Pakistan: US to Speed Up Visa Processing

Visa processing will speed up as the US moves to accelerate issuance of visas to Pakistanis outside the United States, Secretary of State John Kerry said on Monday.

"Our goal is speeding up processing, so that people can have their applications reviewed more quickly," Kerry said in a phone call with Prime Minister Raja Pervez Ashraf.

"We will continue to work very closely with you and your team, as we have in the past, to ensure that the visa process is fair, transparent, and efficient," he added.

Kerry also said the US will support Pakistan in its efforts to combat terrorism and extremism.

The call came as the US and Pakistan are working to improve relations following a series of disputes over issues including drone strikes, human rights, and the closure of the US consulate in Peshawar.

Kerry said the US is committed to continuing its engagement with Pakistan on issues of mutual interest.

"We believe that working together will lead to greater stability and prosperity for both our countries and the region," he said.

The call also came as the US is considering whether to grant Pakistan a waiver from sanctions under the Iran Non-Proliferation Act.

US officials have said they are reviewing the request from Pakistan, which seeks a waiver to allow it to purchase uranium enrichment equipment from France.

The waiver would allow Pakistan to continue its efforts to develop a civilian nuclear program, which has been suspended since 2009 due to concerns about its military applications.

Pakistan has been a key ally of the US in the war on terror, providing support to the US military in Afghanistan.

However, relations between the two countries have been strained in recent years due to a series of disputes.

The US has accused Pakistan of providing sanctuary to Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters, while Pakistan has accused the US of targeting its military and civilian leaders.

The US has also criticized Pakistan for not doing enough to fight terrorism in its own territory.

Kerry said the US is committed to working with Pakistan to address these issues and strengthen security cooperation.

"We are working hard to build a more secure partnership with Pakistan, and we are committed to working closely with you to advance our shared goals," he said.

The call also came as the US is preparing to host a major conference on the Middle East, which will bring together leaders from around the world to discuss ways to achieve a peaceful solution to the conflict in the region.

Kerry said he expects the conference to be a "key opportunity" to address the issues facing the Middle East.

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