



## Remarks to the Press with Secretary Spellings and Minister Ashraf on the Occasion of the U.S.-Pakistan Education Dialogue

**R. Nicholas Burns, Under Secretary for Political Affairs**

Remarks at the U.S.-Pakistan Education Dialogue Meeting  
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**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** Ladies and gentlemen, good morning and welcome to the State Department. It's a great pleasure for me, to welcome to the State Department our Secretary of Education, Secretary Margaret Spellings, and also to welcome Pakistan's Education Minister Javed Ashraf. He is most welcome here in the United States. We're pleased that he's here today for what we hope will be the first of many rounds of the United States-Pakistan Education Dialogue.

As you all know, President Bush places great importance on the region of South Asia, and he's tried very hard during his presidency to uplift our policy in South Asia -- with India, with Pakistan, with Bangladesh, and the other countries. We are particularly focused on Pakistan. President Bush made a historic trip to Islamabad in early March of this year, a very productive visit. He has since hosted President Musharraf here, at the Oval Office and at the White House in Washington.

There is no more important country in the world to the United States when it comes to counterterrorism cooperation, and Pakistan has been a valued ally of our country. But the President and President Musharraf agree that our relationship should be broader than just counterterrorism. And so we've tried very hard with our strategic engagement with Pakistan over the last year to make sure that we're working in a number of areas to bring forth the best of both of our societies from our governments and from our private sectors to engage the two countries and to build a multitude of bridges between both of our countries, and nowhere is that more important than in education. And we have today, with Secretary Spellings and with Minister Ashraf, the opportunity to engage in a dialogue on the issue of education itself. And as I said before, we hope that this is going to stimulate discussion between the two governments and our two education ministries but also a good partnership between the students and academies and universities of both of our countries.

We hope today's sessions can be informative and, yet, also informal and frank. We look forward to them very, very much. And it's a great pleasure for me on behalf of Secretary Condoleezza Rice, who by the way is in Jordan with President Bush as we speak, to welcome all of you here and to showcase again the importance that the United States attaches to this priority partnership that we have with the people of Pakistan and with its government.

And with that, it's a great pleasure for me to introduce Secretary Margaret Spellings. She has done a phenomenal job not just here in the United States in building first-rate education at all levels but also in reaching out across the world to bring the best of our educational thought and our ideas to our colleagues around the world. And she's just come back from a trip to Asia, so I wanted to personally thank her on behalf of Secretary Rice for the great efforts she's making for our country.

**SECRETARY SPELLINGS:** Thank you very much. I told him that I feel like I work for the State Department some days. But I think as our world becomes very much smaller, education and the development of human capital really is our most vigorous and interesting challenge really for all nations. And so I'm thrilled to be here at the State Department and again with my friend Minister Ashraf to see him and to continue the discussions that we've had over the last several years. As Ambassador Burns said, I mean there really is no more important relationship when it comes to counterterrorism. And of course I believe, and I know Minister Ashraf does also, that a civilized, productive, developed society really begins at education and the development of human capital. And so I'm pleased to be a part of this.

President Bush and his commitments to President Musharraf and his actions and deeds really I think speak volumes about the importance that we place on this relationship. So welcome, Minister Ashraf. I'm very excited about the opportunity to visit with you today about some of the things that we have in common.

One of the things that strikes me as I travel around the world is really how similar some of our issues are around literacy. We all have work to do around literacy and the development of those skills with all of our people. We have work to do on the development of technology and math and science capability and innovation issues that really are the new currencies of our global marketplace. And that's why I'm very excited that the United States Government has made a commitment to Pakistan and is helping them develop and reform their education system. In fact, a five year, \$100 million agreement with the government to support Pakistan's education reform efforts and \$66 million last year alone. It is the largest Fulbright program in the world, which is a unique and outstanding fact and is obviously one of the things that the U.S. Government I think is most proud of as it relates to students exchanges.

The sorts of things that we'll be visiting about today, as I said, are very much shared and that is how do we develop teachers, how do we develop curriculum strategies, and interventions with our young learners and learners really of all ages. And we want to learn from each other and build on the partnerships that we've had.

This is a dialogue that will develop over time. We've begun it previously, but we will get down to brass tacks I think today about the very specific things that we can work together on. We intend to have in the seven panels that will be before us today, have a frank exchange on literacy and education reform in Pakistan schools. We'll learn about your progress, Minister Ashraf. We're very -- we very much understand how vigorous your reform efforts have been. And speaking as a fellow reformer, I know it's not for the faint of heart and it's not easy. So congratulations for the progress you have made, and we're anxious to hear about that.

We also want to discuss our existing efforts and how we can build on those, how we can strengthen the existing relationships, how we can -- as has been very key in our country in our reform efforts, improve linkages with the private sector as well as the public sector, how we can engage the business community and other stakeholders, the philanthropic community and the like, and what our next steps will be after this meeting. And this is certainly by no means the last time we will sit and discuss our progress, but I'm very encouraged that we're having this meeting, and I've pledged the commitment of my department to do all we can to help your efforts succeed, Mr. Minister.

**MINISTER ASHRAF:** Thank you very much.

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** It's now a great pleasure for me to welcome to say a few words Minister Ashraf.

**MINISTER ASHRAF:** Secretary Spellings, Mr. Burns, ladies and gentleman, it's indeed a great pleasure for me and my delegation to be here today to be able to exchange our views on this Strategic Dialogue on Education, a very useful for us initiative that was taken during President Bush's visit to Pakistan when both presidents decided that education needs to be given the due emphasis which it was not done in the past.

We in Pakistan have suffered from poor education standards and also from mass illiteracy, which we need to overcome because today we have realized that we need to educate our people, otherwise illiterate masses become ready recruits for all sorts of unhealthy activities. We want to give them meaningful education so that they can contribute to the building of future Pakistan. We want a strong country. We need to harvest technology. And in all these endeavors, we welcome the support that the

United States has given us so far and we hope to channelize further the support, to make further progress in this regard.

We would be undertaking these dialogues quite frequently, and I hope to see Secretary Spellings in Pakistan next time along with our delegation. This time we would start with the -- since this is the first round, we will start with a complete appraisal of what our education scenario is and then discuss how best to channelize the U.S. funding that has been given to us or earmarked for us to make improvements in that -- our student exchanges, our teacher training, our technology institutes, which would need capacity building, and would need improvement, and all these various facets would be discussed (inaudible) and absolutely frankly.

We hope that this dialogue would continue and we look forward to it certainly so that we could take benefit from it. And we are grateful to the United States for this offer and for this help that they are extending to us. So I look forward to a very meaningful day today. Thank you.

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** Thank you very much.

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