PRESS RELEASE

UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

18 June 2010

UNHCR calls for Pakistan to sign Refugee Convention

ISLAMABAD: At a special event to mark World Refugee Day in Islamabad today, UNHCR's Representative Mr Mengesha Kebede urged Pakistan to accede to the 1951 Refugee Convention and called for an inter-ministerial committee including UNHCR to deliberate on the issue.

Speaking at the occasion, Mr Kebede said that UNHCR's latest Global Statistics Report shows that, with 1.7 million Afghan refugees, Pakistan continues to host the largest refugee population around the world and that it was important to acknowledge this generosity on the eve of World Refugee Day (celebrated on 20 June).

"Pakistan's hosting of so many Afghan refugees and its respect for the principle of voluntary return has been in line with international refugee law but it has not yet signed the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol. I think it is high time we fixed this anomaly," said Kebede.

Mr Kebede said that that Pakistan's signing the Refugee Convention would complement its commitment to other Human Rights treaties which already include strong provisions to protect refugees. He also noted the strong correlation between Islamic teachings and international refugee law.

"The key principles embodied in modern international refugee law are to be found in Islamic Shariah – the protection of refugees, their property and their families, non-refoulement, the civilian character of asylum, voluntary repatriation – are all referred to in Islamic teachings," he said.

The UNHCR Representative said that accession to the Refugee Convention would help Pakistan distinguish between genuine asylum seekers who need international protection, and illegal or economic migrants and would be an important component of the government's new strategy on the Management of Afghans in Pakistan, which was endorsed by Cabinet in March.

The Federal Minister for SAFRON Najamuddin Khan was Chief Guest at the World Refugee Day event at the National Library Auditorium in Islamabad, which was also attended by senior public officials, diplomats, representatives from NGOs and international organisations as well as from the refugee community.

Today's event follows other special activities throughout the week, including speech and drawing contests and a friendly football match between young Afghan and Somali refugees. SAFRON Secretary Raffat Pasha presented the winning students their prizes. Each year on and in the lead up to June 20, UNHCR marks World Refugee Day to pay tribute to refugees and others uprooted by violence and conflict. The theme for the 10th World Refugee Day this year is *Home – they took away my home, but can't take away my future.*

Media contact: Qaiser Khan Afridi, tel. 92 (0)300 501 8696

UNHCR
The UN
Refugee Agency