
PAKISTAN, AFGHANISTAN, UN AGREE ON REFUGEE REPATRIATION

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Pakistan, Afghanistan and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) have unanimously agreed on a joint 12-point declaration aimed at the "safe and honorable" repatriation of Afghan refugees living in Pakistan for the past four decades.

In a declaration issued at the end of the three parties' meeting in Islamabad, they expressed their commitment to extend the existing Tripartite Agreement governing the voluntary repatriation of Afghan citizens living in Pakistan, local English daily Dawn reported on Wednesday.

A member of premier Imran Khan's cabinet told Anadolu Agency on condition of anonymity that the government had, in principle, decided to extend the stay of Afghan refugees in Pakistan until June 2020.

He said Khan would formally announce the decision during Afghan President Ashraf Ghani's upcoming visit to Islamabad.

Earlier this week, Pakistan, Iran, Afghanistan and the UNHCR urged the international community to support countries hosting millions of refugees.

The demand came during the Sixth Quadripartite Steering Committee Meeting in Islamabad, where they discussed the issue of repatriation of Afghan refugees from Pakistan and Iran.

The committee called for joint efforts to create an environment conducive to a phased, orderly and voluntary return of refugees, as well as their reintegration into Afghanistan and better support for host communities in Iran and Pakistan, according to the state-run Associated Press of Pakistan.

The UNHCR also praised Pakistan and Iran for hosting Afghan refugees and said it would help communities hosting refugees in their countries.

Afghan Minister of Refugees and Repatriation Sayed Hussain Alemi Balkhi also thanked Pakistan and Iran for hosting refugees from his country and requested an extension of the timeframe for repatriation of Afghan refugees as his country still suffered from security issues.

The legal stay of 1.4 million registered Afghan refugees would end June 30 under the current plan.

Iranian Deputy Interior Minister Hossein Zolfaghari said his country extended several facilities to refugees living in Iran.

"Iran has enhanced services for Afghan refugees, issued driving licenses, regularized parts of the

population and has been issuing 550,000 work visas, annually," he said.

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