

ISLAMABAD - The US-Pakistan Women's Council in collaboration with Islamabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry and US Embassy organised a symposium at ICCI to discuss business opportunities for women entrepreneurs in textile and fashion sector which was attended by women entrepreneurs from around the country.

Addressing the symposium, Ms. Sarah Peck, Executive Director, US-Pakistan Women's Council, who came straightaway from Washington, said that US-Pakistan Women's Council was launched in September 2012 by USA to promote economic opportunities for women in Pakistan. We are working in collaboration with Pakistani and US businesses, universities and institutions to link resources and financial support initiatives aimed at helping women entrepreneurs in Pakistan. If we can help women entrepreneurs succeed, we believe the future of Pakistan will be brighter she added.

In his welcome address, Zafar Bakhtawari, President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry appreciated the efforts of US-Pakistan Women's Council for promoting women empowerment in Pakistan and hoped that the event would be very beneficial experience to the participants.

He said textile sector is Pakistan's largest exporter and offers plenty of opportunities in textile and fashion designing for women designers and entrepreneurs. He said women are 51 percent of the Pakistan's population and government should come up with better policies for encouraging and facilitating women to opt for entrepreneurship and contribute more effectively to the economic development of the country. He assured that ICCI would continue to collaborate in all initiatives aimed at youth development and women empowerment. He stressed that US should include Pakistani products made by women entrepreneurs in its GSP scheme which will help them to grow their businesses.

Iftikhar Ali Malik, Vice President SAARC Chamber of Commerce & Industry highlighted the importance of women empowerment and said that SCCI has also taken initiatives to encourage women in the mainstream of business. He said USA should fulfil its pledge of constructing ROZs in Pakistan to give boost to industrial activities.

Speakers at the symposium included several established women entrepreneurs who described how they used market research to develop successful products. Saulat Salahuddin successfully tapped international market. Mehnaz Khan created a business that partnered with the Serena Hotel to sell some of the best work of Pakistan's artisans. Mahbina Waheed sells a successful line of house wares. Aasia Saail Khan developed a contemporary line of garments for women and Shannon Grewer is developing a company that will source materials from Pakistan for products for the US market. Saba also shared her efforts through Skype for women entrepreneurs in Pakistan.

Speakers also described the resources available to women entrepreneurs including a USAID official who talked about USAID programmes and grants and the services of Smeda. Banking officials Ghalib Nishtar from Khushali Bank and Mian Unwarud Din from UBL Bank helped the entrepreneurs understand the forms of financing available.

Ms. Nafeesa Inayat Khattak and Ms. Sajida Zulfiqar MNAs, Rehmatullah Javed Regional Director Pak-USA Business Council and many other business leaders were also present at the occasion. Panel discussions and questions/answer sessions were also held.

Courtesy: Nation