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**Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearing
'Combating Terrorism through Education - the Near East & South Asian
Experience'.**

Washington D.C., April 19 2005

I want to thank Chairman Richard Lugar, and the ranking member, Senator Joseph Biden, for holding this important hearing, and inviting me to testify on behalf of the International Crisis Group on the continuing challenges of education reform in South Asia.

The Crisis Group has been in South Asia since December 2001, and has published reports directly relevant to the issues under this committee's review. We are deeply concerned that the absence of meaningful education reform will aggravate social and economic rifts, and feed the spread of extremism amongst the region's youth.

Education in South Asia has been the subject of renewed international focus in the wake of the attacks of September 11, and millions of dollars in donor funds have been allocated for education programs. However, a lack of government commitment, political interference, and a deteriorating physical infrastructure threaten to undermine these efforts. My testimony will expand on these concerns as they apply to Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan, with a particular focus on President Pervez Musharraf's education reforms, whose outcome will be absolutely crucial given Pakistan's key role in the war against terrorism.

In a report that the International Crisis Group published yesterday on "The State of Sectarianism in Pakistan" we emphasize that:

Sectarian conflict in Pakistan is the direct consequence of state policies of Islamisation and marginalisation of secular democratic forces. Co-option and patronage of religious parties by successive military governments have brought Pakistan to a point where religious extremism threatens to erode the foundations of the state and society....

Instead of empowering liberal, democratic voices, the government has co-opted the religious right and continues to rely on it to counter civilian opposition. By depriving democratic forces of an even playing field and

continuing to ignore the need for state policies that would encourage and indeed reflect the country's religious diversity, the government has allowed religious extremist organisations and jihadi groups, and the madrasas that provide them an endless stream of recruits, to flourish.

As we look at the education system more specifically, it nevertheless is vital to see and understand the broader political environment in which the education system functions.

Pakistan and Bangladesh have almost parallel education systems. As they did under British colonial rule, both countries maintain a three-tiered education structure:

1. Private English-medium schools catering to privileged families;
2. A highly centralized public school sector including Urdu- or Bengali medium schools for the poor;
3. Religious seminaries, or madrasas.

Each sector has its own syllabus, exam systems and fee structures. The growing disparities between these sectors, in terms of the quality of education and the professional opportunities available to graduates, are exacerbating already sharp social and economic divisions.

Pakistan and Bangladesh are signatories to the World Declaration on Education for All (EFA, signed in Jometien, 1990), yet are falling significantly behind on achieving agreed targets. Both spend well below the 4 per cent of GDP on education recommended by UNESCO (currently Pakistan has allocated 2.7 per cent; and Bangladesh 2.3 per cent). Most of this goes towards salaries, leaving extremely limited funds for development and other productive inputs. Their public school infrastructure is deteriorating, with dropout rates in primary education fluctuating around 50 per cent in Pakistan, and 33 per cent in Bangladesh. In rural areas and urban slums we've visited in Pakistan in the last year, many schools were in locations where there was very little public transport and their learning environments were deplorable –many lacked boundary walls, water and toilet facilities, electricity, and proper furniture. That parents are unwilling to send their children to such schools should come as no surprise.

Not only do one of every two children in Pakistan drop before completing primary school (5th grade), but also there is an equally devastating flaw in public school education. The content of that education is increasingly irrelevant since it does not prepare students for the demands of a modern economy (or for higher education).

In Bangladesh, a National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) devises the national curriculum and produces public school textbooks. In Pakistan, a central Curriculum Wing determines the government syllabus, and Provincial Textbook Boards then produce all public school textbooks. Teachers are prohibited from deviating from the prescribed material. These virtual monopolies have prevented the emergence of innovative and flexible education systems. Teachers and students we've interviewed in the field argue that public school education is no preparation for employment. As a result, many families chose instead to send their children into labor, or to madrasas, which provide accommodation, food and other basic necessities, and yield professional opportunities in mosques, madrasas and other religious institutions.

Bangladesh's madrasa sector has mushroomed, reaching an estimated 64,000 madrasas from roughly 4,100 in 1986, with little if any government oversight. This has accompanied the rise of militant Islam, including increased numbers of radical groups, some with ties to global terrorist networks, such as the Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami. Two Islamist parties, the Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Oikyo Jote are coalition partners in the Bangladesh Nationalist Party-led government. According to the latest official estimates (2003), there are 10,430 madrasas in Pakistan. However, adding the numbers provided by each of Pakistan's five madrasa boards, the figure is closer to 13,000. Both figures mark a significant increase from the official estimate of 3,000 madrasas in 1988.

Both countries continue to harbor Islamist radical groups who seek recruits from poverty-stricken and education-deprived areas. Increased jihadi rhetoric in madrasas and mosques, including calls for an anti-American global jihad, is a major cause of concern. Without a viable public school system that expands students' economic opportunities, more and more children are likely to drift towards extremism.

Reforms under the Musharraf Government

The Musharraf government has publicly acknowledged the problem, and made education reform a centerpiece of its modernization drive but has failed to follow through. In January 2002, the government launched its Education Sector Reforms (ESR) program, aimed at reforming the education system. In 2005, we continue to have serious concerns about the program's directions. Our findings indicate that three main obstacles beset meaningful education reform.

First, the government has proved reluctant to divert more of its own resources to education. Repeatedly pledging to raise the education budget to 4 per cent of GDP, it has yet to follow through on its commitment. To meet Pakistan's commitments to EFA, the government will need an estimated \$7.9 billion. According to its EFA Action Plan, the government expects \$4.4 billion of this, more than 55 per cent, to come from foreign donors, symbolizing an unwillingness to invest its own resources in education reform.

Second, Pakistan's public education bureaucracy is highly centralized and inefficient. Since salaries and opportunity in the public and private sectors depend on educational qualifications, positions within the education department –and degree-granting institutions are some of the most lucrative in government service. Appointments are based on politics rather than merit within the education sector, thereby severely impairing the quality of teaching. Overly centralized control has further prevented effective monitoring over public school teachers and administrators.

Third, the government has repeatedly yielded to political pressure from religious parties that have openly opposed education and madrasa reform. These lobbies have managed to hijack curricular content to promote their own ideological and political agendas. We are particularly concerned about the public school curriculum's emphasis on religious indoctrination. General Zia-ul-Haq's Islamisation policies in the 1980s had resulted in a massive expansion in the numbers of madrasa, with the numbers increasing from 1,745 in 1979 to almost 3000 by 1988. During this period too, militant interpretations of Islam were systematically incorporated into the mainstream public school curriculum. Current national syllabus guidelines require students between classes I-VI, for example, to "recognize the importance of Jihad in every sphere of life" and "make speeches on Jihad".

In 2003, an independent Islamabad-based research group, the Sustainable Policy Research Institute (SDPI) documented religious, sectarian and gender biases in the public school syllabus in a report entitled, *The Subtle Subversion: The State of Curricula and Textbooks in Pakistan*. Although a government-formed committee of independent academics and education officials approved the report's recommendations for an immediate and comprehensive review of the national curriculum, subsequent pressure from the religious parties prompted the government to finally reject its proposals. Then Education Minister Zobaida Jalal had also announced that Quranic references to jihad would be deleted from public

school science books but backtracked under pressure from the religious right, and those references remain in place.

In this context, the ESR objective of streamlining the madrasa syllabus with the mainstream curriculum is questionable. Any effort to do so would be premature without a comprehensive review and improvement of the public school curriculum.

The government's capitulation to the religious right on education reform stems from its reliance on them to counter its civilian secular opposition. The six-party Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal presently controls the NWFP government and governs Balochistan in alliance with the ruling Muslim League. MMA officials head the provincial education ministries of both these provinces and have publicly opposed the reform of the public school sector.

This reliance on the religious right has also led the government to back down on its pledges to reform the madrasa sector. In June 2002 the government approved a draft bill, the Deeni Madaris (Voluntary Registration and Regulation) Ordinance calling for the voluntary registration of madrasas, imposing restrictions on foreign grants and donations, and barring foreign students or teachers without valid visas and official permission. A week after cabinet approval, however, President Musharraf opted not to sign the bill after it was strongly opposed by madrasa board representatives.

The lack of effective registration requirements and oversight has resulted in the madrasa sector's alarming and unchecked expansion. Today most registered madrasas are licensed under the Societies Registration Act of 1860 after the ban on such registration, imposed in 1996, was removed in 2004. The Act lacks any significant monitoring mechanisms over financial accounting, internal governance, or madrasa curricula; its only practical requirement is for registered organizations to submit an annual list of governing body members.

The U.S. Role

The U.S. can and should play an important role in education reform in Pakistan and Bangladesh. USAID should consider significantly expanding its current financial commitments for education in Bangladesh, which were below \$5 million for fiscal year 2004, focused on early childhood and primary education, and are planned at similar levels for fiscal years 2005 and 2006. USAID has allocated \$100 million over five years to Pakistan's education sector, aimed at teacher training,

engendering democratic ideals, improving the quality of exams, and enabling greater access to schools. The U.S. government has a stake in the direction and outcome of educational reform and should adopt a more proactive approach. That approach should affect both the direct primary education and literacy program but also some portion of the \$200 million in annual budget support provided to the government of Pakistan over the next five years.

The U.S. should:

1. Condition continued education aid to Pakistan and Bangladesh on their raising education expenditure to 4 per cent of GDP. Comprehensive reform efforts will not be sustainable under current expenditure levels. In that regard, some clear conditioning should provide for evidence of additionality in government resources going to expand access and quality of education from the budget support the U.S. is providing.

2. Expand programming to address educational content, and attach conditions that its funds cannot be used, as they could under present circumstances, to support a curriculum, and any textbook material, that promotes intolerance towards women and religious, sectarian and ethnic minorities; and contains references to jihad, or any historical inaccuracies. The U.S. should urge Pakistan to immediately resume reviewing public school curriculum and textbooks to address historical and factual inaccuracies, glorification of armed struggle and jihad and minority and gender biases. USAID should extend its programs to support the private production of quality English language textbooks for public schools, presenting valuable substitutes to the Provincial Boards and NCTB's texts. This is crucial to improving public school educational content.

3. Assist in the shift to English-medium instruction Since the language of instruction in elite private schools is English, given the demand for English in Pakistan and Bangladesh's public and private sectors, the products of Urdu and Bengali medium government schools are at a severe disadvantage in competitive job markets. The U.S. should assist in all aspects of this shift from textbooks to teacher training to monitoring results.

4. Urge the Pakistan government to follow through on its commitment to establish better oversight on the madrasa sector: to put in place a new madrasa law that requires financial transparency, curriculum and management reform and mandatory registration of all madrasas under this new law, including those

currently registered under the Societies Act. Pakistan should also be urged to immediately resume reviewing public school curriculum and textbooks to address historical and factual inaccuracies, glorification of armed struggle and jihad, and minority and gender biases.

5. Ensure against politically motivated teacher and administrative transfers: USAID should require all local partners to sign memorandums of understanding with the relevant education ministry to curb the transfer of any teacher trained under their programs for a minimum period of three years.

5. Target more funds based on district need. In Pakistan, much of the education funding currently is limited to only a handful of Sindh and Balochistan districts, some of which are relatively developed and pose no significant threat of extremism amongst youth. A recent proposal to expand the \$60 million USAID-funded Education Sector Reform Assistance (ESRA) program from nine to twenty-five districts is a welcome step, and should be followed through. However, the new recipients should be identified on the basis of need, the number of donors already active in the district, as well as areas that have witnessed an expanding madrasa sector or increased jihadi activity. USAID should also consider extending ESRA to NWFP, where tribal customs and the spread of extremism continue to hamper education especially for girls. In some NWFP districts we found clusters of up to fourteen villages without a single girls school. In 2004, female enrollment made up about 35 per cent of total enrollment in NWFP, the lowest ratio of any province.

6. Address infrastructure constraints: In determining any program's performance targets, USAID should take into account practical constraints. Targeted enrolment rates in most rural areas of Pakistan cannot, for instance, be achieved without addressing factors such as transport and security problems, particularly relevant in addressing education for girls and women.

7. Avoid diverting scarce aid funding to the madrasa sector. The U.S. government must not allocate any of its assistance for madrasa schools in Pakistan and Bangladesh. Donor funding and engagement is unlikely to reform the madrasa sector and the provision of modern facilities will only make madrasas more attractive educational venues, increasing the clergy's social and political influence. U.S. educational assistance should instead remain focused on strengthening Pakistan and Bangladesh's failing public school systems.

8. Finally, with regard again to the broader political context in which the education system functions, the United States should strongly press the Government of

Pakistan to reaffirm the constitutional principle of equality for all citizens by repealing all laws, penal codes and official procedures that reinforce sectarian identities and cause discrimination as well as those laws that discriminate against women and minorities and to disband all private militias, particularly those organized for sectarian and jihadi causes.

Afghanistan

Afghanistan also presents a daunting set of challenges, linked directly to that country's reconstruction. Over two decades of war and repressive government have left a shattered economy and physical infrastructure, and some of the lowest human development indicators in the world. By all accounts, Afghanistan's school system is in ruins. However, the Taliban's ouster has opened up new opportunities in education, especially for girls who were banned from attending school, and has led to unprecedented levels of enrolment. Over 4 million students have registered in schools since 2002, with female enrolment estimated at around one third of the total amount. Yet, the existing infrastructure is unable to meet the increased demand for schooling. An estimated 80 per cent of schools were damaged or destroyed by war, and many have yet to be restored. Millions of children remain out of school, and current teacher/student ratios are unsustainable, by some accounts averaging around 1:60.

Security remains a primary concern. Girls' schools continue to face external threats, and many have come under attack. In 2003, Afghanistan's female literacy rate was 19.6 per cent (compared to 49 per cent for males). Many regions remain under warlord control. Militia forces and remnants of the Taliban and al-Qaeda continue to operate in and around Afghanistan, seeking recruits amongst the country's disaffected youth. Former soldiers, including child soldiers, and returning refugees are especially vulnerable in the current environment, and more extensive efforts are needed to reabsorb them into Afghan society. According to an Asian Development Bank (ADB) estimate in July 2002, there were 25,000 to 30,000 ex-child soldiers in Kandahar alone. A strong education system would contribute significantly to such efforts.

Given ongoing security concerns and limited resources, President Hamid Karzai's government will continue to require significant levels of external funding to rebuild and revitalize its education system. We believe an effective approach should include expanded efforts in:

1. Establishing a strong physical infrastructure, including new schools and adequate educational facilities.
2. Policy-oriented capacity building of regional education departments and other policymaking institutions, whose responsibilities include curriculum development and long-term education policy.
3. Involving Afghan civil society in the delivery of education.
4. Building a broad and equitable education system. Afghanistan's education infrastructure must extend its reach to accommodate a scattered, highly diverse, and multi-ethnic population.
5. Continued and expanded teacher training programs, geared especially to induct more female teachers into the sector.
6. A sustained and coordinated international effort to provide security, especially in remote areas of the country where the writ of the central government has proved limited, and where attacks against civilians, especially against women and girls, continue.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, South Asia's economic growth and security depend on a strong education sector. The failure to implement meaningful reform in Pakistan and Bangladesh's madrasa sectors and deteriorating public education systems and to revitalize Afghanistan's educational infrastructure will undermine regional stability, promote extremism, and prevent the spread of democratic ideals.