

TRIP REPORT:
**LEBANON &
AFGHANISTAN**

NOVEMBER 2009



A congressional delegation from the House Democracy Partnership (HDP) traveled to the Middle East and Southwest Asia from November 9 to 16, 2009, to advance HDP's existing partnerships with the national assemblies of Lebanon and Afghanistan and engage with members of parliament and other senior officials in Pakistan. The delegation was led by HDP Chairman David Price (D-NC) and included HDP Ranking Member David Dreier (R-CA) and HDP members Lois Capps (D-CA), Keith Ellison (D-MN), Mazie Hirono (D-HI), and Charles Boustany, Jr. (R-LA). This was HDP's fourth outbound congressional delegation of the 111th Congress and 17th overall since 2005.



HDP Members conduct a roundtable discussion on economic reform with Lebanese MPs.

The delegation's visit to Lebanon (Nov. 10-11) marked HDP's third program with the Lebanese National Assembly in Beirut and first since political tensions caused a government shutdown in late 2007. The visit coincided with the formation of a new Lebanese cabinet five months after the country's June 2009 elections, allowing the delegation to engage with newly elected members of parliament and other senior officials on their goals for the coming legislative session.

The delegation began its visit by meeting with President Michel Suleiman, incoming Prime Minister Sa'ad Hariri, and outgoing Prime Minister Fouad Siniora to congratulate them on the formation of a new government and discuss various bilateral issues of concern, including the Lebanese economy and the Middle East peace process. The centerpiece of the delegation's visit was its program with the Lebanese National Assembly, which included roundtable discussions with legislators on economic reform and legislative strengthening issues, meetings with senior parliamentary leaders including Speaker Nabih Berri, and informal lunches with rank-and-file legislators from various political parties. The delegation also hosted a roundtable presentation by Lebanese civil society organizations about their work in the country.

Between visits to HDP partner countries, the delegation spent two days in Islamabad (Nov. 12-13) meeting with members of parliament and other senior Pakistani officials. Pakistan's February 2008 elections and subsequent political developments have given rise to hopes that the country's parliament will assume a more prominent role in setting national policy, and the visit allowed HDP Members to assess the prospects of future peer-to-peer engagement with their fellow legislators.



Rep. Mazie Hirono discusses the role of women in parliament with Pakistani MPs in Islamabad.

The delegation's program with the Pakistani parliament included meetings with National Assembly Speaker Fahmida Mirza, Senate President Farooq Naek, the chairwoman of the National Assembly Defense Committee, leaders of the two largest opposition blocs, and the cabinet minister for parliamentary affairs. The delegation also met with Prime Minister Yousaf

Gilani to discuss the current political and economic situation in the country, the government's campaign against extremist organizations, and other issues of bilateral concern. In addition, HDP Members had an opportunity to engage with a large and diverse group of Pakistani legislators and civil society leaders at dinners hosted by U.S. Ambassador Anne Patterson.



Rep. Keith Ellison discusses various issues with a Pakistani MP from the Waziristan region.

The delegation concluded its trip in Afghanistan (Nov. 14-15), marking HDP's third visit to Kabul since its partnership with the Wolesi Jirga (lower house) of the Afghan National Assembly was inaugurated in 2005. Afghanistan has been among HDP's most active and constructive partners, and the visit allowed the delegation to continue developing the relationship at a critical moment in the country's history.

Building on HDP's previous work with the Wolesi Jirga, delegation Members conducted an intensive series of meetings and working groups with their Afghan counterparts, including roundtable discussions with the Defense and Internal Security committees, a forum on constituent outreach and representation, and breakout sessions with members of the Budget and Finance, Health, Education and Culture, and Religious Affairs committees. The delegation also met with Wolesi Jirga Speaker Yunus Qanooni, observed a plenary session of the Meshrano Jirga (upper house), and toured the Afghan parliamentary library, which has been a central focus of HDP training and material assistance. Throughout its program, the delegation underscored the critical role that the legislature can play in serving as an effective balance to the executive branch and influencing the direction of national policy.

Although HDP's mission focused primarily on the legislature, the visit also gave Members an opportunity to consult with senior U.S. and Afghan officials during the final stages of President Obama's review of U.S. strategy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan. In a meeting with President Hamid Karzai, the delegation emphasized the importance of forming an effective and inclusive government and taking concrete steps to address corruption. It also met with Karzai's main opponent, Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, to discuss his role as the leader of the political opposition and the ability of the legislature to hold the executive branch accountable for its actions. Finally, the delegation held extensive discussions with U.S. Ambassador Karl Eikenberry, General Stanley McChrystal, and representatives of the United Nations and United Kingdom regarding the future of the U.S.-NATO mission in Afghanistan.



Reps. Charles Boustany, Jr. and Lois Capps tour Afghanistan's parliamentary library.

Overall, the delegation successfully advanced HDP's mission of supporting the development of democratic institutions and strengthening cooperation between the U.S. Congress and its peer legislatures around the world. The Lebanese National Assembly welcomed the resumption of its partnership with HDP in the wake of the 2009 elections; Pakistani legislators showed an active interest in a deeper institutional relationship with the U.S. Congress; and HDP's partnership with the Wolesi Jirga continued along its positive trajectory.

For more information about the House Democracy Partnership or its work in Lebanon and Afghanistan, contact the HDP office at (202) 226-1641 or visit <http://democracy.house.gov>.