

# Chitral Community Development Network (CCDN)

## Initiatives for maintaining peace and harmony in Chitral District

### 1. Inter Harmony Religious Meetings

Building peace and social harmony in the region is the prerequisite for all the development interventions and keeping in view the security threats in the surrounding districts there is a need to give special attention to the issue. Thus through platform of CCDN an attempt was made to maintain the current situation of interreligious peace and harmony by sensitizing the stakeholders in the district. In this connection four (4) activities were conducted with Koh Local Support Organization (KLSO), Upper Torkhow Development Network (UTDN), Biyar Local Support Organization (BLSO) and Shishikoh and Madaklasht Development Program (SMADP). In all the activities regional peace and harmony between various religious sects, ethnic groups and marginalized community were highlighted.

Moreover, special radio talks on peace and Islam, peace and development, role of civil society in peace and development were major themes of discussion to sensitize the local communities and minimize possibility of any kind of insurgency. Religious scholars, local intellectuals and social activists participated in the events.

### 2. Awareness Raising on peace and social harmony

Chitrali community is considered to be very civilized community in the world, but with the passage of time the people of different geo-political and social changes are constantly weakening the social ties and values of the area which is creating social problems in the area. In this regard CCDN conducted four (4) activities with Ayun Valleys Development Program (AVDP), Garamchashma Area Development Organization (GADO) and Biyar Local Support Organization (BLSO). Under these activities debate program, radio talk show, awareness workshops were held to ensure peace and social harmony in the area.

### 3. Peace Committees

There were no proper security systems and check posts at the borders with Afghanistan. Therefore the LSON formed Peace Committees in LSOs of boarder areas (3 Afghan border and 2 Upper Dir and Swat). Such Committees were made responsible for surveillance of cross border movements and timely reporting to the local police stations about suspicious elements. Moreover the Committees were responsible for resolving local conflicts in coordination with local Police.

### 4. Engagement of Imam Jumas and other religious leaders for peace and harmony

In Chitral society, the Imam Jumas and other religious leaders have strong stakes and they are instrumental in maintaining peace and harmony. Therefore, the CCDN continuously remained in contact with them, encouraging their positive role and updating them about the grave situations in the neighboring areas. They resolved that no new comer religious leaders would be allowed to deliver Juma Khutba or any type of religious speeches without formal prior approval of the local permanent Imam Juma/Khateeb.

#### **5. Proactive initiatives to address potential threats**

The CCDN realized that the sectarian and ethnic divides of Chitral society are potential risk factors for peace and harmony. Therefore, the CCDN took several measures to combat this threat. Examples: Social Organisers of the member LSOs were tasked to advise member VOWOs to be extra careful and do not take any actions over rumors. In the Ayuon Valley Development LSO, the Chairman and Manager were deliberately appointed from Kalash community.

#### **6. Safe recovery of an abducted foreigner from Taliban**

Mr. Athanasi, a Greek social activist who was serving for the Kalash community for the last 6 years was abducted and taken to Nooristan valley of Afghanistan by Taliban. The position of the Government was very weak and they were not been able even to establish any contact with the responsible people in Afghanistan. Therefore, the CCDN decided to extend its support to the Government functionaries. The Taliban was demanding huge amount of ransom to release Mr. Athansasi. The Chairman of LSO Ayun Valleys and Development was a member of the same family who had abducted Mr. Athansasi in Nooristan. Therefore, a committee was formed under his chairmanship and they held series of dialogues with the Taliban of Afghanistan, District Administration and the Security Agencies of Pakistan. Finally they managed to recover him back paying a nominal amount of ransom.

#### **7. Recommendations for peace building in Chitral**

- Reduction of poverty
- Scale up development interventions to engage people
- Inclusion of youth in peace and development
- Promotion of religion and cultural values
- Inclusion of women in peace building interventions

**8. Results:** When Sofi Muhammad was freed and he started Swat and Dir, his third destination was Chitral. But due to the active role of the CCDN and its member LSOs, the local civil society stopped him from entering Chitral and saved Chitral from Swat type disasters.