

July 30, 2009

Ms Farzana Raja meets President General Assembly and UN officials

United Nations 2nd August,2009,,Ms Farzana Raja Federal Minister and Chairperson Benazir Income Support programme (BISP)held extensive talks with President United Nations General Assembly, Ms Emmy Takahashi, Senior Policy Adviser, UNHCR office in New York and Mr Ajay Chibber, Assistant Secretary General and Regional Director United Nations Development Programme(UNDP) Asia and Pacific and briefed them about the BISP. Federal Minister was accompanied by President Think Tank International, Dr. Ammar Turabi.

In her meeting with Mr. Ajay Chibber, Assistant Secretary General UNDP the Minister informed him that the Benazir Income Support Programme is not only in line with the Millennium Development Goals set out by UN but also aimed at empowering and mainstreaming women.

The Minister said that the programme is one of the largest of its kind in South Asia. BISP has so far been able to access 2.2 Million families within the 8 months while the target for the year is 3.5million.The government she added intends to access 5 million families this year



Ms. Farzana Raja, Federal Minister and Chairperson of Benazir Income Support Programme called on Mr. Miguel d' Escoto Brockman, President of the UN General Assembly on July 30, 2009 at his office and presented him with a plaque.

Dilating on the salient features of the programme she said that all funds are channelized through female members of the family on the condition that they have Identity Cards. The criteria for selecting families include that the family should be earning less than Rupees 6000 and have no account in a Foreign Bank. Widows are however exempted from this condition. In case of Emergency Relief given to dislocated persons the conditions have been relaxed for two months, she added.

The BISP ,she said enjoys across the board support of all political parties including the opposition and civil society. Each parliamentarian has been given 8000 forms without any distinction of the party he or she belongs. The Federal Minister said that a sum of Rs 70 billion has been allocated this year for BISP and the government has permitted the programme to access International donors as well as the Corporate Sector for funding,

Ms Farzana Raja said that the programme also extends help Earthquake Affectees, victims of bomb Blast and dislocated persons in Pakistan. Ms Raja said that despite stiff opposition and threats from militants she visited Northern Areas, FATA and NWFP. This resulted in enrollment of thousands of women from those areas. The minister said that in order to ensure transparency a website has been launched where all relevant information, regarding the programme, disbursement of Funds and complaints can be registered.

Earlier, Secretary General UN, Ban Ki-moon also applauded Think Tank International headed by Dr. Ammar Turabi. Mr. Ajay Chibber said that he was impressed with the programme and has always believed that conditional cash transfers as packaged in BISP are the best way to tackle poverty alleviation as well as emancipation of women. He also appreciated President Asif Ali Zardari and PM Syed Yousuf Raza Gillani's efforts for poverty alleviation in Pakistan. Mr. Ajay Chibber said that he is arranging a regional seminar somewhere in October and November this year and would like Ms Raja to share Pakistan's experience so that the region could benefit from this model. Mr Ajay invited Ms Raja for attending such a seminar. Mr. Ajay assured the Minister that though UNDP had comparatively little funds it would be ready to help BISP in any way possible. The UNDP however he said can provide funding some pilot projects so that the programme can get a boost. The Minister invited Mr Ajay Chibber to visit Pakistan which was accepted and his visit to Pakistan is expected in November this year. In her meeting with Ms Emmy Takahashi Senior Policy Advisor, UNHCR Ms Farzana Raja thanked UNHCR for extending co operation. The Federal Minister said that BISP is a social safety programme and is being implemented not only to improve the living standards of downtrodden and underprivileged but also provide them vocational training so that they stand on their own and become constructive members of the society.

The federal minister said that the President and Prime Minister of Pakistan are personally taking interest in the programme. Ms Farzana Raja informed Ms Takhashi that BISP is conducting a national poverty census to know the financial condition of the people. Ms Emmy Takahashi thanked the Minister for inviting her to Pakistan and assured that she would direct UNHCR office in Pakistan to extend all possible support. Federal Minister and Chairperson BISP also called on the President General Assembly Mr Miguel d' Brockmann and briefed him about the programme, The President General Assembly evinced keen interest in the programme and said that he would visit Pakistan at the first available opportunity.