

Vice-Chancellor's Award Acceptance Speech

Mashhood Mirza

Dear esteemed members of the University of Essex community,

It is with great pleasure and gratitude that I accept this Vice Chancellor's Award. This recognition means a great deal to me, and I am honored to be among the outstanding individuals who have received this award before me.

I would like to express my gratitude to the University of Essex for providing me with the opportunity to pursue my academic and personal goals. The University of Essex has been a supportive and inclusive community that has allowed me to grow and develop as an individual. I would like to thank my advisors and professors, whose guidance, support, and encouragement have been invaluable in my academic journey.

I would also like to thank my family and friends for their unwavering support, encouragement, and love. Without their support, I would not be standing here today, receiving this award. They have been my constant source of motivation, and I am truly grateful for their unwavering support.

The LLM degree program offered by the University of Essex has been instrumental in advancing the knowledge and skills of human rights professionals. The program is designed to provide students with an in-depth understanding of international human rights law and its application in different contexts – the true significance of which came to light across departmental trainings, implementations, legislation and manifest development.

The LLM degree from the University of Essex equipped me with analytical and critical thinking skills that enabled me to examine and evaluate the legal, political, social, and economic contexts faced by the disadvantaged in Pakistan. At the helm of the National Commission for Human Rights of Pakistan as Secretary, I helped fulfil the vision of extending support to a progressive Pakistan where human rights of all faiths, races and ethnicities are respected and celebrated. This was done through investigations into allegations of human rights abuses, as well as reviewing existing and proposed legislation.

Capitalizing on the learnings and opportunities to engage with human rights activists, practitioners, and scholars, both through coursework and through the university's network of partnerships with organizations working on human rights issues, I was able to lead investigations into extrajudicial killings, torture, and other human rights violations, putting forth recommendations that led to the prosecution of perpetrators.

I have contributed to the improvement in the human rights protection mechanisms by conceiving and implementing a pioneering project for the Rehabilitation of Juvenile Prisoners in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the Baluchistan Province. Besides this, I contributed in the drafting of Draft Borstal Laws and the establishment of first ever Borstal Institution for the juvenile delinquents in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. I have also imparted trainings to the jail staff, police, probation officers, prosecution officers, judicial official and district government officials on human rights and relevant international law on the rights of the persons deprived of liberty.

Further to this, I have worked as Director Investigation in the Federal Ombudsman to address public grievances with special focus on discrimination cases and helped in the creation of Child's ombudsman office under the umbrella of Federal Ombudsman. I had a short stint as a contracting staff in UN Mission in Kosovo to build the capacity of the Office of the Ombudsperson in Kosovo, by intervening in the cases of human rights violations in a more effective manner by interacting and frequently advising the acting Ombudsperson and also reporting to the UN security Council for the 'returns' and protection of 'minority rights' through field visits to the municipalities for the determination of its future status..

I have to my credit of conducting research on different issues on child rights and human rights, which include papers on Alternatives to Imprisonment for Juveniles, Study on Draft Borstal Laws for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Honour Killings, Human trafficking and problems of Prosecution department and also on the editorial board of the 'Pakistan Journal of Criminology'.

My passion didn't stop in human rights, as I went on to explore possibilities of protecting and promoting the cultural rights of minority communities in Pakistan whilst working in the Ministry of Information, Broadcasting and National Heritage. I inscribed Pakistan's first ever multi-state intangible element of 'Nauroz' festival on the World Heritage List for Humanity. My next feather in my cap was the inscription of 'Suri Jagek' the Kalash Community's fast fading out traditional meteorological and astronomical practice based on the observation of the sun, moon and stars in reference to the local topography, on the urgent safeguard list of UNESCO. Besides this, I also wrote and edited a coffee table book titled "Life Story of Buddha etched in Stone" to promote religious tourism in Pakistan.

Moreover, while working as consultant on FCDO funded Sub-national Governance programme I was able to introduce and notify Pakistan's first ever 'Citizen Engagement' guidelines for the local governments in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to help improve decision making at the sub-national level with citizen's participation to promote accountability and inclusiveness.

Whilst being in Establishment Division I have proposed special measures for minorities to address under representation in civil service by introducing a special exam in the Civil Superior services of Pakistan.

Now being in the Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination as Special Secretary I have contributed by introducing mandatory screening for HIV/AIDS and Tuberculosis in penal settings across Pakistan as well as for deported migrant workers in the new grant of Global Fund Facility. Investigated deaths due to hospital acquired infections (HAI) to introduce the basic minimum

standards for infection, prevention and control (IPC) in the public owned hospitals in Islamabad capital territory to promote and protect basic right to health.

Some of the most important life lessons I have learnt and something I will always be grateful for was the ability at Essex to have had my views constantly challenged, to engage in dialogue, to throw myself into debates, and to hear viewpoints of others. I now see that through the encouragement of diverse dialogue and robust debate, the bar is raised, new benchmarks are set along-with setting new boundaries and breaking limits in human thinking.

The highly driven culture cultivated at The University of Essex gave me the best gift of all – it helped me discover the *raison d'être*, who I am, what my passions are and what I truly stand for, allowing me to use in every position I have and will serve, the skills and knowledge that has been imbibed in me by my august alma mater.

This award serves as a reminder that hard work, dedication, and passion can lead to incredible achievements. I am committed to continuing to pursue my academic and personal goals, and to making a positive impact in the world.

My advice to future graduates, follow your passion – do what makes you happy and fulfilled, even if it means taking a detour from the original plan. Be open to new experiences and keep learning – embrace new developments and technology in your fields. And finally, always strive for excellence in whatever you do. Set high standards for yourself and work hard to achieve them. Laser beam focus and military discipline in the face of challenges and setbacks will not let you waver. Remember, success is not just about achieving your goals, but also about journey of self-reformation and personal growth.

Once again, thank you University of Essex for this honor. I am truly humbled, and I will carry this award with great pride and humility.