

Report to the Standing Committee on International Economy, Budgets and Administration

Senator Salma Atallahjan's International Travel to Pakistan (Karachi, Islamabad, Nowshera, Charsadda, and other effected flood regions)

November 5th, 2010 – November 16th, 2010

Summary

In late July, Pakistan was ravaged by devastating monsoon waves. As a result, thousands have been left without shelter and forced into overcrowded relief camps. This is one of the worst natural calamities in history, as the effects will be felt for over a decade. Canada has reacted proactively by committing \$98.8 million in aid relief for Pakistan.

Background

As Canada's first Pakistani Senator, I am in a unique position to improve relations between both countries.

The Pakistani community in Canada is estimated at more than 300,000¹, and is continuously growing. When Pakistan was devastated by this disaster, many Canadians of Pakistani origin needed reassurance that Canada's relief money was properly distributed amongst the victims of the flood.

Originally from Pakistan, I am fluent in the major languages of the country and I am familiar of the different provinces that make up Pakistan. Because of this, I believe I would be the ideal Canadian Parliamentarian to visit the affected areas and to find answers for Pakistani-Canadians.

Objectives of Travel

The main objective for my visit to Pakistan was to ensure Canada's generous commitment of \$98.8 million was properly distributed to the victims of the floods, and that conditions in the ravaged country were improving.

In addition, the bilateral co-operation between Canada and Pakistan was also a priority for me. Canada is in the unique position to assist Pakistan in promoting democracy and upholding human rights.

¹http://www.canadainternational.gc.ca/pakistan/bilateral_relations_bilaterales/index.aspx?lang=eng&menu_id=10&menu=L

Summary

I visited the relief camps in Karachi, Islamabad, Nowshera, Charsadda, and other affected regions. I was received with a warm welcome by Pakistanis, not only because I was of Pakistani origin but also because I was a Canadian. Pakistanis were very appreciative of Canada's generous commitment as each dollar was a small step towards reconstruction of the country.

The presence of non-governmental organizations and the United Nations on the ground was very noticeable. Organizations such as the Red Cross and the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) are playing a major role in providing hands-on assistance for victims of the Pakistani flood. In addition to raising money for relief aid, organizations provide basic medical care, food support, and a mechanism for safe drinking water.

I would like to make note that the majority of the country is slowly moving towards the reconstruction phase. The Pakistani Army should be commended because of their ability to fast track supplies to the remote areas of Pakistan. In addition, due to an overall effort, the country has been able to suppress cases of cholera from spreading.

However, I heard many complaints from flood victims that supplies were not getting to them in a timely fashion. Thousands are still without shelter, and millions were affected by the disaster. There is much more work needed to be done. As noted previously, the effects of the floods will be felt for over a decade.

I also met with Pakistan's highest dignitaries, including Prime Minister Syed Yusuf Raza Gilani, to promote Canada-Pakistan relations by discussing issues of importance:

- development cooperation;
- people-to-people links;
- regional security and counter-terrorism;
- governance and human rights;
- trade and investment

The Prime Minister of Pakistan commended Canada and Prime Minister Stephen J. Harper for appointing me, a Pakistani of Pashtun descent, to the Senate of Canada. He made note that my appointment would lead to a productive relationship between the two great nations.

Like most Pakistanis, the Prime Minister spoke very highly of Canada. He made note that since 1947² (*the creation of Pakistan*), Canada has stood by Pakistan in their most dire times of need – including the recent flooding.

While meeting with Pakistan's dignitaries, I felt obligated to voice Canada's concerns with regards of the controversial conviction of Asia Bibi³ – a 45-year-old mother of five whom was sentenced to death for blasphemy. While meeting with Pakistan's Foreign Affairs Minister, Mehmoud Qureshi, I requested Pakistan's officials to repeal laws that criminalize blasphemy as these laws restrict freedom of religion and expression. The officials in Pakistan have indicated to me that there is serious consideration to repeal their laws relating to blasphemy due to an outcry from the international community.

Conclusions

My visit to Pakistan was very successful. I was able to conclude that Canada's \$98.8M commitment to Pakistan is being properly managed and utilized. However, supplies are taking longer to reach the flood victims due to the after-effects of the flood as millions have become victims of this natural calamity.

By meeting Pakistan's highest officials, including the Prime Minister of Pakistan, I was able to voice Canada's concerns and observations. By having a Canadian Parliamentarian that speaks the national languages of Pakistan and is familiar of the provinces of the country, Canada and Pakistan will be able to further improve their bilateral cooperation. It is these types of productive discussions that lead to improved and better relations between two nations.

Travel Expense Report

Ticket from Toronto to Islamabad -	\$1329.65
Ticket from Islamabad to Toronto -	\$1329.65
Total:	\$2659.30

² <http://storyofpakistan.com/articletext.asp?artid=A050>

³ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-11930849>

