In this seminar, Professor Halai will look at the role of teachers and teacher education in promoting social cohesion and harmony as significant elements of peacebuilding. She will draw on empirical data from two research projects carried out in the province of Sindh in Pakistan.

There are three parallel systems of education in Pakistan that broadly reflect the class driven society: (i) the government school system, (ii) the private school system, and (iii) the madrassas. In the government schools and the madrassas, the medium of instruction is mostly Urdu - the national language of Pakistan. In the private schools, the medium of instruction is mostly English. Government schools are gender segregated, with schools for girls with female teachers, and schools for boys with male teachers. There is a perennial shortage of female teachers for girls’ schools, especially in remote areas and in subjects such as science and mathematics.

In the late 1980’s and 1990’s, the regime of Zia ul Haq unleashed the process of Islamisation which involved significant changes being made to the national curricula and textbooks to align education with a specific and narrow interpretation of Islamic ideology. In this context, education was seen as part of the problem that reinforced divisions in society. However, education was also recognised as part of the solution, ie, as a potent strategy to support the processes of social cohesion, harmony, respect for diversity and inclusion – all of which are important for peacebuilding. Hence, over the last two decades Pakistan has seen extensive reform in teacher education led by government agencies, but with strong input from international development partners.