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UNICEF Afghanistan and Ghalib University discuss Child Malnutrition at Academic Symposium

KABUL, Afghanistan, 01 November 2015: A one day symposium on child malnutrition in Afghanistan was held today at Kabul Intercontinental Hotel, hosted by UNICEF Afghanistan and Ghalib University.

Keynote speakers at the event attended by over 200 students were Dr. Faizulalh Kakar Health Advisor to the President, Dr. Farida Momand Minister of Higher Education, Habibullah Sahak Advisor to the Minister of Public Health Ms. Farkhunda Zahra Naderi Member of Afghan Civil Society and UNICEF Deputy Representative in Afghanistan, Dr. L.N. Balaji.

In the inauguration ceremony of this scientific symposium, Dr. Faizullah Kakar, the president's health advisor, called child nutrition very important. He added that "the first 1,000 days of life play critical role in the rest of children's life. Parents need to pay undivided attention to their children". Mr. Kakar urged feeding with quality food. He added that "people should not use food that MoPH has not indorsed. Government, he said, should not allow low quality food, especially edible oil, to find way to local markets to endanger children's life."

Addressing the fact that Afghanistan is among 37 countries in the world with the highest burden of stunting (with 40.9 per cent of the country's children stunted according to the National Nutrition Survey, 2013), UNICEF Deputy Representative, Dr. Balaji said, "Stunting is caused by severe acute malnutrition and is exacerbated by poverty and poor sanitation and hygiene. Stunted children are short for their age and are less likely to learn well because they suffer long-term cognitive damage. Between age 4 and 9 a child's brain becomes twice as active as an adult brain. Without adequate nutrition, babies' brain nerve cells have no fuel to grow. These children are less likely to stay in school and will become economically less productive. This perpetuates the malnutrition-poverty cycle into future generations. Nutritional deficiencies are mostly irreversible.

Dr. Balaji also called on the university faculty and students to create awareness around this issue, become advocates for exclusive breastfeeding, iron folic acid supplementation for adolescent girls, and the use of safe water and good sanitation and hygiene practices to transform the cognitive and physical development of Afghanistan's children, reduce child deaths and improve the country's human capital.

In his speech, Dr. Ali Ahmad Yousefi, Academic Chancellor of Ghalib University said, "One of the most important factors of sustainable development is based on development of human capacity and children creates the foundation of human society and this is the reason that Ghalib University with the cooperation of UNICEF Afghanistan called this symposium for highlighting the child malnutrition", said Dr. Ali Ahmad Yousefi. "The current situation of child nutrition is not acceptable and must not be acceptable. We need to change the situation and changing the situation requires the commitment of everyone living in this society and I would like to call on all Academic, youth, politicians, media parents and international society to pay more serious attention to the issue and play their important role in ending child malnutrition in Afghanistan," he added.

The symposium - a joint effort of UNICEF Afghanistan and Ghalib University - included presentations on child malnutrition; group work to identify solutions to the problem and key advocacy messages; a march to show solidarity on the issue.

About UNICEF: UNICEF works in more than 190 countries and territories to help children survive and thrive, from early childhood through adolescence. The world's largest provider of vaccines for developing countries, UNICEF supports child health and nutrition, good water and sanitation, quality basic education for all boys and girls, and the protection of children from violence, exploitation, and AIDS. UNICEF is funded entirely by the voluntary contributions of individuals, businesses, foundations and governments. For more information about UNICEF and its work visit: www.unicef.org.

About Ghalib University: Ghalib University is a private university with campuses in Herat and Kabul. Initially established as an institute of Higher Education in 2009 offering affordable & quality education, it was promoted by the Ministry of Higher Education to the level of university in 2015. Its programs are designed to prepare students to meet the needs of the market. It has a credit system; with modules split into lectures, exercises or practical work in class, research, examination hours, preparation hours and personal work.

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