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UNESCO committed to promoting, safeguarding Pakistan's unique culture

Islamabad—In an effort to raise awareness and highlight the importance of safeguarding the diverse culture of the country, UNESCO Pakistan and the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Islamabad in collaboration with Islamabad Serena Hotel, launched an ethnographic photo exhibition, entitled “Faces of the Kalash” at Satrang Art Gallery Corridor.

The five-day exhibition (from September 27 to October 2) is showcasing photographs from Georg Morgenstierne's field-work in Chitral, Pakistan in 1929. At the time, Morgenstierne was a Norwegian linguistics professor who visited the region and documented the culture of the Kalash extensively. His photographs are showcased for the first time in Pakistan.

Speaking at the opening, UNESCO Representative to Pakistan, Vibeke Jensen highlighted the urgent need for safeguarding the unique culture of the Kalash people.

She said that the photo exhibition provides an opportunity for much-needed awareness raising with regard to safeguarding of a minority culture which is at risk of disappearing. Promoting respect for cultural diversity is at the core of UNESCO's mandate and also features in the new sustainable development agenda 2030 that all UN member states have become signatories to.

She highlighted the efforts being made with the support of a number of Embassies and development partners in Islamabad to support cultural safeguarding and livelihood activities for the people living in the Kalash valleys. The world will be a lot poorer without the Kalash people and along with them many other minority groups in the world were they to disappear completely and Prof Morgenstierne realized that already in 1929. It is about time we also learn that lesson. Local, indigenous knowledge is key to devising sustainable and climate friendly development strategies and it will be a huge loss for all of us if that knowledge disappears. Vibeke Jensen concluded by thanking the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Islamabad for inviting UNESCO to collaborate on this photo exhibition, which later in October will be brought to the Kalash valleys and handed over to the local community. She also expressed her gratitude to Satrang Gallery and Islamabad Serena Hotel for their support in organizing the exhibition.

Speaking at the opening ceremony, H.E. Tore Nedrebø, Ambassador of the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Islamabad, welcomed all the participants and commended UNESCO's efforts to support the exhibition. He said that the unique culture of the Kalash people was captured and documented by Mr. Georg Valentin von Muntheaf Morgenstierne (born in Oslo in 1892 and died

in 1978): “Morgenstierne was a language genius, and a professor of linguistics at the University of Oslo and carried out field-work during 1923 to 1971 in Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and Iran. In addition to his field work, he also collected some remarkable scientific materials from the culture of the regional people, like images, movies from pre-Islamic ceremonial dances, as well as sound recordings from nearly extinct languages. The materials are available in a database at the National Library of Norway.”

The UNESCO’s Convention for safeguarding Intangible Culture Heritage (ICH) was adopted in 2003 to safeguard the living heritage against the threats posed by the contemporary process of globalization and unprecedented social transformation.

The convention lays out a number of possible safeguarding measures including identification, documentation, research, and promotion, transmission of knowledge specifically through formal and non-formal education. The convention provides a mechanism of international cooperation which includes the listing system and Intangible Cultural Heritage Fund, which encourages the State Parties to the Convention to inscribe its endangered ICH elements on the Urgent Safeguarding List and apply for international assistance.

Source: <http://pakobserver.net/unesco-committed-to-promoting-safeguarding-pakistans-unique-culture/>
