

Media Update

22 December 2022

UNITED NATIONS

SECRETARY-GENERAL MESSAGE

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL MESSAGE FOR THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF EPIDEMIC PREPAREDNESS

New York, 27 December 2022

Three years ago this month, the virus that causes COVID-19 was first detected.

The costs have been catastrophic. Millions of lives have been lost, and hundreds of millions of people have fallen ill. Economies were shattered, health systems were stretched, and trillions of dollars were lost. Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals has been thrown off track. And developing countries were often left to fend for themselves, shamefully denied the vaccines, tests or treatments they needed to protect their people.

COVID-19 will not be the last epidemic or pandemic humanity faces. As a global community, we must heed the harsh lessons of COVID-19 and make bold investments in pandemic preparedness, prevention and response.

We need better surveillance to detect and monitor viruses with epidemic potential. We need more resilient health systems supported by universal health coverage. And we need a health workforce that is well-trained, well-equipped and well-paid.

We also need equitable access to vaccines, treatments, diagnostics and life-saving technology for all countries.

And we must fight the scourge of misinformation and pseudoscience with science and fact-based information.

A pandemic cannot be fought country by country. The world must come together. COVID-19 was a wake-up call.

On this International Day of Epidemic Preparedness, I urge all countries to stand with our efforts to ensure the world is equipped and ready to take on the health challenges to come.

UNHCR

PRESS RELEASE

Government of Pakistan and UNHCR open 11 PoR smartcard modification centres for Afghan refugees in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD – The Government of Pakistan with the support of UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, has opened 11 Proof of Registration (PoR) card modification (PCM) centres across the country.

The PCM centres located in Peshawar, Quetta, Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad, Nowshera, Mianwali, Lower Dir, Haripur and Kohat, will serve Afghan refugees who hold Proof of Registration (PoR) cards with an expiry date of June 2023. Run by Pakistan's National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA), these PCM centres will update, correct and modify information pertaining to the PoR card holders.

A PCM centre in Islamabad was formally inaugurated by Mr. Gohar Ahmed, the Chief Project Officer for NADRA, Mr. Farid Ullah Jan, Commissioner for Afghan Refugees (HQ), and Ms. Noriko Yoshida, UNHCR Representative in Pakistan. Representatives from the international community attended the event.

Mr. Gohar Ahmed informed that PCM operations have been extended to 11 nationwide sites equipped with 80 counters and 140 IT professionals to serve Afghan citizens more effectively. "By virtue of support from UNHCR and other development partners, PoR cardholders can register their newborn children and obtain a birth certificate," said Mr. Ahmed.

In addition, as part of services offered by the PCM centres, registered children who turn five years of age can avail of their own PoR card. A PoR cardholder can also obtain a Family Information Certificate including for their unregistered family member recorded during the most recent verification exercise.

Mr. Farid Ullah Jan noted that it was a landmark achievement that the data of Afghan refugees were verified and updated during the DRIVE exercise conducted last year, and extended his appreciation to the donor community for their continued support and the hope that the PCM centres will enable refugees to get swift services in their respective areas.

Speaking on the occasion, the UNHCR Representative underscored the significance of the identity document which grants legal status and protects Afghan refugees from arbitrary detention and deportation during their stay in Pakistan as well as provides access to essential services. “It is important for Afghan refugees to hold updated cards that help ensure access to health, education and other facilities,” she said.

Pakistan hosts some 1.3 million registered Afghan refugees who are holding PoR cards.

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