

## **Press Statement released on Islamabad / New Delhi: June 1, 2020**

### **Peace Activists on Both Sides of the Border Assert People-to-People Relationship, Condemn Siege of Jammu & Kashmir**

At a time when relationships between countries within South Asia and neighbours like China are at an impasse – with India's stand-off with China and Nepal when attempts of war cry are repeated to subvert the attention from burning people's issues, when hyperbolic nationalism and increased militarisation is employed to crush citizens' rights in Jammu & Kashmir, etc. Over a hundred senior journalists, activists, artists, former military personnel, academics, and common citizens met over a Zoom call on Saturday evening (May 30) asserting Guftagu Band Na Ho (interpretation used as 'conversations should not stop'/keeping conversations alive').

Pakistan India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy (PIPFPD), a twenty-six-year-old platform of citizens from both sides of the border demanding peace between the nations convened the event, which was marked by poetry, singing, sharing of political development in both countries and Kashmir, and expressions of hope and optimism. Members of many other peace groups including Aman Ki Asha, Agaz-e-Dosti, Aman Choupal, Indo-Pak Soldiers' Initiative, South Asia Free Media Association, South Asian for Human Rights, SANGAT South Asia, etc. participated in it.

Speakers reiterated that the relationship between India and Pakistan has been at an all-time low in the past few years, tremendously impacting the people-to-people relationship and holding entire South Asia to ransom. As neighbours, India and Pakistan do not have the choice to burn each other and continue to hurt, without hurting themselves. To the economy, society, and polity of both countries, which harbour many fundamentalist, religious, and conservative voices, it is important that governments and people must make sure to address core issues and bring about peace.

Nighat Syed Khan, Pakistani activist, and author, drawing attention to the state of affairs on both sides of the border said, "Military is not securing the border but ruling our lives". Looking back at Pakistan's history and currently the Indian state, she said "fascism in both countries is so internalized" that people started to take it as a new normal. It's a collusion of capital, military, and state, she asserted.

Echoing the same, PIPFPD founding member Tapan Bose said, "We need to be aware that there is an atmosphere of fascism that virtually permeates our society. What they are doing to the workers and students under the garb of lockdown shows what the state is. Criticizing the military for violations is being seen as anti-national now!"

What has been unfolding over the years in Kashmir with complete impunity to the military and human rights crushed under the might of the state was a point of conversation on the 300th day of the lockdown imposed in wake of the abrogation of Article 370.

Succinctly putting the situation in Kashmir, the editor of Kashmir Times, Anuradha Bhasin said, "The barbed wires have not been removed, militarisation has deepened. Two ways of controlling happening these days, one in the name of Kashmiri militarisation and one the new administrative measures." Older laws have been abrogated, new laws are yet to be implemented. In the middle of this, domicile and land laws have been changed meaning Indian capital and labour move into the valley, she added.

The meeting condemned the incarceration of the founding member of PIPFPD, Mr. Gautam Navlakha in the fabricated Bhima-Koregaon case and demanded the immediate release of all the political activists arrested under the Elgar Parishad / Bhima-Koregaon cases.

Key among the participants from both countries were: I. A Rahman, Syeda Hameed, Adm. Ramu Ramdas and Lalita, AH Nayyar, Munizae Jahangir, Salima Hashmi, Jatin Desai, Taimur Rahman, Rene Singh, Karamat Ali, Qasim Jafri, Beena Sarwar (USA), Devika Mittal, Mohd Tahseen, Swati Sharan (Canada), Sumit Chakravarty, Dinesh Mohan, Haroon Ahmed, Ashok Choudhary, Prafulla Samantara, Asha Hans, Rita Manchanda, Ravi Kumar Stephen, and several others. Sanna Irshad Mattoo and Anuradha Bhasin Jamwal spoke at the event from J&K, while participants from Indian-administered Kashmir included Khurram Parvez, Siddiq Wahid, Noor Ahmed baba, etc. The session was co-moderated by veteran feminist and peace activist from Pakistan, Ms. Anis Haroon, and Vijayan MJ of PIPFPD India.

#### About PIPFPD

PIPFPD is a 26-year-old membership-based platform with chapters in India and Pakistan and thousands of ordinary peace-loving people taking decisions about people-to-people relations and the future of India and Pakistan. PIPFPD has consistently tried to raise the concerns and issues of the people of the erstwhile unified territory of Jammu & Kashmir (now divided between India and Pakistan) and has unequivocally asserted that the people of the region should have absolute rights to their political aspirations. PIPFPD continues to run a campaign since the abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A of the Indian-Administered Jammu & Kashmir region, wherein the Government of India unilaterally withdrew the constitutional autonomy to the region.

PIPFPD has raised several issues within the Confidence Building Measures (CBM) mechanism, over the years, to make sure that the ordinary people, including border communities, etc do not suffer from the militaristic means applied by the governments. These include the demilitarisation of Siachen and J&K civilian areas, effective implementation and joint monitoring of the ceasefire (since 2008), consular access and timely release of prisoners, a no-arrest policy for fishworkers, effective monitoring and mutual respect in implementing the Indus Water Treaty (including Kishan Ganga concerns, etc.), re-opening of trade between each other and especially the border states, regional economic and trade co-operations and so on.

Mohd Tahseen, PIPFPD (Pakistan)

Email: tahseenstu@gmail.com / #+92 3008480821

Vjayan MJ, PIPFPD (India)

Email: pipfpd.india@gmail.com / #+91-9868165471

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