

# DAWN

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## **Photo exhibition showcases Kalash culture in early 20th century**

ISLAMABAD: A photography exhibition, titled 'Faces of the Kalash', on the endangered Kalash people of Chitral, opened at the Satrang Art Gallery in Serena Hotel on Tuesday.

Organised by UNESCO Pakistan, the Royal Norwegian Embassy and Satrang, the exhibition showcased photographs from Georg Morgenstierne's fieldwork in the region in 1929, when the linguist documented Kalash culture.

The Kalash culture is in danger of disappearing, as the population of the community has fallen to approximately 4,000 people, and continues to decrease.

A member of the Kalash community who attended the exhibition opening, Luke Rahmat, spoke of the history of the community.

'There are many hypotheses on where the Kalasha people came from some say we are descendants of Alexander the Great, that we are from Siam, that we came from Afghanistan, but we can trace our history back to 327 BC and there were also indigenous people in the Kalash Valley. The culture is unique with numerous festivals and rituals and these need to be preserved.

Tore Nedrebø, Norwegian ambassador to Pakistan, expressed his pleasure that so many people attended the event, and said: 'The story behind this exhibition is quite interesting. In Norway we have some 40,000 people of Pakistani descent settled there, representing one of the biggest minority groups in the country.

We have many prominent Norwegian Pakistani members of society both in the public and private sectors.

'One of them, Nauman Mubashir, a wellknown TV journalist was given some of these original photographs of the Kalash, and he contacted the Norwegian embassy here to see if we could do something with them. As a result this exhibition has come about and the pictures will be presented to the Kalash people afterwards.

He added: 'The [photographer] carried out extensive fieldwork in this region and in 1924 he undertook the first of his two major linguistic expeditions and arrived in Afghanistan. Along with studying languages he also made video and sound recordings of indigenous cultures, which are available at the University of Oslo.

The UNESCO country representative, Vibeke Jensen, said: `This exhibition gives us the opportunity for advocating for and mobilizing support for the Kalash culture which is old, unique and threatened by social, political and environmental issues.

`... With various ethnic minorities and language groups disappearing, we are losing traditional indigenous knowledge and we are cutting the strings to the past.

Ms Jensen added: `UNESCO is only here to support the desires of local communities in finding ways of safeguarding and protecting their culture. No one can impose the safeguarding of a culture if the people themselves don't want it.

National History and Literary Division Secretary Mohsin Haqqani said: `It is part of our Constitutional duty to preserve our heritage and we are very proud of the vibrant Kalash culture that we are losing because of social pressures... The Kalasha community is the only one that continues to practice cultural and religious traditions that once existed across the Hindu Kush and it is essential that they be documented and safeguarded.

**Source:** [http://epaper.dawn.com/DetailImage.php?StoryImage=28\\_09\\_2016\\_153\\_005](http://epaper.dawn.com/DetailImage.php?StoryImage=28_09_2016_153_005)

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