



## **PRESS RELEASE:**

### **Mobilink, UNESCO to use mobile phones to increase access to literacy**

#### **A world first in Pakistan**

Islamabad, May 21, 2009: Mobilink, Pakistan's market leader in cellular services and part of Orascom Telecom Holding, today signed an innovative Partnership Agreement with United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) for provision of literacy to adolescent girls using mobile phones. The use of mobile phones to facilitate literacy in Pakistan will be the first such use anywhere in the world.

Commenting on the partnership, Bilal Munir Sheikh, Vice President Marketing, Mobilink shared "Creating access to education is a core part of our CSR initiatives. As market leader, Mobilink actively supports initiatives that combine the benefits of technology to reach out to the community. This is the first of its kind initiative in the world and with UNESCO's expertise in the field of education, we hope to create a model that the world can follow and learn from."

Elaborating on the project, Maurice Robson, Director UNESCO stated, "We are grateful to Mobilink for wholeheartedly coming forward and extending their support to this unique and first-of-its-kind initiative. The literacy programme uses mobile phones, a common and popular means of communication among the youth population, to develop a mobile-based, distance post-literacy programme where the new literates receive post-literacy materials as messages on a mobile."

At 52 %<sup>1</sup> and with more than 50 million people illiterate, Pakistan has one of the lowest literacy rates in Asia. There is a large gender gap. The literacy rate for males over 15 years is 63% while that for females it is 36%. The reasons for the prevailing situation in Pakistan are complex. One of the main reasons is the difficulty of retaining literacy skills of the new literates.

In order to maintain the literacy skills after basic literacy courses, the new literates should have constant access to reading materials, at least for three months afterwards. But for most of the new literates, reading materials are scarce and the occasions to use the acquired literacy skills are rare. After graduating from the basic literacy courses, the new literates return to a non-literate environment and it is difficult for them to retain their newly acquired literacy skills.

The program has two parts. In the first, adolescent girls will receive interesting and informative text messages daily in Urdu and are expected to respond. The method is believed to be far more effective than conventional print based post-literacy programmes in maintaining the interest and in keeping the literacy skills alive. The second part of the programme includes evaluation every month to assess literates' gains in knowledge, interactive exercises, a glossary of educational terms and additional resources. The first phase of this programme will cover 250 learners in Punjab in the next 4 months and will be expanded in other areas on favorable outcomes.

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<sup>1</sup> Literacy rates (15+) Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement Survey (2006/07)

**Editor's Notes:**

CSR at Mobilink: As a socially responsible corporate citizen, Mobilink believes in playing an active role in supporting the community and social development of Pakistan. Mobilink Foundation supports The Citizen's Foundation education program across Pakistan, Zindagi Trust, Roshni Homes Trust and LUMS catering to over 2,000 students. Moreover the company has various socially inclusive products and services to facilitate the otherwise marginalized sections of society. Mobilink has also recently launched Pakistan's first handset recycling initiative.

**About Mobilink:**

Mobilink, a subsidiary of the Orascom Telecom Group, is Pakistan's leading cellular and Blackberry service provider. Mobilink maintains market leadership through cutting-edge, integrated technology and the country's largest voice and data network with over 7,800 cell sites covering more than 10,000 locations. Housing Pakistan's largest distribution and contact centre networks and an unparalleled 6,500 kilometers fiber optic backbone, Mobilink has invested, to date, over US \$2.5 billion and provides uninterrupted countrywide connectivity, unmatched customer services and international roaming in over 130 countries. As a responsible corporate citizen, in addition to ensuring employee well-being, Mobilink aims to support education and health initiatives, protect the environment and promote sustainable business practices. It also offers a range of products and services dedicated to enhance access to information. The company is also the official Telecom service provider for the Pakistan Cricket Board.