

Media Update-2

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UNHCR PRESS RELEASE

UNHCR calls for additional investments in education, livelihoods for Afghan refugees

ISLAMABAD, 7 July 2020: UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency convened a global high-level meeting to seek practical support and galvanize action in support of durable solutions for Afghan refugees.

The virtual high-level meeting was convened by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr. Filippo Grandi, and was attended by ministerial-level officials from the Islamic Republics of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan. Representatives from key countries and multilateral organizations also participated.

The aim of the high-level meeting was to seek support for programmes and projects under the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR). The Islamic Republics of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, together with UNHCR, launched a portfolio of projects in education, health and livelihoods, as well as energy, water and community infrastructure.

At the Global Refugee Forum held in Geneva in December last year, the three governments, together with UNHCR, launched a “Support Platform” in order to generate additional resources for refugee-hosting countries and for sustainable return and successful reintegration inside Afghanistan.

Speaking during the virtual high-level meeting, the UNHCR Representative in Pakistan, Ms. Noriko Yoshida, said that additional support through this platform aims to help ease pressure on refugee-hosting countries and support Afghanistan despite its challenges.

“The world must come forward and shoulder the burden, as Pakistan and Iran have done in hosting 90 per cent of Afghan refugees for over four decades,” said Ms. Yoshida. She added, “Education and livelihoods, in particular, give Afghan refugees real hope for the future”.

The initiative seeks strategic investments in education, health, training and youth empowerment as a priority as nearly half the Afghan population of 37 million are under 15 years of age. In Pakistan, some 64 per cent of registered Afghan refugees are below the age of 25.

On the occasion, the Federal Minister for States and Frontier Regions, Mr. Muhammad Mehboob Sultan, urged key humanitarian and development donors to invest in these important projects. He stressed, however, that this support should be additional and not substitute traditional funding.

He said that there has been a significant decline in funding for refugee-hosting countries. “The international community must play its role in shouldering the burden and responsibility,” he said.

He noted that Pakistan is committed to ensure the voluntary, safe and dignified nature of return to Afghanistan and added that there is dire need to support the Priority Areas of Return and Reintegration (PARRs) in Afghanistan, which will help the sustainable return and reintegration of Afghan refugees.

Pakistan continues to host 1.4 million registered Afghan refugees. Since 2002, some 4.4 million Afghan refugees have returned to Afghanistan under the UNHCR-facilitated voluntary repatriation operation.

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Photo caption:

The Federal Minister for States and Frontier Regions, Mr. Muhammad Mehboob Sultan, participating as panellist in the virtual high-level meeting convened by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr. Filippo Grandi. © UNHCR/S. Imtiaz Shah