

UNHCR's Nansen Refugee Award 2015 – "Aqeela Asifi" international story ENGLISH

Title: 2015 winner of UNHCR's Nansen Refugee Award
Profile and work of Aqeela Asifi
Origin: UNHCR
Source: UNHCR Codi Trigger, Sebastian Rich
Shot: June 2015-02-08
Sound: Nat/Pashto/English
Duration: 05:29
Location: Mianwali, Pakistan

Suggested INTRO:

The 2015 winner of UNHCR's Nansen Refugee Award is Ms Aqeela Asifi, recognized for her decades-long work to give an education to more than 1,000 Afghan refugee girls.

Some of the names of the women and girls have been changed to protect their identities.

VOICE OVER ONE:

In a place where not even one in every two refugee girls receives an education – this is an extraordinary scene.

NATURAL SOUND: girls in class

VOICE OVER TWO:

In the remote Punjab Province of Pakistan, an Afghan refugee woman singlehandedly introduced education for the girls of Kot Chandana refugee village, Mianwali district. Aqeela Asifi has made it her life's mission to teach refugee girls in this settlement.

It started in 1992 when Asifi and her family fled Kabul and ended up in Mianwali. Nothing had prepared her for the life she found in exile.

As a teacher from Afghanistan's capital city, what struck her most was the complete absence of school for girls.

SOUND: Aqeela Asifi (Pashto)

When I first came to the camp, the biggest problem here was that people were not aware of the importance of education. Some boys were enrolled in school but they were absent for weeks. School buildings were empty. For girls getting education and going to school was a religious taboo.

VOICE OVER THREE:

The strict cultural traditions in Kot Chandana didn't allow women to leave home unescorted, and meant that most girls were married off before their 12th birthday. Asifi didn't want to challenge traditions, but she felt girls had the right to learn.

SOUND: Aqeela Asifi (Pashto)

All the girls and their mothers thought that they had one purpose: to do housework. Never did they think they should get an education.

VOICE OVER FOUR:

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It didn't happen overnight. After months of persuasion a few families agreed to let their girls go to Asifi's school.

It was a modest beginning - under a borrowed tent and without school materials. She stayed up nights and wrote her lessons by hand. But it worked: within two months she was teaching dozens.

SOUND: Sawera (Pashto)

My message is let your children go to school. School is a nice place where they learn. Once they are educated, they get to know what is right or wrong. Education gives you knowledge and understanding.

VOICE OVER FIVE:

The students learned basic literacy, Afghan cultural and religious traditions, foreign languages and mathematics.

Today the tent is gone, in its place permanent school rooms, chalk boards and desks.

The village has become supportive – helping her to build the school rooms and hire teachers and the local Pakistani girls can attend as well. To date Aqeela has guided more than 1,000 young girls through her school.

SOUND: Aqeela Asifi (Pashto)

Whenever I see a student of mine with a pen in their hand, when they solve a problem, when they read and write, for me – these moments are my reward. I live with this happiness every day.

VOICE OVER SIX:

1.5 million Afghan refugees remain in Pakistan, and half of them are school-age.

Since 2002 more than 3.9 million registered Afghan refugees have returned from Pakistan. Those equipped with an education have better chance to succeed as they repatriate and restart their lives.

SUGGESTED OUTRO:

Ms. Asifi will receive the Nansen Medal at a ceremony in Geneva, Switzerland on the 5th October. UNHCR's Nansen Refugee Award recognizes outstanding dedication and service to forcibly displaced and stateless people.

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Shot list

- 00:00 shots Aqeela Asifi's school
- 00:30 shots Aqeela Asifi teaching at school
- 01:18 **SOUND: Aqeela Asifi (Pashto)**
When I first came to the camp, the biggest problem here was that people were not aware of the importance of education. Some boys were enrolled in school but they were absent for weeks. School buildings were empty. For girls getting education and going to school was a religious taboo.
- 01:51 shots Kot Chandana refugee village
- 02:31 **SOUND: Aqeela Asifi (Pashto)**
All the girls and their mothers thought that they had one purpose: to do housework. Never did they think they should get an education.
- 02:41 shots Aqeela Asifi at school
- 03:37 **SOUND: Sawera (Pashto)**
My message is let your children go to school. School is a nice place where they learn. Once they are educated, they get to know what is right or wrong. Education gives you knowledge and understanding.
- 03:56 shots general boys and girls schools in Kot Chananda refugee village
- 04:44 **SOUND: Aqeela Asifi (Pashto)**
Whenever I see a student of mine with a pen in their hand, when they solve a problem, when they read and write, for me – these moments are my reward. I live with this happiness every day.
- 05:06 shots vocational training in Kot Chandana refugee village

ENDS