



P.O Box 2875  
Islamabad 44000  
Pakistan  
Tel: 051-2609430-33  
Fax: 051-2854357  
Email: [info@ndi.org](mailto:info@ndi.org)  
Website: [www.ndi.org](http://www.ndi.org)

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## **Party Youth Seek to Strengthen Democracy with Fresh Ideas and Modern Skills**

Islamabad: Around 40 activists from the youth wings of eight major political parties called for the support of their leaders to inject fresh ideas and political skills as a way to build and modernize their party and strengthen democracy in Pakistan.

Participating in a two-day moot to review the role of youth in political parties convened by the National Democratic Institute, the young activists stressed the dynamic role they can play to strengthen democracy in the current democratic transition adding that the support of their leaders to strengthen party youth wings is crucial.

The meeting included youth wing activists from Pakistan Peoples Party, Pakistan Muslim League-N, Pakistan Muslim League-Q, Awami National Party, Muttahida Quami Movement, Jamiat Ulema Islam (F), National Party and Pakhtunkhaw Milli Awami Party. All were former participants in a year-long NDI program which provided opportunities to learn and put in practice new political techniques such as using databases for membership tracking and recruitment, developing websites and newsletters for internal communication, organizing issue-based events and utilizing media outreach to promote their message.

The young leaders recounted the use of their new skills in the recent election including voter registration campaigns to sign up young supporters, going door to door and organizing rallies to build support for their candidates, and getting out the vote on election day. Four of the youth wing participants were elected to their respective provincial assemblies while two of them also chair parliamentary committees.

While the young leaders were optimistic about Pakistan's transition to democratic rule they also raised concerns about the barriers they face to play a more active role in their party despite their energy, proven skills and many successes over the past year. They called on their party leadership to give a voice to youth in party structures and to ensure party youth wings are encouraged within the party to play an active role.

Breaking down these barriers, they agreed, will provide youth with an opportunity to serve as a catalyst for democratic change, peace, tolerance and harmony through political activism which, they believe, is the right way to use their potential in a positive manner.

NDI Program Manager Brian Vogt did a presentation at the session on the important role youth played in the recent election of Barack Obama as President of the U.S. Mr. Vogt described how the Obama campaign targeted the youth vote and created ways for youth to use the internet to reach out to hundreds of thousands of young voters, in addition to creating an army of young volunteers across the country that knocked on doors to build support for his campaign.

Dr. Samina Ahmed, South Asia Project Director of the International Crisis Group (ICG) spoke to the young leaders about the challenges to Pakistan's transition to democratic rule and the importance of strengthening political parties as key institutions in a democratic society.

NDI Country Director Sheila Fruman lauded their commitment and encouraged them to remain active in their parties as a way to build a democratic society. She urged the activists to continue to use the skills they learned in the program to strengthen their youth wings and stated that NDI will continue to support youth participation in political parties through a new three-year program.

The participants also visited the National Assembly and the Senate where they observed proceedings of both Houses in session.

NDI is a non-profit non-partisan NGO working to strengthen and expand democracy by providing practical assistance to civic and political leaders advancing democratic values, practices and institutions.

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For information contact:  
Niaz Ahmed  
Cell: 0300-8523060