

Nafisa Shah's Speech for Malala Day and Million Signatures Campaign



Ms. Nafeesa Shah, Secretary General of the Women Parliamentary Caucus chairing meeting of the working council of the Parliamentary Caucus in Parliament House on 15.10.2012.

The Right Honourable Dr James Gordon Brown, UN Special Envoy for Global Education,

Honourable Sheikh Waqas, Minister for Education and Trainings

Dr Shehnaz Wazir Ali, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister

Baela Jamil, Director Idara Taleem-o-Agahi,

Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Ministry of Education and Trainings, the National Commission for Human Development and Idara Taleem-o-Agahi, I am delighted to welcome you all to this “One Million Signatures Campaign for Right to Education” initiated by Idara Taleem-o-Agahi. In particular, I extend a warm welcome to Dr Gordon Brown, UN’s Special Envoy for Global Education, and thank him for gracing this occasion as a Chief Guest, and for finding time to meet with Pakistan’s civil society. Your visit is a source of encouragement and strength for us all.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In Pakistan, since many years now, we are facing states of emergency in our everyday life. With a chronic war situation in the region, militancy, coupled with some of the worst natural disasters

in recent history have taken a heavy toll on the well being of the people, particularly on their state of education.

The earthquake of 2005, one of the most ravaging in recent times, hit the Hindu Kush and devastated entire villages and towns, leaving more than 73,000 casualties. It is estimated that 17 thousand of these were school children. Of the 600,000 buildings destroyed, 5500 were school buildings. In 2010 floods, at least 10,000 school buildings were damaged. And as we fight militancy and terror, 40,000 people have lost their lives in the war, and 700 schools have been targeted and destroyed by the militants.

Pakistan has also faced some of the fastest and largest internal displacements of the recent history. In 2009/10, at least three million residents of Swat and Waziristan fled from their homes overnight as the Pakistan army stepped in to combat the rising militancy in the region. These displaced persons took shelter in schools in the first phase before tents became available. Similarly, in the 2010 floods, the 20 million people fleeing from the ravaging waters of the Indus also took refuge in schools. As a result, these schools became unavailable to students for long periods of time, and further suffered damages as the displaced persons lived there. Displacement also exacerbates school dropout. In the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, (FATA), the drop out rate is as high as 80 percent, as people are constantly moving due to conflict.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Taking its vision from Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto, who as Prime Minister constructed 50,000 schools, our democratic government is ready to face these challenges.

President Asif Ali Zardari has strengthened democracy by surrendering his powers to the parliament, and we are working at restructuring and reforming both the basic law and structures and systems of service delivery to make them more responsive to peoples needs.

One of the most important steps taken by the parliament is the amendment to the Constitution making education a fundamental right. Article 25A makes education an obligation of the state and a right of the citizens, and today's campaign has used this right effectively in driving and pushing for action.

The devolution of powers and resources to the provinces has also led to greater commitment to education at the level of the federal units.

All this, I am sure, will lead to significant improvement and raise investments in education. But as we assert our right of education, we also have to rethink **how** we educate our children. *This education must promote multiculturalism, interfaith harmony and must help us build tolerance, respect and understanding for our differences.*

As militancy and war try to divide us, this education can and must be our uniting force. As Chairperson of NCHD, the lead organization for literacy in the country, **I believe that we must not let education be a victim of militancy, or in that case, of natural disasters, but make it our most effective weapon against them.** This is something that young Malala knew very well, as she stood up for right to education against the militants and braved their bullets.

And inspired by her will, we the National Commission for Human Development, announce today, **a campaign to build Malala Schools in 16 flood and disaster hit districts of Pakistan,** and we hope to raise this money with our global partners the Pakistan Human Development Fund.

The National Commission bridges the private and the public gap, and provides informal education in a country where drop out rates can be very high. Working under Ministry for Education and Trainings, the Commission leads enrolment drives, provides stop-gap schooling for out of school children and is the lead agency for adult literacy. Our Commission has also partnered with organizations like the Idara Taleem-o-Agahi for a citizen led movement for quality education.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The cowardly gun attack at Malala has become a defining moment for us, and has led to a strong voice calling for unity against obscurantism and militancy. This has also stirred up the global community, and your visit, Dr Gordon Brown, is testimony to this renewed commitment. **Pakistan needs all the global attention in this regard, not for our tragic terror attacks, and our losses, but for our courage demonstrated again and again, whether it is our brave**

leader Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto who stood up for restoration of democracy or Malala Yusofzai, who stood for right of education.

I hope this momentum will only grow in the coming times, and help to promote, expand and strengthen the political and social space for the civil society, and for the people, the very space that Malala was trying to define for us, a space occupied by many more schools, many more community and learning centres, and many more such places where the state and society meet to build a better world.

Thank you.

Dr. Nafisa Shah