

**Speech by Dr. Attia Inayatullah,  
Federal Minister for Women, Development and Social Work  
Delivered on 20 June 2002**

**Honourable Commissioner Afghan Refugees, NWFP  
Respected delegates of the United Nations  
And Head of the UNHCR, Peshawar Office.**

**Asslam u Alaikum,**

**This day has many dimensions and perceptions, for me, so as to be pleased, to enjoin you, on this important day in our lives.**

**I being my self, a woman, too feel happy that the United Nations is celebrating this year as the year of the Refugees and today the 20<sup>th</sup> June 2002 has been dedicated as the women refugee day.**

**I am also further pleased today that while, I am amongst you to celebrate Refugees women's day the news from our western borders is of peace, reconstruction and an herald of an end of a period, when Afghans per force, had to take refuge, with in Pakistan.**

**Example of Afghan patriotism is firmly established without doubt, from the sheer fact that since 1<sup>st</sup> March 2002, till date more than million Afghanis have returned home as against the expert estimates of 400,0000 till December. This phenomenon has surprised all that are involved with the welfare of the refugees.**

**It is important to highlight that out of these returnees 49% are women. And this figure includes, those households which are now being, headed by women, who as widows, sisters or as daughters have been forced to shoulder the responsibilities of her family and siblings.**

**I am happy that you are getting the required world notice the plight, inter clan fighting and other misery, you have been exposed to and for such a long time. And now that you have the world at your disposal for you, to engage your abilities, efforts and skills to bring your country Afghanistan again at the right place amongst the comity of nations, where Afghanistan right fully belongs. And we should also never forget that where does Afghanistan, lie in its geographical terms.**

**Afghanistan has since many hundreds of years witnessed only a few "Loia Jirga" (The Grand Assembly) and this year for the first time ever, a woman was also in contest, has given new response to the Afghan women in Afghanistan, which must be grasped as soon as possible, as the opportunities seldom knock twice.**

**I have always been content that during the last quarter of a century, when you were being hosted in Pakistan, you did diligently catered to the educational needs of your children. Specially of the girls who were made aware of personal hygiene, social knowledge and for me it is important to say that in addition to parents, brother and environment provided, also made it conducive to follow such a progressive, attitude of life. I foresee that once in Afghanistan if you continue with the same spirit and commitment, you are ought to succeed.**

**Pakistan and specially the province of NWFP, who have for the last quarter of the century hosted you and as a brother and sister shared with you what ever meagre resources the province and the country had. And this history making fact is recognised by all and has no parallel in history.**

**I am confident that few days more that you are with us, you will raise your hopes and with well wishes, I anticipate these days bringing for you of peace, harmony and well being. So that once you are back to your own country, you could contribute in the national reconstruction of the great future for Afghanistan.**

**I am thankful to all of you, that today, a day specially dedicated to Refugee women, I have been invited by you, to spend some time together and looking at you gives my heart a feeling of consolation and serenity, that you would with grace of Allah be proud Afghan Nation again, soon.**

**I on my behalf and on behalf of the Government of Pakistan assure you of best of our co-operation and collaboration in all endeavours.**

**Ladies and Gentlemen, senior delegates of the United Nations, especially Head of the UNHCR office, Peshawar and honourable commissioner Brig: Mushtaq Ahmed Ali Zai, I thank you once more, for inviting me to share these remarkably memorable moments with you today.**

**Thank you very much.**