

**SPEECH FOR CHAIRPERSON FOR BISP'S SEMINAR ON  
PROMOTING PRIMARY EDUCATION AND PROVIDING  
EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL**  
**11<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2013**

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**DFID Head of Office, Mr. George Turkington**

**Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

- I deem it an honor and privilege to speak to you all at this Seminar on Role of **BISP in Promoting Primary Education and Providing Equal Opportunities for All.**
  
- Poor segments of society especially women and minorities have become the victims of a culture of exclusion, deprivation, and discrimination. Majority of our women are illiterate. Millions of children of school going age are out of school and seventy per cent

of the children who are denied education are girls. There is an education emergency in Pakistan. Pakistan is less likely to achieve the MDG Goal of Universal Primary Education for All. The problems are plenty and enormous in scale and often discussed by different stakeholders at different forums. But this is an opportunity for me to talk about what is being done by BISP to address these issues of massive proportions that are holding Pakistan back from progress.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

- Providing primary education to our children is not only right in principle; it is also the absolute key to economic and social progress. If we can ensure that all children, including the girls, will get the opportunity of a good education only then massive development progress is possible. But if we fail - if the poorest people continue to be denied this opportunity - not only will the terrible poverty be carry on, but the gap between the rich and poor

will further grow. Bridging this education divide, opening up educational opportunity to all - this is one of the biggest challenges we face in the 21st Century.

- It is critical to recognize that educational objectives cannot be pursued or achieved in isolation. Education and skills are the core pillars of a modern economy. That means placing them at the very centre of a government's economic and development strategy is absolutely imperative for sustainable economic growth. A high-quality, equitable education system depends, above all, on good economic policy that generates the growth necessary to fund and sustain that system. This economic growth depends in turn on an expansion of educational opportunities. But this approach to education also means addressing the barriers that impede the educational development of the poor and recognizing the links between education and other areas of policy.

- The biggest barrier is poverty itself. In our country with the worst education indicators, most children - particularly girls - from the poorest households have no schooling. And of the children who do enroll, it is overwhelmingly the poor, especially girls, who drop out of school. Education system imposes costs of access - school fees and the requirement for school uniforms - which are a further barrier to education for the poorest. And, of course, many children have to work to supplement the meager incomes of their families. A policy for improving the educational opportunities of the poor needs to address these issues together, to reduce the direct and indirect costs that make education prohibitively expensive for them, and to enhance the income levels of parents so that they are no longer so dependent on the work of their children.
- While Pakistan has faced a lot of criticism in failing to respond to the education crisis, the Benazir Income Support Programme has developed a robust programme to expand primary enrollment for the children of millions of poor. At BISP, we are concentrating on

primary education with an aim to send 3 million children of BISP beneficiary families to primary school.

- Waseela-e-Taleem is a co-responsibility programme that gives additional incentive to the poorest families of Pakistan to invest in building their human capital and send their children to school. Once the families fulfill their responsibility of sending their primary aged children to school, BISP fulfils its responsibility of paying per child extra sum in addition of Rs 1000 monthly cash grant to these poor families. The scale of this programme is matchless and similar programmes have transformed societies in various Latin American countries. BISP's large, national outreach and this government's dedication in addressing the education crisis are on the path to alleviate a fundamental education problem in the country.

## **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

- This confirms that BISP is not just a tool for providing relief for those worst affected by the ongoing global economic crisis, but through components like these, is also playing a key role in investing in the human capital development of Pakistan. BISP is providing a fundamental human right, as charted in the UN Charter for Human Rights, to the illiterate and marginalized of our society. With the efforts of Waseela-e-Taleem, we hope that Pakistan can move up on the Human Development Index after staying at the very low ranking for over 20 years. Furthermore, Waseela-e-Taleem aims to enroll these 3 million children in the next three years, bringing us closer to realizing the Millennium Development Goal on education by 2015.
- We all need to agree that a strong commitment by government to the targets of universal primary education and gender equality is critical to achieve this goal. Where that commitment exists, real

progress is possible. Where it is lacking, progress will be much slower or simply not happen at all.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

- Speaking on fundamental rights and rights to education, I will also like to apprise that BISP is established on fundamental principal of promoting equal opportunities for all.
- The constitution of Pakistan guarantees fundamental rights and equality before the law for *all* citizens of Pakistan as it says: "Therein shall be guaranteed fundamental rights, including equality of status, of opportunity and before law, social, economic and political justice, and freedom of thought, expression, belief, faith, worship and association, subject to law and public morality." The constitution further specifically safeguards the rights of minorities by requiring the state to provide complete freedom in the practice of their religions and to develop their cultures. This

constitutional protection is based on the legacy handed to us by Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the father of our nation, who declared in August 1947:

*"We are starting in the days when there is no discrimination, no distinction between one community and another, no discrimination between one caste and creed and another. We are starting with this fundamental principle that we are all citizens and equal citizens of one State."*

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

- In this spirit BISP by design provides a unique opportunity to Minorities: an equitable access to programme, based on their poverty status and not any quota. BISP plays a very important role in promoting social cohesion and harmony by providing equal opportunity to the poorest of the poor in society, without looking at which political group, religion, ethnicity or province they belong

to. BISP used a detailed targeting process to identify eligible households through application of a poverty scorecard that determines welfare status of the household on a scientific scale. Nationwide Poverty Scorecard Survey was undertaken in October 2010 and was completed in a record one and half year's time. In this national survey, BISP did not inquire about the religion of the household but only sought information about their citizenship status. Thus developing strong linkages among empowerment, access to safety nets, and citizenship as means for promoting social inclusion and social cohesion for all who are citizens of Pakistan.

- This concrete step towards promoting equal opportunities for all the citizens of Pakistan shows yet another commitment from the democratic government that has given numerous sacrifices in its bid to fight for the people of Pakistan to ensure security of human right beyond any socio-religious discrimination. Present democratic government respects the life, liberty, property, livelihood and right to freedom of association, expression and

movement of every citizen. It honors the International Human Rights Declaration in both letter and spirit. I have a great sense of achievement for what our government has been able to accomplish for the women and the downtrodden, for what we have been able to do for the poor and the less fortunate segments of the society like the minorities. Faith in the people and the justness of the cause which we have propounded has been a great support which has sustained us in difficult times. BISP is a true manifestation of our Government's serious efforts to protect the rights of the weak and oppressed, the discriminated and the downtrodden.

- At the end, I would thank our development partners especially the World Bank, and UK's Department For International Development (DFID) for their support for BISP and our initiative for promoting primary and basic education. I would also like to urge the international development community to continue supporting our efforts as we are committed to our objectives and have put in place the appropriate policies and robust mechanism to deliver on it.

## Ladies and Gentlemen,

- I will end my speech quoting my leader Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto Shaheed, who in April 2007 had said:

*“We should band together to fight hunger and disease. We should band together to fight discrimination and bigotry against minorities..... These are the real issues that confront our masses”.*

And in an address to the Oxford Union in February, 2010 she had remarked that

*“Human dignity and respect is at the heart of Islam. If there are political prisoners in Pakistan and elsewhere, if there are witch-hunts against women and minorities, that is not Islam; It is discrimination.”*

- The prevailing inequalities are the result of social, economic, cultural and political structures which place certain sections of society at risk, creating a development divide. Our collective efforts aiming at creating a just and equitable society with equal opportunity for all its citizens, Women, Minorities and under-privileged will provide equality of opportunity. The challenge is a huge one. But the prize is also equally great. Let's resolve today - together - that we will do what needs to be done to make this happen.

**I THANK YOU ALL**