

Speech in honor of the Pakistani Speaker

October 10, 2006

Speaker Soomro,
Honourable parliamentarians,
Distinguished guests:

Please join me in welcoming our distinguished guests from Pakistan. As Speaker of the Senate of Canada, I would like to extend a particular welcome to my counterpart in the Senate of Pakistan – the Honourable Mohammed Mian Soomro.

Speaker Soomro, you bring impressive credentials as an international banker, governor of the province of Sindh, and more recently Senator. It is an honour for us to learn about Pakistan from someone of your vast experience.

We are also eager to share our experiences with you. As you know, good governance is one of the priorities for Canada's international development program. The Parliament of Canada plays its part by holding exchanges with our counterparts in other countries, by sharing our parliamentary expertise through the Parliamentary Officers' Study Program, and by participating in multilateral associations such as the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

There are many reasons why Pakistan and Canada work well together. Relations between our two countries go back over fifty years. We cooperate within the Commonwealth, and our armed forces have worked together on peacekeeping missions. Canada also helps Pakistan through development and humanitarian assistance.

As a case in point, the Government of Canada committed \$40 million to assist the recovery efforts following the October 2005 earthquake. I would like to take this opportunity to express, on behalf of the Senate of Canada, our condolences to those who lost loved ones in the earthquake. Such events remind us that we are all members of one human family.

There are nearly 150,000 people of Pakistani origin in Canada, and they provide us with a solid foundation on which to build a lasting relationship. Meanwhile, trade between Pakistan and Canada has been growing steadily. Last year it amounted to about \$550 million – a nearly 50% increase over the figure for 2002.

One of the reasons it is important to have good parliamentary relations is to gain an accurate picture of each other's country. Most Canadians, for example, do not realize that the Pakistani economy has been performing very well lately.

At the same time, we are anxious to tell our Pakistani counterparts more about the Canadian way of life. People often think of Canada as a land of forests and wheat fields, and while this is true to a certain extent, it has also become one of the world's most urbanized countries. As a country of immigrants, it is also one of the most ethnically diverse. Indeed, this diversity is reflected here in the Senate.

As Speaker of the Senate, I have the chance to meet with parliamentarians and officials from around the world. Earlier this year, I was honoured to host, along with my colleague from the House of Commons, the Asia-Pacific Parliamentarians' Conference on Environment and Development, which was attended by Pakistani parliamentarians.

I come away from each meeting with my foreign counterparts with a better understanding of how to deal with the challenges that we all face today. Even in this age of instant communication, such face-to-face contact cannot be replaced.

Let me close by thanking you once again for taking the time to visit us. Be assured that after you have returned home, we will continue to pay close attention to developments in Pakistan.