wright said, “The quality of the education including quality of the facilities and quality of teachers among refugees show clearly that there is a long way to go. 1.74 million Afghan refugees are still living in country, hosted generously by Government, and 3.7 million has gone back in last 10 years. Out of this refugee population 10 per cent are on the age of 14 whereas 70 per cent are on the age of 18. Only 52,000 (6 per cent) of the 1.74 million PoR card holders have completed primary education, there is only 20 per cent enrolment in primary school amongst school-aged Afghan refugee children”.

Wright added while concluding, “vast majority of these children were born in Pakistan and they feel that this is their country when I talk to them no matter how much they consider to be Afghan refugees they consider Pakistan as their country”.

The seminar was attended by eminent educationists from provincial education ministries, as well as civil society NGOs working for the rights and education of Afghan refugees.

The keynote speaker, Dr. Gwong Jo Kim, Director, UNESCO Bangkok, who stressed on different aspects of Education for All, and indicated that one of the reasons for low implementation rate to meet EFA goals is the challenges for the marginalized groups which include refugees.

He further added, “It’s not a favor to these refugee kids it’s just for all of us, because if we educated them we have to pay less taxes to pay, less to spend of social security and peace and harmony.

There is no peace or security without education”. In Pakistan 290,000 children in privately managed schools study and follow Afghan curriculum.