

## **The Outstanding Journey of Pakistani Educators to USA (A Pre-Departure Ceremony for Pakistani Educational Leadership Institute New Hampshire USA)**

After having gone through a rigorous procedure with an incredibly tough selection criteria, there were understandably many glowing faces amongst the 37 selected Pakistani Educators (of them 29 women and 8 men), coming from all parts of Pakistan including: FATA, Gilgat, Biltistan, Khaber Pakhtoon Khaw, Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Sindh and Baluchistan, representing the diverse and rich culture of Pakistan, as they gathered in the prestigious Hill View Hotel, Islamabad to attend an orientation and pre-departure ceremony for an educational expedition to the *Pakistani Educational Leadership Institute* at Plymouth State University, New Hampshire, USA. The venerated hosts of the event (funded by the *US Department of State and Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs*) comprised of staff from *Idara Taloom and Agahi and the Institute for Professional Learning*, who commendably managed to facilitate the needs and queries of the esteemed participants at this ostentatious assembly.

*Adara Taleem'o'Agahi* has been teamed up with the *US Department of State and Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs* for this cross cultural, educational exchange and professional development program since 2004, thus it was the 8<sup>th</sup> group which was leaving for the united states as an American pledge “---to strengthen US long term commitment to the future of Pakistan-----“. Building upon existing leadership strands of the academicians, the Pakistani educators are to receive training about educational leadership, management, planning and pedagogical skills with the theme for this year's program being “*Leaders in Climate of Change*”. The program is composed of a four week stay in the US, during which the candidates will design a mechanism according to their local context in the form of a *Master Action Plan*. The Master Action Plan will be implemented in Pakistan within the participant's local institutions as the second half of the program. After the completion of the program, the participants will be officially awarded 15 credit hours by the *Plymouth State University*.

A two days orientation session and pre-departure ceremony was organized to prepare the participants to take part in a demanding and academically enriched short span (four weeks) program. The major topics discussed in the session, by eminent scholars such as; Professor Dr. Bernadette Dean, Dr. Baela Jamil and Javed Ali Khan were *Climate Change: key challenges and terminologies, Citizenship & Conflict Resolution Skills for Educators, Sharing best pedagogical practices / culturally & geographically appropriate and Current Educational Scenario – 18 Amendment & Right to Education*. These talks were given to prepare the participants for the forthcoming program, aimed at familiarizing them with the vocabulary and terminology they would later require.

Furthermore, *PELI alumni* and staff of *Adara Taleem'o'Agahi* shared enlightening experiences of past programs and their interaction with the US citizens and faculty of *Plymouth State University*. The participants also got a chance to share their hopes and doubts for the program, highlighting how they would use the opportunity to develop their leadership abilities and

strengthen their pedagogical skills in order to meet some of the challenges they encounter and project the image of Pakistan as a positive, peace loving nation.

A cultural night was organized to celebrate and appreciate the diversity and enrichment of different regions of Pakistan, with everyone participating in their regional dresses. It was a rich cultural exchange through presentations of regional folk songs and dances in local languages, as the candidates were expected to do the same with their American counterparts. As anticipated the program was thoroughly enjoyed by everyone with full participation.

In the pre-departure ceremony, Mark Davidson *Councilor for Public Affairs US Embassy, Islamabad*, along with Julia Fendrick *Deputy Cultural Attaché U.S. Embassy, Islamabad*, congratulated the educators and expressed his expectation that the Pakistani educators would find the program beneficial for initiating the modification in the existing educational culture and system of Pakistan. He suggested that these programs facilitate the exchange of ideas between the teaching faculties of the two countries and helps to bring the nations closer.

In her presentation, Baela Raza Jamil, *Director Programs Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi*, insisted upon the fact that, since the faculty exchange has been sending Pakistani educators to America for 8 years, it is time now for American educators to visit Pakistan for a truly effective cultural and educational exchange. In the past, the 160 alumni of the program played an important role in bringing the innovative initiatives in parent institutions and communities. The guests include Provincial Education Secretaries and Directors including Muneer Ahmed Baadini *Secretary Secondary Education Baluchistan*, Muhammad Rafique Tahir *Joint Secretary CADD*, Waseem Ahmed Ursani *Secretary Education Sindh*, Muhammad Farid Qureshi *Special Secretary Elementary and Secondary Education KP*, Khalid Mahmood Ramay *Additional Secretary (Education Reforms) Punjab*, Muhammad Sadiq Dar *Secretary School AJK*, Muhammad Raja Nasir *Director Education Gilgit-Baltistan*, and Fazale Manan *Director Education FATA*. They were joined on the occasion by eminent civil society organizations, academia and development partners.

The excitement continued until the group finally left on the early morning of 3<sup>rd</sup> July. This great educational commemoration ended with ever high expectations to revolutionize the Pakistani educational system after being equipped with cutting edge, modern techniques.