

Press Release, 20 November 2009

Children Petition Government Officials : "Please make my school bigger and send us more teachers"

Universal Children Day celebrated in 5 Districts across Punjab

“Children are the future of our nation we can never deny their rights”, said Mr. Ahmad Masood Nadeem Malik, EDO Education, Muzaffargarh on the occasion of Universal Children Day celebrated by Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi (ITA) involving more than 25,000 children of 185 public sector girls primary schools located in the rural areas of Chiniot, Multan, Muzaffargarh and Rahim Yar Khan. The activities were organised under the Girls Education Project funded by Dubai Cares, a UAE based charitable organization.

On the Universal Children's Day, students' representatives in each district met key district officials to submit charter of demands highlighting critical needs in their schools including teachers' shortage, up-gradation of schools and encroachment issues in schools etc. Musarat Bibi, a student of Class 5, Government Girls Primary School Sheikhwla in Muzaffargarh who handed her school's petition to the official said, " I want to study beyond class 5 and become a doctor.. Please make my school bigger and send us more teachers". At school level, essay writing competition, speeches by the students and head-teachers during assembly, education walks, posters highlighting the key messages of promoting tolerance, basic child rights and protection global harmony, peace and love were disseminated in schools and education department. Speaking on the occasion, Mr. Muhammad Amjad Ali, EDO F&P, Muzaffargarh and other education officials of Multan emphasized the importance of literate mothers in their children's lives.

Children who participated in the essay writing competition highlighted some concerns and problems in schools. "I love playing with my friends and going to school but my parents were walways worried because there was no boundary wall until some time ago". This year, Universal Children Day was linked with the International Day of Tolerance which was observed on November 16, 2009 for the very first time in these districts. “Learning Tolerance from the History – Bolti Tareekh Bolti Rawadari” was the key theme of the field visits of students coordinated by ITA in each target districts to the historical monuments which were accessible and safe. Students were accompanied by professional guides. The initiative was appreciated by the education officials and parents of students.

Additional Notes:

Despite ratification of the UNCRC and its two optional protocols, Pakistan fails to provide education to all children- a fundamental basic right. Issues of commitment, governance and efficiency have been often cited as major reasons for this. Indeed, with only 2% of GDP allocated to education, Pakistan progress on the MDG's and Education for All targets is considered 'of-track'. Nearly half of 5 – 9 year olds do not go to primary school in Pakistan (DFID, 2009) and only 30% of students continue beyond the primary level (Planning Commission, 2009). Among children aged 10 – 14, about 40% of girls have never enrolled in school, compared to 20% of boys (Lloyd, 2004). There are disparities in school attendance between rural and urban areas, widening the gulf between the urban elites and the comparatively marginalized and disempowered rural population. Rising poverty levels impact children's well being.

