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**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation respecting  
its participation to a Bilateral Visit to Pakistan**

**Canadian Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary  
Association (CPA)**

**Islamabad, Pakistan  
March 31 to April 8, 2018**

## Report

### Introduction

A delegation of the Canadian Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) conducted a bilateral visit to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan from 31 March to 8 April 2018. The delegation was led by the Chair of the association, Yasmin Ratansi, Member of Parliament. Other members of the delegation included the Honourable Salma Atallahjan, Senator; the Honourable Diane Griffin, Senator; Terry Duguid, Member of Parliament; Ramesh Sangha, Member of Parliament; Robert Kitchen, Member of Parliament and Murray Rankin, Member of Parliament. The delegation was assisted by Rémi Bourgault, Association Secretary and Jean-Philippe Duguay, Analyst.

It should be noted that this was the first time in many years that such a high-profile delegation had been to Pakistan.

The purpose of this visit by CPA was three-fold: firstly, to engage with parliamentarians from Pakistan and to strengthen Canada and Pakistan's relationship, by visiting Islamabad, the political capital. Secondly to visit the commercial capital Karachi and gauge the prospect of enhancing trade with Pakistan. Thirdly to visit the cultural capital Lahore to see how Canada and Pakistan could enhance their cultural landscape.

Due to security concerns, the visit was ultimately limited to Islamabad. This report therefore deals with the various meetings the delegates held on areas of mutual interest, including: meetings with the Prime Minister and other high-ranking ministers and officials, CPA counterparts, human rights groups, developmental agencies, climate change experts, experts on regional security and defense, academics and Canadian entrepreneurs doing business in Pakistan.

Overall the delegation heard that Pakistan has made significant progress in recent years. Some interlocutors pointed to the reduction in terrorism and peaceful democratic transitions following the 2013 election as important indicators that Pakistan is moving in the right direction. The delegation was also informed that Pakistan presents an important opportunity for Canadian businesses, especially in the energy sector and high-tech industry. As well with a population of 207 million people and a burgeoning middle class, there are ample opportunities for trade in goods and service.

The delegates heard from the CEO of Pakistan Stock Exchange and other business people that the negative image of Pakistan as perpetrated by certain elements in the media has made it difficult for Canadian businesses to establish themselves. They pointed to other successful US and European companies that have solidified their foothold in the Pakistan economy.

However, the delegation also heard that the rapidly growing population in Pakistan if not curtailed will have a negative impact on progress. They cited the example of water shortages due to increase in population, lack of adequate infrastructure to support the rural as well as urban population and the inability to adequately address natural disasters because of climate change.

In the meetings with civil society, it was clear that in general there is a heavy reliance on development aid for healthcare services and education. From a human rights standpoint,

Pakistan's blasphemy laws, its reintroduction of the death penalty and the use of secret military courts undermine its efforts to improve its record on human rights.

It should be noted that the Canadian Branch of the CPA's delegation visited Pakistan before the country's most recent election. That election saw a new party gain control of government, the Tehreek-e-Insaf led by Imran Khan. The Tehreek-e-Insaf party secured a majority of seats in the National Assembly of Pakistan with support from independently elected members of the national assembly and coalition partners, including the Muttahida Qaumi Movement and Grand Democratic Alliance.

As part of the Commonwealth Pakistan has a mixed system: both Westminster and the Presidential system

## **A. System of Governance**

Pakistan is a federal parliamentary republic. Its Parliament (Pakistan House) consists of a president and two houses: The National Assembly of Pakistan (National Assembly) and the Senate.

### **1. National Assembly of Pakistan**

There is a total of 326 seats in the National Assembly. The seats are distributed among the four provinces and the Federal Capital. Article 51 of the Constitution of Pakistan calls for 60 reserved seats for women and 10 for non-Muslims. "The reserved seats are filled through a proportional representation system with closed party lists. The seats for women are allocated in proportion to the number of general seats a party gains in each of the provinces."<sup>1</sup> Some have criticized this process for distancing non-Muslim voters from their elected officials. To form government, a political party must hold the majority of seats. Because political parties infrequently hold majorities, dominant parties will work with other political parties and independents to secure the required number of seats.

### **2. Senate**

The main purpose for the Senate of Pakistan is to give equal representation to the provinces and balance provincial inequality in the National Assembly, which is based on population size. The Senate is composed of 104 members. Each province is allocated 23 seats, the FATA eight<sup>2</sup> and the Federal Capital four. Like the National Assembly, some of the provincial seats are reserved for women (four) and non-Muslims (one) as well as technocrats (four). The Federal Capital has two general seats and two reserved seats, which are split between technocrats and women. It does not have reserved seats for non-Muslims. Though the FATA does not have any reserved seats, some may be prescribed by the president. Senators representing provinces are elected by their respective provincial assemblies.

Senators for the FATA are elected by National Assembly members representing that region, while Senators representing the Federal Capital are chosen by the National Assembly. Senators serve six year terms, with half of the seats up for election every three years.

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<sup>1</sup> Freedom House, [Freedom in the World 2017 – Pakistan Profile](#)

<sup>2</sup> The [Senate of Pakistan website](#) indicates that the FATA region is still allocated 8 seats in the Senate.

Legislation must be passed before both houses of Parliament before it can receive assent from the president and become law. While the Senate retains most of the same powers as the National Assembly, it cannot amend or introduce money bills. The Senate, however, can make recommendations on budgetary proposals.

### 3. President

The president of Pakistan is elected by members of the National Assembly and the Senate as well as members of the four provincial assemblies. The president is elected for a five year term for a maximum duration of two consecutive terms. The president's role is largely symbolic as the office holder generally acts on the advice of the prime minister, according to recent constitutional changes. The president must be a Muslim.

The role of the president has changed significantly in recent years:

*Before 2010, the President had many privileges, such as the unilateral right to dissolve parliament. However, the 18th amendment of the constitution moderated these powers, and in doing so, changed Pakistan from a semi-Presidential to a parliamentary republic. Currently, the constitution gives the President reserve powers (subject to the Supreme Court's veto) to dissolve government, trigger new elections and thereby dismiss the Prime Minister.<sup>3</sup>*

There are democratic procedures to impeach and remove a sitting president:

*not less than one-half of the total membership of either House may give in writing its intention to do so, to the Speaker National Assembly, or, as the case may be, to the Chairman Senate, for moving a resolution for the purpose. In a joint sitting of the two Houses, convened for the purpose, and after the deliberations, if the resolution is passed by the votes of not less than two thirds of the total membership of the Parliament, the President shall cease to hold office immediately on the passing of the resolution.<sup>4</sup>*

### 4. Prime Minister

The prime minister of Pakistan is appointed by the president. The appointment is determined by whether the individual enjoys the confidence of the majority of the members of the National Assembly. The prime minister is head of government and advises on the president's functions. The head of government is assisted by the Federal Cabinet, a council of ministers and ministers of state who are appointed by the president on the advice of the prime minister.

## **B. Canada–Pakistan Relations**

Canada and Pakistan's diplomatic relationship dates to 1947. According to Global Affairs Canada, the major points of common interest between the two countries "include people-to-people links (there are over 200,000 Canadians of Pakistani origin living in Canada).

Documents provided by Global Affairs Canada indicate that two way merchandise trade between Canada and Pakistan has doubled over the past five years. Canadian merchandise exports to Pakistan in 2017 reached \$746 million (down 30.8% from the year prior largely due to diminished exports of oilseeds and pulses). Canada's top

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<sup>3</sup> Commonwealth Network, [Pakistan – President](#).

<sup>4</sup> The National Assembly of Pakistan, [Introduction](#).

merchandise exports consisted of canola, lumber, lentils, chickpeas, ferrous waste and previously worn textile articles. In 2017 Canada exported approximately \$520 million worth of grains, oilseeds and pulses to Pakistan (including \$438 million of canola, \$39 million of lentils and \$34 million of chickpeas). Canadian merchandise imports from Pakistan in 2017 exceeded \$410 million, up 12.6% year on year. Top merchandise imports were textiles, plastics, gloves, bed linen and apparel. Two way trade in services totalled \$317 million in 2016, with service exports of \$228 million and service imports of \$82 million. With a total stock of \$5 million in 2016 Pakistan ranks 104th in Canadian direct investment abroad.

Canada's High Commissioner to Pakistan's website states that, Canada has historically been a strong humanitarian partner in Pakistan, contributing almost \$47 million since 2013, including \$10 million in 2016. This assistance has targeted the most urgent life-saving needs, including assistance to internally displaced people and improving health and living conditions of conflict-affected people. Canada is currently the 7th largest single-country donor for humanitarian assistance in Pakistan.<sup>5</sup>

Global Affairs Canada states that some of the major challenges facing Pakistan include:

- high mortality rate for infants, children and mothers;
- frequent natural disasters including flooding, drought and earthquakes;
- access to and quality of education for children, especially girls;
- poverty linked to economic crises and domestic instability, the average annual income is US\$1,260; and
- gender discrimination.<sup>6</sup>

As such, Canada focusses its international development assistance to Pakistan on education and health, women's economic empowerment, citizen engagement and aid effectiveness.

During Pakistan's last Universal Periodic Review, Canada recommended that Pakistan:

1. Implement effective measures to prevent violence, persecution and discrimination on the basis of religion and, in particular, take effective steps to reduce the misuse of blasphemy laws by requiring all cases to undergo prior judicial review and authorization before charges may proceed.
2. Advance disaggregated data collection and analysis on laws, policies and safeguards for women and girls by fully staffing and funding the National Human Rights Institutions identified in Pakistan's Action Plan to Improve the Human Rights Situation in Pakistan.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Government of Canada, [Canadian international assistance in Pakistan](#)

3. Bring to justice anyone who threatens, abducts, or attacks human rights defenders, journalists, bloggers and others who work to promote democracy, inter alia by legislating before the next UPR cycle a specific definition of torture as recommended by the Committee against Torture in June 2017.<sup>7</sup>

Canada added that it “remains concerned by credible reports of forced conversions, spurious blasphemy charges, and sectarian attacks against religious minorities.”<sup>8</sup>Canada also encouraged Pakistan to “reinforce existing efforts to promote women’s access to education and health, and to economic opportunities and political empowerment.”<sup>9</sup>

### **C. Pakistan and the Commonwealth**

The Commonwealth is a voluntary association of independent sovereign states. Member states are brought together by a shared history with the United Kingdom, parliamentary democracy and shared values, which are outlined in the Commonwealth Charter. Through the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Commonwealth provides various support services to member countries to help further development in a range of fields, including democracy, rule of law and human rights. Though the Commonwealth does not impose legislative obligations on member states, it has a range of tools to influence behavioural and policy change.

The Commonwealth’s bluntest mechanism to influence change is the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG). The CMAG was organized by the Commonwealth Heads of Government to “deal with persistent and serious violators of the Commonwealth’s shared principles.”<sup>10</sup>Though the CMAG may proactively engage with a country in a “positive manner,” it also has the authority to suspend or even make a recommendation to Commonwealth leaders for a member country’s expulsion.<sup>11</sup>

Pakistan joined the Commonwealth in 1947. Since that time, its relationship with the association has not been fluid, as demonstrated by the following timeline:

1972	Left the Commonwealth when other member countries recognized Bangladesh.
1989	Rejoined the Commonwealth following that year’s democratic election.
1999	Suspended by the CMAG following the overthrow of the democratically elected government.
2004	Restored membership to the Commonwealth due to progress made towards democracy.
2007	Suspended by the CMAG pending the restoration of democracy and the rule of law.

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<sup>7</sup> Government of Canada, [Pakistan](#).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> The Commonwealth, [Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group \(CMAG\) established](#).

<sup>11</sup> The Commonwealth, [Our governance](#).

2008 Restored membership to the Commonwealth due to progress made towards democracy and other objectives. Pakistan has been a member of the Commonwealth without interruption since 2008.

## **Canadian Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Meetings in Pakistan**

### **A. Briefing by the High Commission of Canada in Pakistan**

The delegation began its visit of Pakistan on 1 April 2018 with a briefing at the High Commission of Canada in Pakistan. During this meeting, the Canadian High Commissioner to Pakistan, Mr. Perry John Calderwood, and his personnel briefed the delegation on a wide range of topics, including Pakistan's political landscape, its system of governance, human rights, security and the economy. The High Commissioner also underscored challenges in providing consular services in Pakistan.

**DELEGATES' ASSESSMENT:** The delegation felt that they would have benefited from a more comprehensive and thorough briefing. They were concerned about the lack of analysis and depth in the officials' response.

### **B. Meeting with the United Nations Population Fund**

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) is the United Nations agency responsible for reproductive health and rights. It advocates for "the realization of reproductive rights for all and supports access to a wide range of sexual and reproductive health services – including voluntary family planning, maternal health care and comprehensive sexuality education."<sup>12</sup> In Pakistan, the UNFPA facilitates progress on Millennium Development Goal 5, *Improve Maternal Health*, through policy advocacy and national capacity development.<sup>13</sup>

During its meeting with Hassan Mohtashami, representative for the UNFPA, the delegation was informed that Pakistan's population is growing at an alarming rate. Dr. Mohtashami told the delegation that the following factors are contributing to high birth rate.

- only 26% of women use contraceptives;
- contraceptives and other family planning services are difficult to access;
- people are not informed on the benefits of using of contraceptives;
- women have little control over their birth rights; and
- government handouts favour larger families.

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<sup>12</sup> United Nation Population Fund, [About us](#).

<sup>13</sup> United Nation Population Fund, [UNFPA Pakistan](#).

The delegation was further informed that the high birth rate is particularly challenging for Pakistan because the country does not have the infrastructure in place to provide health services and facilitate deliveries, especially in rural areas. As a result, Pakistan has a high maternal mortality rate (primarily caused by haemorrhage hypertension and infection) and has the highest rate of infant mortality in the world. Dr. Mohtashami told the delegation that improving access to family planning services, encouraging midwifery and bettering emergency care could go a long way to help Pakistan with these challenges. He stressed that reproductive rights and women empowerment are interlinked. He stated that where women are empowered success can be found.

**DELEGATES' ASSESSMENT:** The delegation was concerned about the population boom. The delegates believe that more education is needed in the area of reproductive matters, including birth control and in engaging the religious leaders to ensure that the country does not fall back in its economic index. The narrative to accelerating child birth to meet that of India is unhealthy for the development of Pakistan.

### **C. Meeting with the Aga Khan Development Network**

The Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) is a “family of private, non-denominational development agencies with mandates ranging from health and education to architecture, culture, microfinance, disaster reduction, rural development, the promotion of private-sector enterprise and the revitalization of historic cities.”<sup>14</sup> The AKDN’s development agencies primarily work in the poorest parts of Asia and Africa.

The delegation met with the following AKDN agencies: Aga Khan University, Aga Khan Education Services, Aga Khan Agency for Habitat, Aga Khan Trust for Culture, Aga Khan Agency for Microfinance, Aga Khan Foundation (Pakistan), Aga Khan Health Services. During this meeting, the delegation was informed on the depth of the AKDN’s involvement in Pakistan. Its development approach was described as holistic and long-term. It aims to tackle numerous issues through its various agencies each with objectives that contribute to the AKDN’s long-term vision.

The delegation learned that the AKDN’s development work in Pakistan focusses on the following areas: agriculture and food security, strengthening of civil society, cultural development, early childhood development, economic development, education, habitat, health, humanitarian assistance and microfinancing. Though AKDN agencies have specific areas of focus, their spheres of activity may overlap.

A notable example is the Aga Khan University (AKU). Described as a “hybrid” agency, it focuses on academics and social development.<sup>15</sup> It not only provides education in needed professions such as medicine, nursing and midwifery but it also aims to facilitate access to healthcare. For instance, one of its teaching sites, its Medical College and a School of Nursing and Midwifery in Karachi, doubles as 710-bed hospital. AKU also operates four woman and child hospitals with a total of 213 beds, as well as 264 outreach medical centres in more than 100 cities across the country. Through its health system, the AKU treated nearly 1.4 million patients in 2017.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Submission made to the CCOM during its meeting with the AKDN.

<sup>15</sup> Aga Khan University, [About the University](#).

<sup>16</sup> Aga Khan Development Network, [Pakistan – Health](#).

The delegation was also informed that the Government of Canada has been supporting the AKDN's efforts in Pakistan since the 1980's. Canada's support has progressed from infrastructure projects to healthcare. To further its development efforts, AKDN has also built partnerships with some of Canada's academic institutions. For instance, in partnership with the AKU and McMaster University helped to introduce the nursing program in Pakistan. Similarly, McGill University helped launch the AKU's medical program.

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The AKDN informed the delegation that it is seeking additional funding from the Government of Canada to support its work in Pakistan: \$17 million over a five-year period to facilitate training as well as \$20 million for projects relating to sexual and reproductive rights.

#### **D. Working Dinner with the Aga Khan Development Network**

The AKDN held a working dinner to continue discussions held earlier that day on its work in Pakistan and the challenges the country is facing. The presentations touched on a range of topics, including civil society engagement, women empowerment and CPEC.

The presenters stressed the importance of civil society engagement. Many rural districts do not have community leaders and the Government of Pakistan does not have the capacity to reach some areas. The AKDN partners with civil society groups to fill these gaps and provide various services such as health and education. One of its objectives is to help civil society organizations develop at the grassroots level. It informed the delegation, however, that recent policy changes have reduced the ability of civil society organizations to operate in Pakistan.

The delegation was also informed that education is a key component of the AKDN's development strategy. As such, the AKDN's first point of contact is the development of schools. The AKDN not only understands education as tool to help advance society, but one that can empower women as well. Though this approach may be critical to further progress for women in Pakistan, the delegation was told that the Government of Pakistan is reluctant to get involved with women empowerment projects.

The AKDN presenters highlighted the importance of CPEC for Pakistan's economic development and stability. The infrastructure project is helping to create jobs in the country, which is helping the economy. CPEC will also bring new resources into Pakistan. The AKDN pointed out that China will be extending Pakistan access to its high-speed internet as an important example. While the AKDN recognized CPEC as an important opportunity for Pakistan, it stated that the project should be approached with caution. The presenters mentioned that China brings many of its own tools and workers for some CPEC projects.

**DELEGATES' ASSESSMENT:** The delegation was very impressed with the professionalism of the AKDN. Delegates were amazed at the resilience of AKDN and the risk areas in which they operate. They were grateful that Canada partners with the AKDN in areas of health care and education. It was clear to the delegation that the governance structure of this organization and its ethos meet the Canadian values.

### **E. Meeting with the Canadian High Commission in Pakistan**

On 3 April 2018 the delegation met with various officials at the Canadian High Commission in Pakistan. During this meeting, the delegation was provided an overview of the issues facing Pakistan including those relating to the economy, governance, security and human rights.

The Canadian High Commission also reported some of the difficulties that hinder the delivery of consular services in Pakistan, such as the requirement to apply for no objection certificates (NOCs) to travel outside of Islamabad. This issue was raised in later meetings with government officials and appears to be an irritant in Canada-Pakistan relations. The High Commission explained that its personnel are required to apply for NOCs to travel outside of the areas they are stationed. Though applying is simple, the time it takes for an approval can vary greatly from several hours to several weeks. The High Commission commented that the inability to move around the country freely is of particular concern as it may impede its ability to respond to Canadians in distress outside Islamabad.

**DELEGATES' ASSESSMENT:** The delegation concluded that under the current circumstances, there have been many missed opportunities for Canada to build stronger diplomatic and economy ties. It recommends and encourages the officials to have a more balanced view of the reality in the region and pursue opportunities more proactively for the benefit of Canada.

### **F. Security Round Table**

The delegation met with three security and defence experts who shared their views on Pakistan's regional security challenges. The delegation was informed that Pakistan's complex history and its evolving diplomatic relations are factors that shaped and continue to influence its security posture. Historical tensions with India and Afghanistan were cited as ongoing and problematic. One expert was particularly concerned with Pakistan and India relations, highlighting that both countries are in a nuclear arms race with little diplomatic dialogue.

The experts generally agreed that Pakistan has made important strides in combating terrorism. However, it was pointed that there remain internal challenges threatening security within Pakistan. The delegation was told that the military still has a lot of influence over Pakistan's governance and that stronger leadership was required from the country's political leaders to overcome this challenge.

Despite Pakistan's external and internal security issues, the delegation was informed that Pakistan is moving in the right direction. It was argued that to continue progress, Pakistan needs peaceful democratic transitions supported by other countries. It was also mentioned that Pakistan could benefit from capacity building, an area in which Canada could play an important role.

**DELEGATES' ASSESSMENT:** Pakistan is in a geo-politically strategic position, bordered by Afghanistan, China and India. Afghanistan still poses a challenge, but the governments are talking to each other to address these challenges. However, in the case of India, the delegation had concerns regarding the lack of cooperation from India in resolving the Kashmir issue.

### **G. Visit of Pakistan's National Operation Emergency Centre**

On 4 April 2018, the delegation met with Senator Ayesha Raza Farooq, the Prime Minister's Focal Person for Polio Eradication at Pakistan's National Operation Emergency Centre in Islamabad. While the global polio eradication effort has made significant gains since the late 1980's, Pakistan remains one of three countries where polio is endemic.<sup>17</sup> That said, in recent years, Pakistan has led a concerted effort to eliminate polio in the country and has experienced considerable success. The number of cases has dropped progressively from 306 in 2014 to 54 in 2015 to 20 in 2016 and 8 in 2017<sup>18</sup>

The virus remains active in Karachi, the FATA, the Quetta block and the Khyber-Peshawar corridor. Environmental surveillance also detects the virus throughout the country. It indicates that "pockets of under-immunised children are allowing the virus to survive and spread."<sup>19</sup> An important challenge for Pakistan are the regions bordering Afghanistan, which are the "remaining strongholds of wild poliovirus transmissions."<sup>20</sup>

The delegation was informed that Pakistan uses an array of tools to combat the polio virus including a vaccine approach tailored for children in high-risk mobile populations, emergency operation centres for improved coordination, such as the one visited by the delegation, a national action plan with an accountability framework and continual surveillance for polio outbreaks. Additionally, Pakistan's approach is supported by the Government of Pakistan, the prime minister and it enjoys broad political backing across party lines.

The efforts to eliminate polio in Pakistan are also sustained by UNICEF, the World Health Organization as well as numerous NGOs such as the AKDN and the Rotary Club. The delegation was told that the Government of Canada is also contributing through the network of organizations operating in Pakistan.

**DELEGATES' ASSESSMENT:** Polio remains a challenge and the delegates were pleased to see Canadians working side by side with their Pakistani counterparts in an effort to eradicate polio.

### **H. Meeting with the Senate Chairperson**

The delegation met with Pakistan's Senate Chairperson, Sadiq Sanjrani. During this meeting, the importance of bilateral relation between Canada and Pakistan were underscored as well as people to people engagement. Senator Sanjrani stated that Pakistan has benefitted from Canada's expertise in governance. He cited the participation

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<sup>17</sup> End Polio Pakistan, [Global Polio Situation](#)

<sup>18</sup> EOC Communication update, ["2017 Historic Progress Against Polio – And the Year Ahead,"](#) No. 245, 5 January 2017.

<sup>19</sup> End Polio Pakistan, [Global Polio Situation](#).

<sup>20</sup> End Polio Pakistan, [Global Polio Situation](#)

of Senate personnel in Canada's Parliamentary Officers' Study Program (POSP) as an important example.<sup>21</sup>

### **I. Meeting with Pakistan-Canada Friendship Group**

The delegation met with several members of the Pakistan-Canada Friendship Group (PCFG) on 4 April 2018. With a membership of 188, the PCFG is one of the largest friendship groups in the Parliament of Pakistan.

The importance of bilateral relations between both countries was highlighted by the two groups. While members of the PCFG were pleased that a Canadian delegation of parliamentarians was visiting Pakistan, they stressed that these exchanges should be more frequent. They also argued that business ties between Pakistan and Canada could be improved, citing difficulties for Pakistani business people to obtaining Canadian visas as a sticking point.

### **J. Meeting with Women's Parliamentary Caucus**

The delegation met with the Women's Parliamentary Caucus (WPC). The WPC is a multi-party caucus consisting of women members from both houses of the Parliament of Pakistan. It was formed by Dr. Fehmida Mirza, Speaker of the National Assembly, on 21 November 2008.

The WPC is credited for giving women parliamentarians in Pakistan a stronger voice and helping them achieve landmark legislation on women's rights. The functions and objectives of the WPC are spelled out in its by-laws. They include, enhancing the role of women parliamentarians, ensuring effective parliamentary oversight, and networking with other organization such as civil society groups to promote women's rights and facilitate the participation of women in the National Assembly.<sup>22</sup>

During their meeting, the WPC and the delegation exchanged ideas on best practices to enhance the role of women parliamentarians. One noteworthy feature of the WPC, for instance, is building consensus among members before introducing legislation in the Parliament of Pakistan. Other areas of discussion included federal-provincial relations, women in politics and legislative oversight with a gendered lens. The WPC was particularly interested in Canada's implementation of gender-based budgeting and gender-based analysis.

**DELEGATES' ASSESSMENT:** Arising from the interactions with the upper and lower house and with the women parliamentarians, the delegates felt that more people to people ties are necessary. Parliamentary diplomacy also helps countries like Pakistan to address issues of governance. If attitudes towards women are to be changed then there needs to be more education and empowerment of girls and women. The Canadian Feminist International Development focus is one way of moving forward on gender issues.

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<sup>21</sup> "The Parliamentary Officers' Study Program (formerly known as the Canadian Parliamentary Cooperation Seminar) is designed as an opportunity for senior parliamentary staff from foreign legislatures and Canadian jurisdictions to learn about the functioning of the Parliament of Canada and, in turn, to reflect on their own practices." See: [Parliament of Canada, Parliamentary Officers' Study Program](#).

<sup>22</sup> Women Parliamentary Caucus, [By-Laws](#).

## **K. Meeting with the Mountain Glacier Protection Organization**

On 5 April 2018 the delegation met with the Ms. Aisha Khan, Founder and CEO of the Mountain Glacier Protection Organization (MPGO). The MPGO is a non-profit social welfare organization that institutes programmes designed to enhance the quality of life of disadvantaged communities by providing them with improved access to education and healthcare services, and by building physical infrastructure and water management systems that contribute to social, economic and environmental security. Social mobilization and gender mainstreaming remain cross cutting themes in all programme areas.<sup>23</sup>

The MPGO is a founding member of the Civil Society Coalition for Climate Change, which is coalition of civil society organizations “dedicated to highlighting the subject of climate change in Pakistan and influencing policymaking at the regional, national and sub-national levels through research, knowledge-sharing, and advocacy.”<sup>24</sup>

Discussions with Ms. Khan centred on the impact of climate change on Pakistan. She informed the delegation that the country is particularly vulnerable. It has difficulty coping with existing challenges, such as natural disasters and poverty, which will only be exacerbated by climate change in the coming years. She also expects new issues to surface and questioned Pakistan’s ability to adapt.

Ms. Khan explained that many of the problematic areas are interconnected and may disproportionately affect poorer populations. For instance, climate change has been attributed to increasing floods and droughts which are threatening the country’s agricultural sector. As rural populations depend on agriculture for income, many may lose their livelihoods and ability to provide for their families. Additionally, a diminishing agricultural sector could seriously threaten Pakistan’s food security, especially if its population continues to grow at its current rate.

Despite Pakistan’s vulnerability to climate change, Ms. Khan told the delegation that it is having difficulty responding to the challenges it poses to the country. One important obstacle is that many of the country’s climate related vulnerabilities fall under provincial responsibility, but the provinces lack a common position and funding to tackle the issues. Moreover, the provinces are unable to implement national policies because they do not have the capabilities or resources.

Ms. Khan advocated for an integrated approach and one that would encourage Pakistani communities to develop their own strategies to combat climate change and become self-sufficient. She stated that national and subnational governments need to improve communications and coordinate efforts to tackle problems brought on by climate change. She also made the case that the provinces need help developing a framework that dovetails from the national policy.

The delegation was also informed that though climate change is an important issue for Pakistan, it is not an area of focus for Canada’s development aid to the country. Canada’s

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<sup>23</sup> Civil Society Coalition for Climate Change, [Founding Members – Mountain Glacier Protection Organization](#).

<sup>24</sup> Civil Society Coalition for Climate Change, [Welcome to CSCCC](#).

contribution to Pakistan's efforts to combat climate change are funnelled through the United Nations.

**DELEGATES' ASSESSMENT:** Pakistan faces great challenges in the area of climate change; the land mass ranges from deserts to high mountain areas and a densely populated area. It is important that Canada share its expertise in the environmental area as well as in the glacier and earthquake management with Pakistan

#### **L. Meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs**

The delegation met with the Honourable Khawaja Muhammed Asif, Minister of Foreign Affairs, who underscored the significance of inter-parliamentary exchanges to further the relationship between Canada and Pakistan. He suggested that expanding business ties between the two countries should be an area of priority. He specifically mentioned technology, agriculture and forestry as potential sectors of interest.

Minister Muhammed Asif, however, mentioned certain irritancies as potential obstacles. He noted that a parliamentary delegation from Canada had not visited Pakistan in numerous years and that the Prime Minister of Canada had yet to visit the country. The minister also pointed out that bureaucratic difficulties present an important barrier that should be eliminated. He mentioned that the Secretary of Commerce is working to ease Pakistan's business environment so that companies are not faced with bureaucratic obstacles.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs was also concerned with Pakistan's image abroad. He acknowledged that Pakistan is in a difficult neighbourhood, but that it has significantly improved its security situation in recent years. He cited the country's successful campaign against terrorism as an example.

#### **M. Meeting with the Minister for Commerce**

The delegation met with Pakistan's Federal Minister of Commerce, the Honourable Muhammad Pervaiz Malik, to discuss Canada and Pakistan's trade relations. The Minister of Commerce told the delegation that Canada and Pakistan have a strong relationship founded on people-to-people ties, which is made apparent by the Pakistani diaspora in Canada and the number of Pakistani students traveling to Canada for post-secondary education.

While the minister stated that Pakistan and Canada enjoy commercial relations, they are limited and imbalanced because Pakistan is in a trade deficit with Canada. He stressed that eliminating certain barriers could go a long way in improving trade relations between the two countries. These include improving visa processing times for Pakistani companies trying to travel to Canada for business purposes, increasing political dialogue to create a more positive trade environment and changing Global Affairs Canada's travel advisory for Pakistan to reflect its improved security situation.

#### **N. Meeting with the Minister of Human Rights**

The delegation met with the Honourable Mumtaz Ahmed Tarar, Minister of Human Rights to discuss the human rights situation in Pakistan. The delegation broached two issues: blasphemy laws and the death penalty.

The Minister of Human Rights stated that the blasphemy laws in Pakistan were misunderstood by observers and that it has not been misused. He stressed that it is primarily used against Muslims not to oppress non-Muslims. He also argued that the Supreme Court of Pakistan has made it very difficult to prosecute charges of blasphemy. As for the death penalty, the minister stated that the moratorium on it was lifted due to public pressure, but that it was mostly used against those prosecuted for charges of terrorism.

### **O. Meeting with the Prime Minister**

Prime Minister of Pakistan, Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, met with the delegation to discuss a wide range of topics including people-to-people ties, democracy, trade relations, CPEC, Afghanistan, the Kashmir region and climate change.

In his opening remarks to the delegation the prime minister stressed the importance of people-to-people ties between Canada and Pakistan. He commented that Pakistani people have a positive perception of Canada. He stated that everyone in Pakistan has a family member living in Canada.

The prime minister underscored that democracy has taken root in Pakistan. He was confident that the 2018 election would see another peaceful democratic transition for the second time in the country's history.

Prime Minister Khaqan Abbasi expressed Pakistan's willingness to increase trade with Canada and eliminate trade barriers. He hopes that more Canadian delegations will visit Pakistan in the future. He underscored that it had been some time since the last visit.

The prime minister informed the delegation that Pakistan's economy is improving because of its improved security environment and CPEC. He mentioned that China is trying to access European markets through Pakistan's ports.

The delegation was also informed that Pakistan is concerned with the situation in the Kashmir region. The prime minister stated that human rights are being violated and people are being oppressed. He hopes that the global community will be more attentive to the situation.

The prime minister likened climate change to a cancer. The effects that it is having on Pakistan's water is of concern for Pakistan. Prime Minister Khaqan Abbasi stated the country is having difficulty building consensus on certain solutions. He also stated that water allocation will become an important challenge for Pakistan in the future.

**DELEGATES' ASSESSMENT:** The practice of isolating Pakistan has not been healthy for either Pakistan or the world. Diplomatic pressure is the best way to move forward as it is through people to people interactions that change can be effected. It is important that Canada regain its position and engage in trade and other bilateral ties with Pakistan.

### **P. Trade and Investment Roundtable**

The delegation participated in a trade and investment round table at the Canadian High Commission in Pakistan on 6 April 2018. Panellists included: Mr. Amir Hashmi, Advisor, National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST); Mr. Asim Majeed, Managing Director, Second Cup; Mr. Muhammad Ali, Director, JCM Power; Mr. Richard Morin, CEO, Pakistan Stock Exchange.

The discussion touched on numerous areas relating to trade and business in Pakistan such as the information technology sector, energy industry, the investment and business environment, climate change and the stock market. The panellists generally agreed that there are many untapped business opportunities in Pakistan and that Canada could help the country reach its potential by breaking down trade barriers, providing expertise and making further investments.

The delegation was informed that numerous visas applications to Canada are being rejected for Pakistani business people and students. In some instances, the same students rejected by Canada are being accepted by the United Kingdom and Australia. It was also mentioned that some Pakistani students can obtain engineering degrees from the United States more easily than in Canada.

Another panellist stated that Canada has been taking a back seat in Pakistan, as Canadian companies are not investing in Pakistan as much as those from the United States and the United Kingdom. He suggested that Global Affairs Canada's travel advisory for Pakistan may be a contributing factor.

The delegation was also informed that Pakistan's global image negatively impacts on trade as countries and businesses are reluctant to invest.

**DELEGATES' ASSESSMENT:** As previously mentioned and reinforced by the investment roundtable, Canada has not been aggressively pursuing the Pakistan market. It is important that the High Commission's office take an active role. We understand that changes have been made recently with the appointment of a Trade Commissioner.

### **Q. Human Rights Roundtable**

The Canadian High Commission in Pakistan hosted a roundtable discussion on human rights. The panellists worked in Pakistan in various capacities. The discussion centred on four themes: women's rights, child rights, the death penalty and military courts.

#### Women's Rights

Despite important advances, the delegation was informed that women in Pakistan are still struggling to have their rights recognized and protected. The political platforms of certain religious militant parties are designed to undermine the rights of women. Some, for instance, would prevent women from voting in general elections. Moreover, other political parties openly use hate speech towards women. While Pakistan has laws protecting women against hate speech, the delegation was told that they do not protect women.

#### Death Penalty

In recent years, Pakistan lifted a moratorium on the death penalty to combat terrorism. The delegation was informed, however, that there are 29 offences for which the death penalty can be applied. It has been used more than 400 times in the last four years. The delegation was also told that many of those executed are women and children.

#### Children's Rights

According to the panellists, civil society groups are advocating for the rights of children to be legislatively recognize. As it stands, Pakistan does not extend children the same rights

as adults. Laws in Pakistan recognize children as the property of their parents. There are no laws preventing child labour, only some regulating it. The death penalty can be used on children under the age of 18. Additionally, laws designed to protect children, such as the *Child Marriage Act*, are not properly implemented leaving children susceptible to mistreatment and abuse.

### Military Courts

In response to a high-profile incident several years ago, the Parliament of Pakistan established military tribunals that allowed military courts to try terrorism suspects. The delegation was told that these courts are often used to skirt traditional courts for persons who have been stopped by police officers on matters unrelated to terrorism. The military courts are also criticised for lacking transparency. While the military courts were created with a two-year sunset clause, they were renewed in 2017 following a parliamentary vote.

**DELEGATES' ASSESSMENT:** As with many developing countries that belong to the Commonwealth, human rights violations are as prevalent in Pakistan as elsewhere. It is our hope that with people-to-people ties and more interactions with other countries, these issues can be addressed.

### R. Meeting with Women's Rights Organization

The delegation met with two individuals to discuss the rights of women in Pakistan. Their presentation mainly focussed on the challenges faced by women living in Pakistan's rural areas. Access to education, participation in public life as well as access to National Identity Cards were the main issues presented.

The delegation was told that women in Pakistan's rural areas live in isolated communities. Access to internet and social media is limited or non-existent. Though Pakistan has more than 100 women's networks, many are out of reach. Moreover, gender-based violence is a problem in these areas. Because women often feel the mechanisms in place to help them deal with violence are not friendly to them, incidences frequently go unreported. Without access to the internet, or support network, many women are unaware of their rights or recourses. Not only are women isolated from the world outside their communities, but they may be prevented from participating in civic activities. The interlocutors stated that some women are barred from voting in general elections by their husbands.

Many rural communities in Pakistan do not have schools. As a result, children, especially school aged children, are unable to attend. In exceptional circumstances, however, empowered women are pushing their daughter to go to school.

The interlocutors reported that more than 12 million women above the age of 15 did not have National Identity Cards card according to the election commission of Pakistan in January 2018. In some instances, men were preventing their wives and daughters from obtaining one. National Identity Cards are required to access some services in Pakistan, including those relating to health care.

The delegation was also informed that rules governing NGOs in Pakistan are increasingly strict and make it more difficult for them to operate throughout the country. Some NGOs, for instance, are not being given NOCs to travel to rural areas, even during times of crisis such as in the aftermath of an earthquake. It was also mentioned that NGOs focused on human rights are perceived by the government as anti-government.

**DELEGATES' ASSESSMENT:** As mentioned previously, isolation of Pakistan has not helped the country move forward on gender issues. Pakistan has had multiple challenges in security and economic development. The Canadian Feminist International Development Agenda is one step to help address these challenges.

### **S. Meeting with United Nations Development Programme**

The delegation's final meeting was with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Pakistan. It informed the delegation that it is involved in a range of activities in Pakistan. It disbursed \$500 million to support its activities in the country. Some of its areas of involvement include: observing the ceasefire in Kashmir, combating the polio virus, food security and nutrition, health, governance, gender and environment. The UNDP works with all levels of government and civil society organizations to develop and implement its programming.

The UNDP told the delegation that Canada could help Pakistan by bringing expertise in agriculture, urbanization and governance. It also stated that Canada is a trusted partner on issues relating to human rights.

The UNDP concluded its presentation by informing the delegation that Pakistan has made a lot of progress in recent years, especially in education. While some indicators do not reflect this progress, others are indicating positive growth. The UNDP stated that things preventing Pakistan from moving forward include population growth, natural disasters as well as geopolitical incidences.

**DELEGATES' ASSESSMENT:** The delegation was surprised to hear from the UNDP that Pakistan was more willing to allow the UN to visit disputed sites in case of a perceived violation. On the other hand, India never allows the UN to visit these sites. The delegation noted that some of the security concerns raised by the Canadian officials were in relation to the Kashmir issue. The delegation felt that the Mission should conduct a further analysis of this issues so that it has a more balanced and nuanced position on the matter.

### **T. Visit to Taxila**

On Saturday, April 7, the delegation travelled to Taxila, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The delegation visited the museum and attended a presentation by an archaeological expert.

### **Acknowledgment**

The delegation would like to thank the High Commissioner of Canada to Pakistan, Mr. Perry Calderwood, and the High Commission staff for their support during the conference. In addition, the delegation wishes to thank His Excellency Tariq Azim Khan, High Commissioner for Pakistan to Canada, for his hospitality while in Pakistan and his help in organising the excellent programme for the delegation.

Respectfully submitted,

Yasmin Ratansi, M.P.

Chair of the Canadian Branch of the  
Commonwealth Parliamentary Association

## **APPENDIX ON A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF PAKISTAN**

### **Pakistan: A Brief Overview**

#### **A. Islamic Republic of Pakistan**

Pakistan consists of four provinces (Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan) and the capital territory (Islamabad Capital Territory). In 2018, the Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA) was merged with the neighbouring Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. The Pakistani-administered portion of the disputed Jammu and Kashmir region consists of two administrative entities: Azad Kashmir and Gilgit Baltistan. Islamabad is the federal capital of Pakistan. It is located within the Islamabad Capital Territory, which has a population of two million people. Pakistan is the sixth most populous country in the world with an estimated population of 204,924,861 as of July 2017.

#### **B. Historical Overview**

Pakistan has a short but turbulent history. The country came into existence on 14 August 1947 when it gained independence from Britain. Pakistan was made up of West Pakistan and East Pakistan, which were geographically separated from each other by Indian Territory. With the partition of British India into Pakistan and India, a great number of Muslim immigrants from India made their way to West Pakistan. Many came from cities, and their aspirations for Pakistan often differed from those of the traditional rural people already inhabiting the region. Conflict between these two groups was and remains an important determinant of the country's political course and economic development.

There were tensions between East and West Pakistan from the beginning. In 1970, when elections were held for a Constituent Assembly, the Awami League, a political party based in East Pakistan, won an absolute majority. President Yahya Khan rejected the election results, which caused the leaders of East Pakistan to declare independence under the name of Bangladesh in 1971. After a brutal civil war, India intervened and defeated the forces of Pakistan's central government.

Following the loss of East Pakistan, present-day Pakistan developed a new constitution in 1973. It provided for a government that was republican, federal, multi party, and parliamentary. However, the constitution was put into abeyance in 1977 when General Mohammad Zia ul Haq overthrew the government of President Ali Bhutto and imposed martial law. Bhutto was tried on murder charges and hanged in 1979.

The 1977 military takeover was not the first or last coup in Pakistan's history. The governance of Pakistan has constituted an important area of conflict between civilian and military leaders for a better part of the country's history, with the latter governing for longer periods. The constitution was amended 17 times between 1979 and 2002. Many of the amendments were inserted by military leaders who wanted to increase the presidency's power through greater centralization.

Civilian administrations experienced significant difficulties throughout Pakistan's history. Many civilian governments encountered considerable civil unrest and leaders were regularly accused of corruption, which the military leadership frequently used to weaken civilian leaders and remove them from office. Transitions of power often led to violent clashes. Elections were tainted with violence and intimidation. In 2007, Benazir Bhutto, daughter of the late President Ali Bhutto, registered to participate in the 2008

parliamentary elections as leader of the Pakistan's People's Party (PPP), a centre-left party. Previously she had served as prime minister of Pakistan from 1988 to 1990 and again from 1993 to 1996. Both times her tenure was cut short by the military president: the first time through corruption charges and the second when the president dissolved the National Assembly. Before she could participate in the election, however, she was assassinated in December 2007.

Violent street protests followed the death of Benazir Bhutto and the elections were postponed. When the elections were finally held, the PPP was able to form a government with the help of several regional parties. Many observers regarded the outcome of the 2008 election as positive. The European Parliament observer delegation stated that "[w]hile the election had fallen short of best international standards ... it had been a significant step forward for Pakistan in its progress towards full democracy."

During its time in government, the PPP faced many challenges. There was a "marked increase in extremist and sectarian violence, a deepening energy crisis, several natural disasters, and a significant deterioration in relations with the United States." Nonetheless, the PPP government acted on a number of electoral promises aimed at strengthening Pakistan's democracy. Most notably, in April 2010, it introduced the 18th Amendment to the country's constitution, which granted the provinces more autonomy and removed many of the constitutional changes introduced by military regimes. Under the new changes, the president no longer has the power to dismiss the prime minister or Parliament. The president's role is largely ceremonial and generally acts on the advice of the prime minister.

Following the 2013 election, the PPP ceded power to the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML N), a centre-right party, led by Nawaz Sharif. Mr. Sharif was previously prime minister from 1990 to 1993 and from 1997 to 1999. Both times his civilian led governments were dismissed on the grounds of corruption. Though the 2013 election was "marred by unprecedented levels of violence, intimidation and bloodshed, carried out by militant groups attempting to derail the electoral process and disadvantage certain political parties" it represented "the first time in Pakistan that power was peacefully transferred from one elected civilian government, after completing its full term, to another." Previous elections (1970, 1995, 2002 and 2008) either took place after a period of military rule, or after the removal of an elected government by military intervention (1988, 1990, 1993, 1997). Some caution, however, that the military still enjoys strong influence over the civilian government in foreign policy, domestic security, budget allocation for the security apparatus and freedom of speech (i.e., ability to censure critics of the military).

Like previous administrations, the government of Nawaz Sharif encountered numerous challenges. In July 2017, Prime Minister Sharif resigned from his position following his disqualification by the Supreme Court of Pakistan. The Supreme Court's decision was related to corruption charges founded on the Panama Papers leak. Though many commentators saw his disqualification as repackaged military tactics to oust leaders, others saw it as accountability and transparency taking hold.

As mentioned earlier, an election was recently held in Pakistan, which saw the Tehreek-e-Insaf party gain control of government. The Panama Papers controversy was a factor during the 2018 election. As stated by the European Observer Mission:

The electorally sensitive timing, as well as the content of decisions of courts investigating or adjudicating on matters related to high-profile Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) candidates, were perceived by several stakeholders as an indication of the politicisation of the judiciary. These cases reshaped the political environment ahead of the elections.

While the European Union Observers noted other issues with the 2018 elections, it also underscored important developments. For instance, it emphasized that changes to the Election Act “significantly improved the legal framework particularly by increasing powers for the [Electoral Commission of Pakistan], introducing greater transparency requirements and measures aimed at enhancing women’s participation.” While the Commonwealth Observer Group shared similar concerns, it concluded that the “2018 General Election was an important milestone in strengthening democracy in Pakistan.”

## **C. Pakistan Today**

### **1. Economic and Social Development**

Pakistan has large natural gas reserves and a thriving manufacturing sector, but its economy is primarily based on agriculture, fisheries and forestry, which represent 20% of the country’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In 2017 the World Bank Group (WBG) reported that Pakistan made significant progress regaining macroeconomic stability in the last three years. It stated that “the fiscal deficit has shrunk from 8 percent to below 5 percent, international reserves have tripled to over \$18b, and the rate of growth has increased by a full percentage point to 4.7 percent.” The WBG expected growth to continue into fiscal year 2019, “driven by public and private consumption, aided by a steady increase in public investment, especially due to projects under the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).”

The WBG’s 2018 assessment, however, was a bit more cautious. It stated that:

Pakistan’s growth continues to accelerate but macroeconomic imbalances are widening. Macroeconomic stability is a major concern for the near-term economic outlook. Pakistan’s GDP growth increased by 0.8 percentage points over the previous year to reach 5.3 percent in FY17. Major impetus came from improved performance of services and agriculture sector. Industrial sector also saw some recovery. Low interest rate environment contributed to the growth in private sector credit, which supported businesses. On the demand side, consumption made up almost 92 percent of GDP, and contributed nearly eight percentage points towards GDP growth at market prices. Average headline inflation for Jul-Feb FY18 remained 3.8 percent compared to 3.9 percent in Jul-Feb FY17, well below the target of 6 percent for FY18.

Pakistan has also shown a 36.2% improvement on the Human Development Index (0.555) between 1990 and 2015. In particular, life expectancy at birth increased by 6.3 years (to 66.4), mean years of schooling increased by 2.8 years (to 5.1) and expected years of schooling increased by 3.5 years (to 8.1). Also, Pakistan’s Gross National Income per capita increased by about 57.5% (to \$5,031 purchasing power parity).

Though Pakistan has improved in some respects, significant challenges remain. It ranked 147th out of 188 countries on the Human Development Index, last in the medium human

development category. Compared to other countries, it scored low on education and life expectancy in early childhood and a substantial percentage of the population lives below the poverty line (29.5%). Pakistan's economic difficulties also disproportionately affect women and girls who have difficulty accessing basic services such as healthcare and education.

Pakistan's economic challenges are exacerbated by internal and external crises. Its dependence on natural resources renders its economy highly susceptible to natural disasters and climate change. Pakistan ranks seventh on the Global Climate Risk Index of countries most affected by climate change from 1997 to 2016. In July 2010, flooding "caused a massive disruption to economic activity across the country and it was only in 2012 that growth returned to levels above four per cent."

A number of issues have also been identified by various organizations that could threaten Pakistan's current rate of economic growth in the future, they include: increasing deficit, struggle to maintain foreign reserves, internal and external shock as well as appreciation of the U.S. dollar. Moreover, the International Monetary Fund has raised concerns about Pakistan's ability to repay loans for CPEC projects, which may have significant implications on future economic growth.

The United Nations Development Programme stated that overall, Pakistan's ability to meet its socioeconomic goals rests on its capacity to promote effectiveness, transparency, accountability and responsiveness of public institutions at both federal and provincial/area levels, as well as to increase targeted pro-poor investments and programmes and ensure a stronger equity focus. Key priorities include strengthening democratic institutions and enhancing rule-of-law capacities, structures and mechanisms to ensure greater people's participation and public trust.

## 2. Human Rights and Civil Liberties

Despite significant internal and external challenges, Pakistan has taken important steps to improve civil liberties and human rights. According to the United Nations Human Rights Council's 2017 Universal Periodic Review (UPR), Pakistan recently:

- Established a Ministry of Human Rights, provincial human rights departments, human rights committees at district level and launched the National Action Plan for Human Rights.
- Ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.
- Recognized the constitutional rights of minorities to freely profess their religion and visit their place of worship.
- Recognized the constitutional rights of minorities to freely profess their religion and visit their place of worship.
- Strengthened social protection networks, which provide subsistence allowances to poor widows, orphans, persons with disabilities and the unemployed.

The UPR report also acknowledged the introduction of “laws prescribing penalties for anti women practices, such as rape and acid crime ... laws providing social support, such as the Benazir Income Support Programme.” Additionally, the Hindu Marriage Act and the Christian Marriage Act were recognized by the UPR as an acknowledgment that members of these faith communities have a right to regulate their own marriages.

Despite these advances, many observers underscore a disconnect between Pakistan’s high-level statements and its international commitments to human rights with their implementation. Numerous challenges have been identified by various international institutions including the European Union, the United Nations and international non-governmental organizations. The following concerns were frequently reported:

- Security forces are not held to account for human rights violations, which include torture, arbitrary detention, extrajudicial executions and enforced disappearances.
- In March 2017, a constitutional amendment was passed by Parliament that reinstated for two years secret military courts to try terrorism suspects. First established in 2015, these courts have been criticized for their lack of transparency and adequate safeguards. Since their inception, a number of people have received the death penalty, and some have been executed.
- National security concerns are used as grounds to silence oppositional voices, non-governmental organizations, media and activists. Human Rights Watch reports that journalists have been self-censoring following retaliatory attacks from security forces and militant groups. It also stated that media outlets “remained under pressure to avoid reporting on criticizing human rights during counter-terrorism operations.”
- Pakistan’s blasphemy laws are widely criticized for being overbroad and misused. According to some reports, they have been invoked to convict people expressing opinions online and to repress religious minorities. In 2017, 19 people remained on death row under Pakistan’s blasphemy laws. These laws were also the subject of numerous recommendations in Pakistan’s UPR
- Vulnerable groups, especially women, girls, religious minorities, and transgender people faced violent attacks, discrimination, and government persecution. Same-sex sexual relations is prohibited under Pakistan’s criminal code.
- Government authorities continued to pressure Afghan refugees to return to their country of origin.

## **Travel Costs**

<b>ASSOCIATION</b>	Canadian Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association
<b>ACTIVITY</b>	Bilateral Visit to Pakistan
<b>DESTINATION</b>	Islamabad, Pakistan
<b>DATES</b>	March 31 to April 8, 2018
<b>DELEGATION</b>	
SENATE	The Hon. Salma Ataullahjan, Senator The Hon. Diane Griffin, Senator
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Mr. Terry Duguid, M.P. Mr. Ramesh Sangha, M.P. Mr. Robert Kitchen, M.P. Mr. Murray Rankin, M.P. Ms. Yasmin Ratansi, M.P.
STAFF	Mr. Rémi Bourgault, Association Secretary Mr. Jean-Philippe Duguay, Analyst
<b>TRANSPORTATION</b>	\$89,095.36
<b>ACCOMMODATION</b>	\$31,370.37
<b>HOSPITALITY</b>	\$1,396.86
<b>PER DIEMS</b>	\$5,887.38
<b>OFFICIAL GIFTS</b>	\$769.37
<b>MISCELLANEOUS</b>	\$397.81
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$128,917.15</b>