

## Press Release

### CPDI-Pakistan Demands Transparency in the Functioning of Parliamentary Committees

Islamabad, January 7, 2006: Centre for Peace and Development Initiatives, Pakistan (CPDI-Pakistan) has demanded all the chairs and members of parliamentary committees to implement completely transparent procedures in the course of considering legislative bills and exercising parliamentary oversight on government departments. The parliamentary committees must ensure that all information about their meetings, proceedings, initiatives and recommendations is easily accessible to all citizens of Pakistan. It may be noted that, barring a few notable exceptions (e.g. Senate Committee on Human rights), most committees currently hold their meetings in camera and treat minutes of committee meetings as confidential, which is inexcusable, undemocratic and unacceptable.

Transparency in the committees would significantly improve the credibility and effectiveness of parliamentary institutions, and would positively contribute to the efforts towards good governance and democratic development. By themselves implementing transparent procedures, the parliamentary committees would set a very good example and, hence, would achieve the moral standing and credibility that is required to work for greater transparency in government departments. At present, most government departments operate in a deeply embedded culture of secrecy and suffer from the widely recognized problem of inefficient and corrupt practices. It may be noted that appropriate implementation of citizens' right to information is universally recognized as an effective anti-corruption tool.

Specifically, it is demanded that the parliamentary committees must (1) announce and publicize the agenda and schedule of their meetings in advance; (2) publicize the bills that are under-consideration for feedback from stakeholders; (3) hold their meetings in open - allowing presence of journalists and members of general public to watch committee proceedings; (4) organize public hearings on critical issues and problems concerning respective ministries/ departments; and (5) publish all information about agenda, schedule of meetings, minutes of meetings and recommendations on the website. The committees must not treat any discussion, proceeding or information as exclusive or confidential, until and unless there is a very good justification for doing so in exceptional circumstances. Such justifications, however, must be recorded in writing, and published on the websites of the National Assembly or Senate.

CPDI-Pakistan also demands the secretariats of National Assembly and Senate to recognize the importance of citizens' right to information and ensure that all parliamentary records are easily and promptly accessible. Parliamentary proceedings must be published as soon as possible. It must also be ensured that most parliamentary information and records are available on websites, which currently exist but hardly provide any useful information. Parliamentary secretariats must be the last places and institutions to be operating in an environment of secrecy.

Yours sincerely,

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