

NOTE FOR RECORD

**By Shoaib Sultan Khan
November 14, 2012**

Subject: Event in British Parliament

The All Parties Parliamentary Group on Pakistan, in collaboration with the British Pakistan Foundation and Unitas Communications organized an Event, in the Grand Committee Room of the House of Commons, "From Britain to Pakistan; Reflections on a journey to the northern areas of Pakistan, observing world class development in some of the most beautiful parts of the world".

The Event was chaired by Andrew Stephenson MP and addressed by the following;

Mudassar Ahmad, CEO Unitas

Con Coughlin, Foreign Affairs Editor, The Daily Telegraph

Peter Osborne, Chief Political Columnist, The Daily Telegraph

Brooks Newmark MP

Kashif Zafar, British Pakistan Foundation

Shoaib Sultan Khan, RSPN (speech attached)

The speeches were followed by a Q&A Session.

The Chair in his opening remarks welcomed the speakers and the audience and the fellow MPs and began the proceedings by asking Mudassar to take the floor.

Mudassar gave a brief background of their visit including Con, Peter and Brooks besides himself, to Pakistan and how it took them eight hours after flying into Gilgit to reach Soust, the last village in Pakistan on the border with China. He marveled at the stunning sceneries and the hazards of the journey which entailed crossing a 25-km long lake and way back as it became dark, the submarine type boat navigated with the help of moonlight. Next day he undertook with Peter, another 14-hour journey from Gilgit to Chitral ,crossing over the highest polo ground in the world, the Shandur Pass. It was an area not only most remote and isolated but

infested with security checks. However what they saw in terms of development and the spirit of the people, the hardship of the journey was not felt.

Speaking after me, Con generously observed how do I match Shoaib's speech. Con is writing a book on Churchill and also visited Malakand after his visit to Gilgit. Con said that the general impression in Britain is that the people of the area are wild and unwilling to accept education or development. He said how wrong this perception is when one gets an opportunity to visit the area, as he witnessed firsthand when he visited northern areas and Malakand. He strongly endorsed the strategy of development implemented by AKRSP and made a strong plea for development aid for RSPN for stability, peace and security in the region.

Peter had earlier visited Swat with Shandana and now he had been not only to northern areas but also to Chitral. He described his meetings with a group of women in Chitral and said compared to men, he found women had done immensely more. He told how the area, surrounded by Taliban and militants bordering with Afghanistan and tribal areas of Pakistan, yet is peaceful and engaged in self development. He strongly endorsed RSPN and its development strategy of empowering people through organising them. He informed the audience about his forthcoming article of his visit in the Saturday Telegraph magazine.

Brooks referred to me being very modest in my speech and alluded what he saw in the northern areas what I had achieved and how much I was revered and loved by the people there. Brooks had attended a function up above Hunza organized by the Local Support Organisation (LSO) in collaboration with AKRSP, to honour the Village Activists who had helped me in implementing the programme in its initial stages. Nearly over 50 Activists in their sixties, both men and women, from Gilgit and Baltistan were honoured with **"SHOAIB SULTAN KHAN SERVICE MEDAL"**. Brooks spoke of the development he saw in Soust, how a mountain had been tunneled to bring water to turn an arid area into a green oasis. He observed this phenomenon throughout his over 100-km journey from Gilgit to Soust and was struck that how this vertical desert had large tracts of greenery because of the AKRSP helping people to bring water from glaciers. He came to believe water is life, seeing this. He met the people who brought about this transformation both at Soust project site and in the village, both men and women and was greatly impressed by their spirit and achievements. Despite the hardship of the journey, he enjoyed every moment of it. He admitted that this visit brought about a change in his thinking about development aid.

All four speakers described their visit to northern areas as **"fantastic"**.

Kashif told the audience that when he first met Shoaib Sultan and had a four hour discussion with him, on returning home late at night, he told his wife that he had either met the greatest conman of the world or a saint. He can say now that he really met a saint, specially after his

visit to Pakistan, a few month ago and seeing the behavioural change in men and specially women. He made a strong plea for a portion of a development aid to RSPN from the current annual development aid of nearly US\$ 1.7 billion to Pakistan from all donors and development agencies put together. What RSPN has achieved in the last thirty years, clearly indicates that an additional US\$ 200 million annual aid to RSPN ,for next five years,would enable the Rural Support Programmes (RSPs) to cover the entire country and uplift the standard of living of the entire population of rural poor households.

In Q&A session, the first question was directed to me about the availability of the secondary education and the impact of Drone attacks. I explained that the RSPN focuses on economic empowerment by unleashing the potential of the rural poor through fostering institutions of the people. Once so empowered the rural poor are enabled to access education, health and other services. In the northern areas this was clearly and convincingly demonstrated. As to the Drone, I advised the questioners to ask this from the PM of Pakistan. However, Con Coughlin and one of the MPs responded to him.

Anther member of the audience, an American, made a strong plea for publicizing achievements of RSPN in schools in form of stories and pleaded to MPs to disseminate the effectiveness of this development strategy as widely as possible amongst policy makers and administrators.

One MP wondered if aid was given for right purposes and asked me for my opinion. I responded, without donor aid over the years probably RSPN would not have achieved what it has but the quantum of aid has been erratic and currently in case of Pakistan, it is not at the level for RSPN type programmes, as I would want it to be. In India, of course, Government of India allocated the required sources to take such programmes to scale. I only wish some day in Pakistan, this also happens.

A professional footballer from the audience made a strong case for linking development with sports.

One questioner enquired about the progress of women entrepreneurs and I quoted him the example of India where in Andhra Pradesh, ten million women got organized and are engaged in a variety of income generating activities. In Pakistan, in the Province of Sindh, in two districts alone, over 200,000 women got organized and through a vocational training programme for gainful employment, thousands of women benefitted. My experience has been given the enabling environment and resources, women surpass men.

Andrew Stephenson MP thanked the speakers and the audience and brought the Event to a closure.