

Media Update

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PRESS RELEASE

The Legal Aid and Justice Authority, the European Union and UNDP hold a consultative workshop to enhance access to legal aid in Pakistan

Islamabad, August 3 2023—Under the European Union-funded ‘Deliver Justice Project’, the Legal Aid and Justice Authority (LAJA) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) jointly organized a two-day consultative workshop to improve access to legal aid in Pakistan. The workshop brought together representatives from the government, rule of law institutions, national and international partners, and civil society organizations to discuss LAJA’s mandate and provide recommendations to LAJA/government regarding how to ensure access to justice through legal aid in a sustainable manner.

LAJA was established under the LAJA Act 2020 to provide legal, financial, and technical assistance for access to justice for poor and vulnerable groups in society on criminal cases. The key functions of LAJA are to provide legal aid/assistance to poor and vulnerable groups, particularly women and children; enhance public awareness of legal aid and laws in Pakistan; research legal aid and pro bono legal services in Pakistan; and advise the government on the right to a fair trial and due process of the law.

Under the European Union-funded ‘Deliver Justice Project’, UNDP Pakistan’s Rule of Law Programme and LAJA organized the two-day consultative workshop to identify challenges faced by LAJA and develop recommendations to feed into a new strategic plan for LAJA to effectively implement its key functions.

Dr Muhammad Raheem Awaan, Director General, LAJA attended the workshop along with Dr Federico Romoli, International Aid/Cooperation Officer on Rule of Law, Delegation of the European Union to Pakistan and Mr Rana Kaiser Ishaque, Assistant Resident Representative, UNDP Pakistan. Representatives from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and UN WOMEN also participated in the workshop.

Ms Mehnaz Akber Aziz, Parliamentary Secretary for Law and Justice Ministry, Government of Pakistan, attended the closing ceremony of the two-day workshop as a chief guest where all the key recommendations were presented. She stated, “LAJA has a strong standing in the chain of the Criminal Justice System of Pakistan to provide legal aid and access to justice to vulnerable groups of society. We remain committed to strengthening LAJA to implement its mandate and encourage all justice sector stakeholders to extend support for enabling LAJA to serve the citizens of Pakistan.”

In his address, Dr Muhammad Raheem Awaan, Director General, LAJA, underlined, “LAJA has a huge responsibility to improve awareness of legal aid and ensure access to justice for all in Pakistan. We are optimistic that initiatives like these will play an instrumental role in achieving that goal. We are thankful to the European Union and UNDP Pakistan for their support in bringing all the important stakeholders under one roof to discuss and resolve roadblocks that impede LAJA from implementing its key functions successfully.”

Dr Federico Romoli, International Aid/Cooperation Officer on Rule of Law, Delegation of the European Union to Pakistan, with a separate note thanked

LAJA, UNDP, UN Women, and UNODC, for their efforts in improving the provision of legal aid in Pakistan. “A broad political consensus and collaborative approach both at the federal and provincial level are essential to finding sustainable and inclusive solutions to making justice and legal aid more accessible, especially for the most vulnerable groups. We praise and encourage learning opportunities like this workshop aiming to enhance LAJA’s institutional capacity and its coordination with other justice stakeholders .”

Mr Rana Kaiser Ishaque, Assistant Resident Representative, UNDP Pakistan, affirmed, “Striving for justice for all is integral to attaining the rule of law and so, now more than ever, we remain steadfast in our efforts to secure a future where everyone will be aware of their legal rights and will have equal access to legal aid in Pakistan. We thank LAJA and EU for being our committed partners in this journey to strengthening peace and justice in the region.”

The UNDP Rule of Law Programme is implementing a range of interventions to strengthen security and justice sector governance in Pakistan.

The ‘Deliver Justice’ project aims to support reform processes to ensure the delivery of people-centered justice, enhance access to justice for all, particularly women and less privileged groups, and improve service delivery of the security sector in line with constitutional safeguards and international standards. Implemented in Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the Merged Districts, the programme is funded by the European Union and jointly implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) and United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

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