

Media Update

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PRESS RELEASE

UNDP Commemorates International Human Rights Day with local community at Faisalabad

Faisalabad, December 12 2023: Christian and Muslim community members, Faisalabad Catholic Church, National Commission for Human Rights, Government of Punjab's Human Rights & Minority Affairs Department, civil society organisations along with local businesses, and UNDP Pakistan, jointly marked the International Human Rights Day voicing a shared message of solidarity, respect, equality, peace, non-discrimination, dignity for all and a core commitment to building a strong, inclusive and rights-based society in Pakistan.

The event organized by UNDP with the support of the Embassy of Norway in Pakistan, aimed at emphasizing and reinforcing the values of inter-faith harmony, equality, inclusion, the right to work, and to reiterate participants' commitment to these values, also distributed goodwill food packages to 125 Christian and Muslim community members from Jaranwala neighbourhood.

Recognising Pakistan's constitutional provisions, specifically Article 25 (1) guaranteeing equality before the law for all citizens and Article 5 ensuring freedom of religious practice and cultural development for minorities, speakers spotlighted the need to translate these constitutional safeguards into tangible realities for all faith communities.

The violence in Jaranwala on the 16th of August 2023 that damaged Christian places of worship and homes, serves as a stark reminder of the imperative need for ongoing multi-sectoral investments in interfaith harmony and community cohesion. In partnership with Human Friends Organization, a Punjab based CSO working on interfaith harmony, local students from the St.

Paul's Girls High School performed a skit on interfaith harmony. The skit echoed the sentiments of the Muslim and Christian residents of Jaranwala who spoke about the importance of tolerance, respect and harmony with their neighbors.

Mr. Manzoor Masih, Member National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR), reaffirmed the NCHR's duty to promote the respect and protection of minorities and the realization of their human rights, including the right to dignified livelihoods. Most Reverend Bishop Dr. Indryas Rehmat spoke about the importance of working together across faiths, with the government and with development partners, for peace, equality, and prosperity of the most vulnerable in Pakistan.

"Promoting interfaith harmony and changing the mindset of people requires continuous advocacy at every level," said Dr. Muhammad Shoaib Akbar, Secretary, Human Rights and Minority Affairs Department of Punjab, reaffirming the Punjab Government's commitment to ensuring the inclusion, respect, protection, and development of minority faith communities in the province.

Speaking on the occasion Dr. Samuel Rizk, Resident Representative, UNDP Pakistan said, "Alongside the Constitutional safe-guards, we need to recognise the valuable contribution of people of all religions, faiths and beliefs, to humanity and the contribution that dialogue among all religious groups can make towards an improved awareness and understanding of the common values shared by all humankind. Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) calls for freedom of religion or belief - asserting that believers of all religions and secular beliefs should be able to live peacefully with their rights guaranteed by the State."

Participants expressed a sustained need for such events and dialogues and thanked UNDP for providing the Holiday Packages with essential supplies for local community members. This is the first event initiating a series of dialogues between duty bearers and rights holders paving way for tangible steps and collaborative actions to ensure the protection and promotion of human rights for all communities in the country.

UNDP's Decentralization, Human Rights, and Local Governance (DHL) Project works towards improved governance at national and sub-national levels to support devolution and decentralization objectives by strengthening state institutions' capacity to deliver basic services to citizens. The DHL Project aims to build resilience in local communities, especially in vulnerable and at-risk

segments of the population. Furthermore, the project also provides capacity development support to government line departments, national human rights institutions and undertakes awareness raising at community levels for the protection and promotion of human rights across the country.

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