

Afghan returns from Pakistan cross 30,000 mark

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan, 04 June 09 (UNHCR) – The UN refugee agency-assisted voluntary return programme of registered Afghans from Pakistan crossed the 30,000 mark for the current year, with the majority of Afghans going home from the North West Frontier Province (NWFP).

The Afghan voluntary repatriation from Pakistan is governed by a tripartite agreement between the Government of Pakistan, The Government of Afghanistan and UNHCR based on the principles of voluntary, gradual and dignified return.

The government of Pakistan has agreed to the proposed extensions of the Tripartite Agreement on Voluntary Repatriation and the Proof of Registration (PoR) cards for Afghans until the end of 2012. The agreement was made during the tripartite consultation meeting held in Dubai in April this year wherein all the three parties endorsed the proposal for extension.

“We value the commitment and generosity of the government and people of Pakistan for hosting one of the largest and most protracted refugee populations despite its internal difficulties”, said Guenet Guebre-Christos, UNHCR’s representative for Pakistan, “and we welcome the Government of Pakistan’s consent to extending Afghan’s stay in Pakistan beyond 2009 in view of the limited absorption capacity of Afghanistan” she stated.

UNHCR has facilitated return of some 3.4 million Afghans from across Pakistan under its voluntary repatriation programme since 2002, making it the largest repatriation programme of the agency in the region.

This year’s total of 30,193 returns include 22,180 from NWFP, 388 from Balochistan, 2,533 from Sindh and some 5,092 from Punjab all via Hayatabad Peshawar and Baleli Quetta. The return programme from Balochistan resumed on 1 June where repatriation of the willing Afghan will be facilitated from Baleli repatriation centre.

Pakistan is currently home to some 1.7 million registered Afghans mostly originating from Afghanistan’s south and eastern regions; the majority reside in NWFP and Balochistan.

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