



## PRESS RELEASE

PAKISTAN AFGHANISTAN JOINT CHAMBER OF COMMERCE & INDUSTRY

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### **H.E. Asad Qaiser, Speaker National Assembly includes PAJCCI in Pakistan Afghanistan Parliamentary Group**

While chairing the PAJCCI's 8<sup>th</sup> focus group discussion at Islamabad today, honorable Speaker National Assembly, Asad Qaiser lauded PAJCCI's initiatives to strengthen economic ties between the two brotherly countries. He stated that the revival of trade, economic integration and people-to-people contact with Afghanistan will result in progress and development of both countries leading to regional prosperity. He remarked to consider him as PAJCCI member who will jointly raise the voice of the business community at all levels. He sought name of PAJCCI members to be included in Parliamentary group to ensure PAJCCI and Parliament works together for the attainment of the same vision to establish mutually beneficial socio-economic relationship. He further sought PAJCCI to submit draft proposal for resolution of standing issues at the earliest so that an action report may be deliberated with the Prime Minister Pakistan.

"It is a great honor to have Speaker National Assembly of Pakistan, honorable Asad Qaiser on board and I believe that it projects the interest of GoP to help and resolve issues pertinent to Pak-Afghan Bilateral and Transit Trade", said President PAJCCI, Jawed Bilwani. He also lauded the support of Government departments engaged in rigorous discussions with PAJCCI and facilitated resolution of several issues tabled during the interactions promptly.

Chairman PAJCCI, Zubair Motiwala provided overview of PAJCCI initiatives, current situation of trade with Afghanistan, issues and difficulties faced by business community on both sides, support of both governments since change of Afghan regime, efforts of Pak Afghan Parliamentary Friendship Group, personal interest and efforts of honorable Speaker National Assembly to establish and sustain government to government relationship, vision and support of H.E. Prime Minister of Pakistan in extending all support to Afghanistan. Deliberating issues at borders, he said that the undue charges at borders by corrupt Law Enforcement Agencies are increasing the cost of doing business and impacting trust. He urged the Government of Afghanistan to give preferential treatment to Pakistani business in the same way as the Government of Pakistan has abolished sales tax on Afghanistan exports of fresh fruits and vegetables. He reiterated that if both Governments will support PAJCCI then it will ensure the raising of trade volume to \$2bn in

short span of time. He requested Afghanistan to ensure safe passage for Pakistan's trade to CIS countries and transit of liquid gas to Pakistan.

Khan Jan Alokozai, Co-Chairman PAJCCI who led the Afghan business delegation and has been instrumental in opening the dialogue with current Afghan Government to address the issues faced by business community of both sides, thanked the forum and extended special thanks to Prime Minister of Pakistan, Speaker National Assembly of Pakistan, Pak-Afghan Parliamentary Friendship Group, Member Customs for their presence and support extended to PAJCCI for getting the issues resolved. He informed the forum that Afghan Foreign Minister along with high powered delegation is arriving today to initiate discussions and negotiations with the Government of Pakistan with the sole objective of sustainable and trustworthy long term relationship between two countries. He urged both the Governments to finalize APTTA and PTA by engaging PAJCCI as the body representing all sectors of trade and transit. He specifically mentioned that Pakistan is the only neighboring country who stood by Afghanistan in this difficult time. Pakistan not only kept border open with Afghanistan, but provided maximum support in humanitarian matters like food and health care, abolishment of sales tax on fresh fruits and vegetables. He emphasized that the new government understands that strong Afghan Economy is the road to peace and success, hence are more responsive to the voice of business community and give credence to trade with Pakistan.

Ms. Shandana Gulzar Khan, MNA & active member of Pak Afghan Parliamentary group commented that "both countries have one challenge; Poverty. This can only be addressed by trade and strong economy". She requested assistance of PAJCCI to bring forward insights and proposals to remove trade and non-trade barriers between two countries, and showed intent to work with PAJCCI as a team for the common goal. She assured that the Government is considering opening up of all borders of Baluchistan with Afghanistan and responded that GoP is ready to provide transportation to India's offer of Wheat via Wagha border, as this is the dire need of our Afghan brothers.

The forum was updated that Afghanistan is now on the Business Visa list and Afghan investors will also get citizenship on certain percentage/amount of investment similar to what other countries are offered along with facility to open bank accounts in Pakistan. APTTA will be extended for 6 more months till new agreements are finalized, border capacity increase is no issue on the Pakistan side however Afghan side has to reciprocate the same arrangements. The ban on poultry export to Afghanistan has been lifted, whereas PTA has been instructed and has approved issuance of SIM cards to Afghan businessmen in Pakistan.

Junaid Makda; Director PAJCCI shed light on issues faced by NLC in terms of their charges and lack of facilitation, lack of timely response by Ministry of Commerce and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, undue detention and demurrage charges due to no regulation on shipping companies, discriminatory attitude by Department of Plant and Protection and sought support from Parliamentary group in facilitating for the same. However, he also urged Alokozai to represent issue of Pakistan side to their new Government for their resolution for the mutual economic prosperity.

Secretary General PAJCCI, Faiza, shared the quarterly progress report of PAJCCI in bringing genuine issues to light and facilitate solutions, coordination and communication with government institutions, Parliamentary group and related forums. She informed the house that PAJCCI has conducted 15 meetings so far and has been instrumental in developing Government to Government relationship. She also informed forum of upcoming meetings to be held at newly opened border crossings for bringing their issues to the table for deliberation and resolution.

Participants lauded the GoP announcement of forming a special fund for Afghanistan and hoped that if such meetings are taken seriously, the majority of the issues may be resolved immediately.

The forum was attended by businessmen from both the sides, members of Parliament, Government functionaries, representatives of different Chambers across the country, members of think-tanks and media.

