

The British parliamentary delegation also visited a refugee camp in Muzaffarabad, where some families have been living for ten years in appalling conditions. Patsy Calton MP said: "It was deeply moving to hear the plight of so many ordinary Kashmiri families in this camp. Although the children were well fed and the camp well run, the desperation of their parents for a better life raises questions that we in the UK must address."

"We saw two men in the camp with their feet missing. They said Indian soldiers had cut them off as a demonstration to the rest of their villages not to back independence for Kashmir. I saw no reason to disbelieve them."

Cllr Ben Jephcott worked with Liz Lynne MEP in drafting changes to the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy to promote EU or UN participation as an 'honest broker' in trying to kickstart a peace process. He said: "Pakistan under President Musharraf is making giant strides to return to democracy, with a whole generation of new members of the National Assembly recently elected. The government has also taken huge risks in rounding up vast numbers of Al Qaeda sponsored militants coming out of Afghanistan."

Liz Lynne MEP, president of the LDFK grouping was unable to go on the visit after suffering a deep vein thrombosis caused by air travel. She said: "I am delighted that the Liberal Democrats were welcomed in Pakistan and Kashmir. It is clear that a broad based process of dialogue is the only way to reach a just and peaceful settlement in the region, where the consequences of a nuclear war just do not bear thinking about. With 700,000 British citizens having family links to Kashmir, this crisis must be higher on the agenda of both the UK government and I would hope the EU."

Dr Tonge added, "As Liberal Democrats, perhaps one of the most impressive people we met was the Pakistan minister of education Zobia Jalal. A woman from tribal Baluchistan, she told us how she has just seen through a 450% increase in education budget funding with the way clear for free schooling with compulsory attendance for all Pakistani children up to 16. The policy also includes the mainstreaming of the unofficial religious schools. This is very good news for the future development of the country."

Qassim Afzal added: "I have formally written to the Indian High Commission in London, as agreed that the next step is to visit the Indian side and explore their perspective in detail and with an open mind. There are sections of opinion in India which are not happy with the way sabre rattling over Kashmir seems to have become a feature of the political landscape. But we recognise the impact and threat perception that terrorist attacks have caused."

Qassim also said "that I am committed in working towards a peaceful and amicable strategy, in which all sides will be content,

