

TRIP REPORT: PAKISTAN & GEORGIA

MARCH-APRIL 2010



A congressional delegation from the House Democracy Partnership (HDP) traveled to the Caucasus and South Asia from March 26 to April 2, 2010, to advance HDP's existing partnership with the Georgian parliament and inaugurate a new partnership with the parliament of Pakistan. The delegation was led by HDP Chairman David Price (D-NC) and included HDP member Jeff Fortenberry (R-NE), Rep. Jim McDermott (D-WA), and Rep. Stephen Lynch (D-MA). This was HDP's sixth outbound congressional delegation of the 111th Congress and 19th overall.

The delegation's visit to Georgia (March 27-28) marked HDP's fourth program in Tbilisi with the Georgian parliament, which has been among the commission's most active partners. Building on a recent defense oversight program conducted by several former Members of Congress on behalf of HDP, the delegation discussed the state of civil-military relations in Georgia, the role of the political opposition, and other regional and bilateral issues with a group of legislators led by Speaker Davit Bakradze. The delegation also discussed U.S.-Georgian relations and the progress of Georgia's economic and political development over dinner with President Mikhail Saakashvili.



The delegation discusses civil-military relations and other issues at a meeting with Georgian MPs.

Between visits to HDP partner countries, the delegation spent two days (March 28-29) in Bangladesh, which held successful legislative elections in December 2008 following two years of rule by a military-supported caretaker government. The visit allowed the delegation to express U.S. support for the country's return to democracy and foster closer ties between the U.S. Congress and National Assembly of Bangladesh.

In an intensive day of meetings in the National Assembly, the delegation held a working lunch with the speaker and legislators from various parties, conducted a roundtable discussion on institutional strengthening issues with a group of rank-and-file legislators, discussed fiscal oversight with the chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, and toured the parliamentary library and office complex. The delegation also met with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wazed, opposition leader Khaleda Zia, and the ministers of foreign affairs and commerce to discuss various issues of bilateral concern. In addition, the group toured a USAID-funded training program for Bangladeshi journalists.



Rep. Jeff Fortenberry discusses the role of the media at a journalist training center in Dhaka.

The central focus of the delegation's mission was its visit to Pakistan (March 29-April 1), which was selected as HDP's 15th partner country in March 2010 following a November 2009 assessment mission. The inauguration of HDP's newest partnership comes at an important moment for U.S.-Pakistan relations, and the visit gave the delegation an opportunity to

emphasize the interest of the U.S. Congress in a long-term strategic partnership with Pakistan. It also coincided with the final stages of a constitutional reform process that will give the parliament a more prominent role in Pakistan's balance of power, providing a fitting backdrop for the delegation's focus on legislative development.

The delegation's program with the Pakistani parliament included meetings with National Assembly Speaker Fahmida Mirza and a multiparty group of Senators led by Senate President Farooq Naek, a lively roundtable discussion with the parliamentary Women's Caucus, a lunch



hosted by the Foreign Affairs Committee, and a briefing by the board of the Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services (PIPS), a USAID-funded legislative research and training center that will be a focal point of HDP's work. It also featured smaller working groups on defense oversight and committee operations with members of the Senate and National Assembly.

Although the delegation's Pakistani parliament, its

The delegation meets with the Speaker of the Pakistani National Assembly, Dr. Fahmida Mirza.

mission focused primarily on the members also met with senior

Pakistani and U.S. officials to discuss various bilateral issues of concern, including Pakistan's campaign against violent extremism in its border regions, cooperation in the areas of security and economic development, and relations between Pakistan and India. Among other officials, the delegation met with Pakistani President Asif Zardari, Prime Minister Yousuf Gilani, and Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi.

On its final day in Pakistan, the delegation traveled from Islamabad to the frontier capital of Peshawar for several meetings focused on the Pakistani military's operations in the region and the civilian government's role in providing services to conflict-affected areas. Members met with the speaker of the provincial assembly of Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province (recently renamed Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) as well as the head of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas Secretariat, and also hosted a breakfast in Islamabad for the region's representatives in the national parliament.



Overall, the delegation successfully advanced HDP's mission of supporting the development of democratic institutions abroad and forging closer ties between the U.S. Congress and its peer legislatures. HDP's four-year-old

HDP Chairman David Price listens to the speaker of the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Provincial Assembly.

partnership with the Georgian parliament continues to provide positive support for the body's institutional development; its new partnership with the Pakistani parliament was successfully inaugurated at an important moment for U.S.-Pakistani relations; and its visit to Bangladesh was warmly received as a signal of U.S. interest in the country's democratic development.

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