

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, D.C. 20515

August 14, 2008

His Excellency Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani
Prime Minister
Islamic Republic of Pakistan
Office of the Prime Minister
Islamabad, Pakistan

Dear Prime Minister Gilani and Parliamentary Colleagues:

As long time friends and supporters of Pakistan, we write to express our concerns over your government's decision to significantly reduce funding for the National Commission for Human Development (NCHD). We appreciate that Pakistan is facing a number of serious economic challenges and that fiscal discipline requires making some difficult budget choices. While defunding NCHD may make financial sense in the short-term, we greatly fear it may have serious negative consequences for Pakistani society as a whole over the long-term.

The NCHD, which we understand currently employs over 80,000 people, was created as a public-private partnership, specifically to work at the grassroots level, on alleviating poverty throughout Pakistan by improving educational opportunities and access to quality health care. We understand that the work done by NCHD has attracted prestigious awards and recognition from international agencies such as UNESCO, UNDP, UNICEF, the World Bank and the Bill Gates Foundation. In its six short years of operations, we have been told that NCHD has been able to:

- Enroll over 8 million children between ages 5 and 7 in village schools;
- Open 22,000 feeder schools in remote areas of the country;
- Provided corrective vision glasses to over 45,000 children;
- Complete over 121,000 Adult Literacy Centers in all districts of Pakistan (most of the students at these literacy centers are women);
- Train over 12 million women in primary healthcare assistance;

- Mobilize over 300,000 local worker volunteers for various community-improvement projects;
- Open (with the assistance of Microsoft) sixteen computer learning centers in remote areas including Thatta and Badin, in Sind, Pakistan; and
- Initiate numerous community development projects in the North Western Frontier Province (NWFP) and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).

Despite these successes, poverty, illiteracy and lack of access to health care remain entrenched problems in remote areas of Pakistan and the gains achieved to date are fragile. Significantly more work needs to be done to solidify the systems already in place and to expand those systems and move Pakistan closer to achieving its United Nations Millennium Development Goals, particularly in the NWFP and FATA regions of Pakistan where economic development is low and rates of militancy are extremely high. Considering that there does not appear to us to be any government, private or no-profit entity capable of stepping in and carrying on the work being done by NCHD at this time, we greatly fear that the gains made so far will evaporate should NCHD cease operations completely.

Your Excellency, we believe that the educational, social and economic development work being done by NCHD in the poorest areas of Pakistan is vital to your country's future. Unleashing the force of Pakistan's human resources will enable Pakistan to fully exploit her vast untapped economic potential; and the work being done by NCHD is key, we believe, to unleashing those resources. We respectfully ask your government to give all due consideration to reversing its decision to defund the National Commission for Human Development.

Sincerely,

Sheila Jackson Lee
Co-Chair
Congressional Pakistan Caucus

Dan Burton
Co-Chair
Congressional Pakistan Caucus