

Press Release – Lahore

Norwegian artists donate 1.48 million Rupees to flood victims

Cultural Life Buoy Campaign to raise funds concluded in Norway

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Several nationally known television and theater artists from Norway have collected rupees 1,480,135 (100670 NOK) in a bid to help the flood victims in Pakistan. The amount has been sent to Labour Education Foundation (LEF) one of the eight organizations that are part of Labour Relief Campaign, an umbrella relief organization of several trade unions, social and political organizations of Pakistan.

Cultural Life Buoy, a Norwegian cultural campaign to support flood victims in Pakistan was started on 1st September by Norwegian-Pakistani actor and Board Member of the Norwegian Actors' Equity Association, Toni Usman. In a press statement, he said "We artists and culture workers have a special responsibility and opportunity to support people who are affected by natural catastrophes. We know that the UN estimates the death toll will exceed both the tsunami in 2004 and the earthquake in Haiti, we cannot wait to give support. Flood victims need support now because it is a crisis with serious effects. It is threatening death in the form of disease and hunger."

As part of the campaign a theater show was arranged on 19th September in Oslo where well known artists performed voluntarily. A variety of stage artists such as Kjersti Elvik, Janne Langaas, Tove Bøygard, Kjersti Fjeldstad, Sølvi Zuckermann Fellus, Shri Lal, Rohini Sahajpal, Jai Shankar, Urmila Berg-Domaas, Sunanda Sharma and Toni Usman took to the stage to raise donations for the flood victims in Pakistan. The show was directed by Kristian Lykkeslet Strømskag who normally works at the National Theatre. He worked hard, day and night along with Toni Usman for the campaign and said "We asked ourselves why people do not donate enough money for flood victims. Norway otherwise is a nation that contributes to a great extent during humanitarian disasters. Having that in mind we decided to do something ourselves. One is completely shattered when you see television images of dying children and know that help is not coming. Soon the freezing winter will be here. They need support now. Pakistan is part of the world and it is the whole world's responsibility to help Pakistan now."

Agder Theatre located in Kristiansand, a city in south Norway decided that instead of giving its employees a Christmas gift this year a contribution to Cultural Life Buoy would be made. They have contributed in the amount of 30.000 NOK. "When disaster strikes, emergency and life saving assistance is essential. Agder Theatre will therefore along with other Norwegian culture institutions be happy to be taking such a responsibility", said Ingrid Forthun, Artistic Director.

The Norwegian Actors' Equity Association leader Agnete G. Haaland said "The flood catastrophe in Pakistan concerns us all." The Association made a contribution of 10.000 NOK and urged all artists to support Cultural Life buoy.

The National Theatre in Oslo and the National Stage (DNS) in Bergen also contributed to this unique

campaign by starting a collection among its employees. Akershus Theatre, Norwegian Musicians' Union (MFO), The Norwegian Dancers' Union (NoDa) and Norwegian Theatre and Orchestra Union (NTO) contributed to the cultural campaign too.

Whilst the campaign was mainly supported by artists associations and performing artists, the Norwegian Transport Workers' Union (NTF), The Norwegian Union of Social Educators and Social Workers' (FO) section in Hordaland and The State Workers Union (NTL) also gave a contribution to show their solidarity with the people of Pakistan said Toni Usman.

In addition, the campaign was supported by The Drama House, Gjerholm Design, Pax publishers, NILZ printing press and AOF Norway.

Qalandar Memon, coordinator of Labour Relief Campaign (LRC) appreciated the efforts of Norwegian artists and said the amount will be spent on the rehabilitation and relief work in different areas of Pakistan including Pir Sabaq, Noshehra Kalan, Matta in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Moro and Makli in Sindh and Sibbi and Naseer Abad in Baluchistan province.

The LRC is working in all 4 provinces: Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa, Sindh, Balochistan and Punjab. Several teams of local volunteers from people who are affected by floods are organized. Members of social organizations and trade unions are also part of the volunteer teams in these areas. The LRC has been doing relief work since the beginning of the floods. LRC teams have facilitated some international organizations too for their relief projects in some areas. At the beginning of the floods, LRC mostly focused efforts on distributing food, medicine and clothes. Now that the water level has gone down in most of the areas, it has commenced work in providing help in the construction houses and forming agricultural cooperatives in some parts of Pakistan.

"The campaign Cultural Life Buoy shows that artists are always able to think and react above the religious, cultural and geographical barriers and the Norwegian artists have set an unsullied model of international companionship for many internationally to follow" says Khalid Mehmood director Labour Education Foundation.