

# **Pakistani American Congress: An Introduction**

**Dr. Riaz Ahmad (President 1999-2001)**

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The need for an umbrella organization for numerous Pakistani organizations in the United States was felt for years to coordinate their efforts in helping the cause of the Pakistan and safeguard the civil rights of the Pakistani Americans. Peace meal, fragmented efforts in the socio-political arena had existed at the local levels for decades in America, but whenever a nationwide campaign was needed, we were not up to the task. In order to enhance our social functioning as community, I proposed the creation of this organization first time in the trustee meeting of the Pakistani American Foundation in Washington D.C. in 1990.

Several organizations around the country were contacted and 22 representatives showed up for the first meeting in Washington D.C. in July of the same year. Our second meeting took place in the Villanova University, Pennsylvania, under the chairmanship of Dr. Hafeez Malik, a renowned scholar of Pakistan. There the constitution of the organization was written and the Pakistani American Congress came into existence with its organizational structure leading to our first convention in Chicago hosted by Indus Society in March 1991.

Since Dr. Hafeez Malik and myself had played a leading role in starting the organization, we both declined to become the president of the PAC at that time, but agreed to serve on the board. Dr. Sakhawat Hussain of Chicago was elected the first president who served exceptionally well until 1994. Dr. Zaheer Chaudhry of Philadelphia served for the next two years as its president.

It was Dr. Zaheer's congressman, Mr. Curt Weldon who proposed to hold an annual dinner at the Capitol Hill in Washington with the friends of Pakistan in the US Congress. This dinner has been regularly held for the last seven years. At these dinners, the PAC invited one important political figure from Pakistan every year. Notable amongst those were Sardar Qayum Khan, former Chief minister of Azad Kashmir and some ministers and senators from the Pakistan's National Assembly. This gave the Pakistani leaders a firsthand exposure to the legislature of the United States and the Pakistani American Congress.

Dr. Zia Ur Rehman Khan of Ohio was the next president of PAC who initiated the PAC's contacts with different think tanks, the State Department and held two seminars at the Columbia University. One of these seminars had the Ambassador of Pakistan and the Deputy Ambassador of India speak from the same podium which indeed was a rare site.

PAC also co-sponsored an outstanding seminar in October 1997 at Villanova University celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Pakistan. Five prominent individuals were invited from Pakistan to participate in this seminar. From the United States there were representatives of the State Department, Pentagon (including General Zinni) and different scholarly institutes and universities in the United States. Several scholars of Pakistani origin and American scholars on Pakistan especially the trustees of the American Institute of Pakistan Studies participated in this seminar. The papers read in this seminar were of very high caliber and were printed into a book form.

PAC and PAK-PAC co-hosted a reception for the Prime Minister of Pakistan in December 1998. Similarly, a joint function of these two organizations took place at the Association of Pakistani Physicians of North America's (APPNA) conference in July 1999, in which Lord Nazir of UK was the chief guest.

### **Mission Statement:**

To function at the national level to promote and protect the civil rights and social, economic, educational cultural and ethnic interests of the people of Pakistani origin residing in the United States. To promote and foster the development of local and regional Pakistani organizations, to provide assistance and guidance for this purpose and to represent such organizations

There are forty-four Pakistani organizations in nineteen states that are members of the Pakistani American Congress. This number is steadily increasing as people come to know about PAC. All these organizations are represented by up to three members in the congress who elect the national board and the office bearers for two years. Any Pakistani organization that wishes to join PAC can simply write to us at

**29482 W. 10 Mile Road, Farmington Hills, MI - 48336 or send us a fax at 248-474-3280**

### **Area of specialization and some achievements:**

Presently, PAC focuses on the political action in the United States to help Pakistan and Pakistani Americans living here. For example in 1991 and 1991, PAC helped pass two resolutions in the House of representatives in Washington condemning the atrocities committed against the Kashmiri civilian population by the Indian Armed forces. At that time, PAC helped publish a book called "*Kashmir - From Happy Valley to Valley of Death*" by Dr. William Baker. Perhaps PAC's greatest achievement was to prevent the anti-Pakistan forces to get Pakistan declared a terrorist state seven years ago in the USA during Dr. Sakhawat's presidency.

PAC has embarked on developing a dialogue with different social and cultural organizations and Think Tanks in Pakistan and USA in order to learn and contribute positively in fair and equitable policy developments in both countries. Another project to be started is dependant on finding Pakistanis who could help Pakistan in various professions by providing their services and advice on national projects which might enable Pakistan to open up her century old bureaucracy to modern specialization era.

A culture of hope and self-reliance has to develop from within Pakistan especially through the private sector. However, the overseas Pakistani should develop a mechanism to have their input in the various area of their professional expertise. Involvement of overseas Pakistanis in the area of technical education, economic development and environment uplift of Pakistan can be a great source of hope and encouragement for the people of Pakistan.

We need to have a more effective influence on the American news media by promoting our own writers and friends of Pakistan. Youth groups of Pakistani origin must be helped to organize on different university campuses to prepare themselves for future leadership position of some of our major organizations. Our common denominator, Love for Pakistan, must translate it self into practical projects to make a positive difference in the lives of the wonderful people of Pakistan.