

**Government of Pakistan
Poverty Alleviation and Social Safety Division
Press Release**

Sania visits welfare homes on Eid day



August 13, 2019 – Islamabad: On Eid day, Dr Sania Nishtar visited the Government of Punjab’s Child Protection home in Rawalpindi and the Edhi home in Islamabad. During both visits she interacted with resident children and women and social welfare workers first-hand over several hours and was briefed about the activities of both welfare homes. The child protection centre takes custody of children that are lost or that are found on streets, unaccompanied. They are produced in the court the next day and then depending on the decision they are either reunited with their families or stay in the centre. Speaking to the media at the end of the visit to the child protection centre, she said that she had gained important lessons for policy from these interactions. She referred to three areas in particular.

First, the child protection office uses “reunification of children with their parents” as a yardstick of the centers’ success. However, she was of the view that this should not universally be the case as in many cases the circumstances at home are such that children should not be sent back. She said that there are two categories of children in such homes: those that are truly lost and must be reunited with families and others that cannot. This latter category includes

children who are forced to beg, are abandoned or are abused by parents/guardians and should be offered protection. She stressed on the need for a rethink of the reunification approach.

The second policy lesson, she informed the media, related to the lack of a unified national portal for lost-and-found children. She said that the absence of this unified portal creates hurdles in tracking children who have been reported lost in one city but are found in another. She said that she is committed to creating a portal of this nature and will be reaching out to the police to formalize arrangements in this regard.

Thirdly, she said that there is a need to create awareness about the legal pathways through which children in child protection homes can be given identities (cards or B forms). It was flagged to her that because children and young boys do not have identities, they cannot avail and technical and vocational training opportunities. There is precedent that permits a guardian to register for identity and in fact that is how Edhi establishes identities of those who come to their shelters.

In addition, at the child welfare center in Rawalpindi, she immediately requested officials to arrange for one of the older boys in the shelter home to be transferred to a the Lahore shelter home, which has schooling up to tenth class as opposed to the Rawalpindi center which has classes up to class 5 only and where he could not be educated. She thanked staff at the Rawalpindi Protection Home.

Later, during the day she interacted with women and girls in the Edhi center in Islamabad and heard first-hand their heart wrenching stories of domestic violence, abuse and abandonment. She thanked the Edhi foundation for the work they do to provide shelter to such women and girls and conveyed her policy intent to strengthen partnerships with institutions like Edhi foundation to expand welfare work through Ehsaas.