



News Release



Office of Public Affairs

U.S. Embassy

Parliamentarians Stress the Importance of Legislative Research

Islamabad, December 11, 2006: Parliamentarians, senators, and academics stressed the importance of legislative research at a roundtable on “Research Support for Parliamentarians: Role of the Parliamentary Institute of Legislative Services” held Tuesday at the interim Parliamentary Institute of Legislative Services (PILS) facility, the Parliament Lodges.

Organized by the Pakistan Legislative Strengthening Project (PLSP), a two-year initiative funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the roundtable was attended by seven members of the National Assembly and Senate, as well as eighteen researchers from a number of national universities, think-tanks and civil society organizations across Pakistan. The session was part of a three-day specialized workshop on meeting the research needs of parliamentarians.

William H. Robinson, former Senior Specialist in Public Policy at Congressional Research Services (CRS), moderated the roundtable through a series of questions aimed at helping parliamentarians in assessing their need for objective and balanced research.

Noting the significance of Parliament’s four-year anniversary observed last month--the second such occasion in Pakistan’s 59-year history--representatives of both treasury and opposition benches agreed that the existing mechanisms of information and research could not meet the demands of a House that had debated a myriad of national and international issues since 2002. They emphasized the need for effective research services to aid their legislative work, calling upon academia and civil society researchers to support the parliament.

Donia Aziz, Parliamentary Secretary for Population Welfare, said there was a dire need to educate parliamentarians about the rules of business since most had little training for that. She argued that often skilled parliamentarians were restricted by certain rules from playing a proactive role in parliamentary discussion and dissemination of information, which undermined their effectiveness.

“We need clear, crisp and correct information at a short notice; we simply don't have the time to wait for long academic writings,” said MNA Aziz, while calling for an Internet-

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based network of researchers and parliamentarians, which could help parliamentarians receive immediate research input from experts all over the country.

Independent research could be of great help to the working of parliamentary committees and the two houses of parliament as a whole, said Farzeen Ahmad Sarfaraz, Chair of the Standing Committee on Environment in the National Assembly.

Researchers expressed their resolve to extend support to the parliament for the cause of democratic development in the country, but argued that the onus lay on parliamentarians to identify issues that needed research input.

“It is not availability of research or information; it is the lack of skill and intention to use, as there are shelves after shelves full of research in the country,” argued Dr. Kaiser Bengali, Senior Economist at SZABIST, adding that the quantity and quality of parliamentary research depended both on supply and demand. “Researchers can be mobilized only if there is a strong demand from the parliament for quality research,” he said.

Prof. Dr. Aliya H. Khan of Quaid-e-Azam University Islamabad said a lot of research coming out of universities and civil society organizations did not answer parliamentarians’ real needs. Researchers’ findings could help parliamentarians understand issues in depth for better policy drafting and implementation. “However”, she stressed, “academicians must disseminate their findings in a manner to which MNAs can connect. It’s a two way-relationship and this forum must become a regular one for it to be effective for both sides.”

Deputy Director SZABIST, Syed Asad Hussain, identified the need to conduct research in Urdu since it was the first and only language of communication for a majority of parliamentarians. “Mostly, the treasury requires research which is in line with a decision already taken and often they need academics’ and researchers’ input to support their position and not to arrive on an appropriate decision,” he argued further.

Terming PLSP initiative the first of its kind, Hussain said its success depended upon how best and specifically could the parliamentarians communicate their research needs to the academia. “We need to push the parliamentarians to take advantage of this, because ultimately they are the end users,” he said.

Douglas McArthur, former provincial legislator and Professor of Public Policy at Simon Fraser University in Canada, currently working in Pakistan with the National Democratic Institute (NDI) on issues related to parties and policy agendas, spoke on the importance of capacity for parliamentarians to be able to fully assess government policies presented to them.

Julie Koenen-Grant, Acting Mission Director of USAID in Pakistan, stressed that linking civil society resources with parliament could be an important contribution of PILS.

PLSP is a USAID-funded initiative implemented by Development Alternatives Inc. (DAI) in partnership with the national and provincial legislatures aimed at strengthening parliamentary institutions and processes. Its focus is to improve the capacity of legislatures in their representation, law-making, oversight & accountability, and infrastructure & management activities. The project was initiated in September 2005 and will operate until September 2007.

Support for PLSP is part of the \$1.5 billion in aid that the U.S. Government is providing to Pakistan over five years to improve education, health, governance, and economic growth.

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