



**Meeting between PCHR members and
British High Commission delegation**

An informal meeting between PCHR members and British High Commission delegation was convened at the PCHR secretariat on Wednesday, January 28, 2004. Mr. Riaz Fatyana MNA presided over the meeting. Mr. Omar Ayub Khan MNA, Senator Dr. Shahzad Wasim, Ms. Kashmala Tariq MNA and Mr. Shafique Chaudhry Chief Coordinator PCHR represented PCHR. The British delegation comprised of Mr. Michael Semple Human Rights Advisor to the British High Commission and Mr. Richard Lindsay Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) in-charge Pakistan section.

Mr. Riaz Fatyana introduced PCHR to the delegation and shed light on its objectives, modus operandi and some initiatives. Later Mr. Omar Ayub Khan added to some points of Mr. Riaz Fatyana and introduced in detail the past performance of PCHR, its future priority areas and a detailed description of some of the key areas.

Mr. Omar Ayub said that he had written a letter to the Ministry of law regarding the implementation of "Freedom of Information Act". Once implemented, he said that it won't be difficult to make necessary amendments in the Act. Similarly, he informed the delegation about the work of PCHR regarding Consumer protection ordinance. Mr. Ayub further said that this forum is a potential one in that it has across the board representation and it has members from opposition as well as the treasury benches. Mr. Shahzad wasim added that PCHR has moved a resolution in the NA regarding the sale of human organs, calling it an abuse.

Mr. Gyan Singh spoke on the controversial Blasphemy laws in Pakistan and said that the minorities are not against the law itself but against the unbridled use of this law. It may well result in persecution of the innocent. Mr. Omar Ayub also took this point and said that this law might be use in an abusing way even by political opponents to settle some scores. So the need is to either abolish or amend this law. He said that in this regards, the President has promised to review all the laws framed after the constitution of 1973. Regarding Blasphemy laws, Senator Shahzad Wasim said that even in the times of the Holy Prophet, people used to abuse him, yet he never punished anyone.

Mr. Lindsay meanwhile asked a variety of questions on different issues and Mr. Omar replied most of the questions to the satisfaction of the delegation. Mr. Lindsay asked

about the status of minorities and especially the Ahmadis in Pakistan. to this question, Mr. Ayub replied that it all started in the era of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto who turned them into a minority but it is not a strange thing as all over the world (even in Saudi Arabia), they are considered as Minorities. Mr. Michael said that it is encouraging that in the last couple of years (particularly after 9/11), there hasn't been any case of an attack on Ahmadis in the whole Muslim world, let alone Pakistan. Riaz Fatyana said that I met with the 'Khalifa' of Ahmadis when I was in England and I have assured him on PCHR's support to Ahmadis living in Pakistan.

The role of opposition in the parliamentary business also came under discussion and Ms. Kashmala really criticised their negative role. She particularly lashed on MMAs dual role. However, Omar Ayub said that the NA session will resume after the Eid and then it will be clear if the opposition plays its due role or not. But he said that issues will be brought up in the parliament for discussion. He continued that first simple and little complex issues will be taken up and then the business of the assembly will be canalized to more complex issues.

Ms. Kashmala said that the membership of PCHR is on the increase with each passing day. She said that Dr. Atya Inayat Ullah (a renowned women activist & Parliamentarian) will be joining PCHR soon. She said that the opposition has formed a bill which they will be moving into the national assembly as soon as the national assembly resumes its business after the Eid. She called upon members of PCHR to make a specific bill unlike the opposition whose bill includes every issue under the sun.

Mr. Lindsay asked about the repeal of Hudood Ordinances, to which Omar Ayub replied that it is not likely to be carried out in the near future. However, a lot of amendments are in the pipeline which will decrease the intensiveness of the ordinances. As already mentioned, the President has promised not to repeal any Islamic law but all would be scrutinized minutely. Mr. Omar Ayub said that all of NGOs and civil society organizations are working for different laws to be amended and PCHR can provide the necessary lead for their works.

To an interesting question by Mr. Lindsey regarding the non-legislation for different issues and the wrong use of power by officials, Mr. Ayub said that yes there has been instances of wrong use of power by state officials even where there is a legislative cover. Yet, PCHR is interested in legislation regarding various issues so that once all the necessary spade work is over; we can then see the proper implementation phase.

Ms. Kashmala Tariq also brought the issue of 'Kachi Abadis' or slums adjacent to various metropolitan centers to the core of discussion. It was decided to talk on the issue later on in the executive council's meetings.

Mr. Fatyana turned the discussion to a very crucial issue faced by Pakistan these days

i.e., the issue of Pakistan's reentry to the Commonwealth. Mr. Lindsay said that we would very much like to have Pakistan in the Commonwealth but there is a criterion. 'I personally think that Pakistan has achieved most of what is required, if not all, to stage a come back in the common wealth, yet there is need for more work'. This issue was hotly debated and the institution of democracy, being the foremost condition for the reentry, was discussed in detail. Mr. Ayub, Senator Shahzad and Ms. Kashmala were of the view that if Pakistan has not a 100 percent democracy, nevertheless, it is nearer to that mark. Mr. Ayub said that there can't be an ideal democracy in any country of the world. However, Mr. Fatyana was of the view that we don't have a good democratic conditions at present, but most importantly things are moving in the right direction. He said that people are suffering from Pakistan's non entry into the commonwealth and there is no harm for the government. So Pakistan should be allowed back into the commonwealth for the betterment of lives of common citizenry of Pakistan.

Another important discussion was on the case of Mr. Javed Hashmi. Members of PCHR assured the delegation that he has been arrested just because he has done wrong to the state of Pakistan. He leveled serious allegations against one of the state's organ which is as important and prestigious as judiciary, parliament and executive. In this regard Senator Shahzad Wasim said that there is a marked difference between something said against the government and something said against the 'State', and Javed Hashmi has uttered disgrace against the state and he has to bear the suffering for it. Mr. Riaz Fatyana said that we are working for his earlier release from the Jail. Mr. Omar Ayub said that it is disappointing to pick up an individual case and to say that Pakistan can't be a member of Commonwealth just because there is not freedom of expression here.

The issue of Okara farms was also brought into the discussion and Mr. Fatyana briefed about the whole issue and said that it was due to PCHR's efficient role that the issue has now been settled once and for all. The delegation appreciated PCHR's efforts in that regard.

In the end Mr. Lindsay and Michael thanked PCHR members for such a detailed meeting. Mr. Lindsay termed the meeting as very informative and fruitful. Mr. Fatyana thanked the delegation and promised to act on various issues brought under discussion.

Later on Mr. Lindsay and Mr. Michael examined various sections of PCHR and appreciated the work and set up of the organization.

