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### Press Release



The human rights violations in Indian Held Kashmir (IHK) remain invisible in the eyes of the world because of the Indian government's stubbornness to grant access to this region to neutral observers and the international media. Repressive legal frameworks such as the Jammu and Kashmir Public Safety Act and Armed Forces Special Power Act have made the Indian security forces, operating in the state of Jammu and Kashmir, virtually immune from prosecution for the hundreds of heinous acts committed against young men, women and children including kidnapping, torture, rape and molestation, while exercising their powers. Indian security forces have sweeping powers of arrest and detention, even shoot to kill with virtual immunity. Panellists shared that it is no surprise that the recent protests and dissent in New Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University are being put down violently in the state of India, reflective of the government's dictatorial nature. These views were expressed at the one-day national conference titled "HR

Violations in IHK: Awakening Global Conscience” organised by the Islamabad Policy Research Institute, here in the capital today.

Former Ambassador Sohail Amin, President IPRI, in his address highlighted the atrocities and human rights violations being perpetrated by the Indian Security Forces in IHK and to bring those to the attention of the international community so that they could join hands with innocent Kashmiris in IHK whose rights were being violated unabashedly.

The Conference included distinguished speakers like Dr. Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema, Dean Faculty of Contemporary Studies, National Defence University (NDU); Shamsa Nawaz, Research Fellow, Institute of Strategic Studies (ISSI), Dr. Muhammad Khan, HoD, Department of International Relations, NDU and the special guest, Farzana Yaqoob, Minister for Social Welfare and Women Development, Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK) who discussed state terrorism in IHK and suggested various approaches to stir the global conscience. The Conference was chaired by former Ambassador Ali Sarwar Naqvi, Executive Director, Center for International Strategic Studies (CISS). In his opening remarks, he said that muted action of the world’s major powers, the United Nations, regional organizations and other countries to outrightly condemn the HR violations have only encouraged India and its security forces to continue their blatant acts of aggression in Kashmir. With more than 7,038 custodial deaths, 107,545 children orphaned and 22,806 women widowed, the world’s silence is unconscionable. Pakistan should not compromise its stand on Kashmir issue, he concluded.

Discussing the historical and cultural roots of the Kashmir issue, Dr. Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema held that Kashmir is the ‘unfinished agenda of Partition’ which the Indian government has been successfully and covertly manipulating by creating strong pro-India lobbies, especially in Washington. The Indian government is violating its own Constitution by not holding plebiscite in Kashmir, he stressed.

Ms Shamsa Nawaz, Research Fellow, Institute of Strategic Studies (ISSI) also spoke on the nearly non-existent world response to HR violations in IHK. She emphasized that INGOs and NGOs should play a vital role in holding the Indian state accountable for its appalling and unchecked human rights violations characterized by arbitrary arrests, killings, disappearances and electrocutions. Rape is being used as tool for war to suppress and demoralize families.

Dr Muhammad Khan highlighted how the Indian state has been engaging in systematically eroding the Kashmiri identity through demographic changes, allocating large areas of land to Hindu Pundits and dividing the people along communal and ethnic lines. He emphasized how it was critical to focus on the humanitarian aspect of Kashmir, rather than its political or religious dimensions. He recommended special Kashmir cells should work in key Pakistani missions and that Political leadership of Pakistan and Kashmir should visit major capital cities for creating awareness on HR violations among global leadership. Silence over Indian human rights violation could endanger world peace - in the context of nuclearization of the region, he warned.

Farzana Yaqoob, Minister for Social Welfare and Women's Development in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) said that Kashmiris will continue to struggle for their right of self-determination and raise the issue of human rights' violations by the so-called largest democracy of the world and what its troops are doing in Indian Held Kashmir under the cover of Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) which is a licence given by New Delhi to its troops to kill anyone in Indian Kashmir. The draconian AFSPA is being used to crush the freedom activists in Indian Kashmir particularly women, she said.

While the Kashmiri diaspora has been active in the UK and the European Union highlighting the violations of human's rights by the Indian security forces in Indian Held Kashmir, a lot more needs to be done. The panellists also called on both national and international media to give more than mere ritualistic attention and coverage to this issue. In the age of social media, young people from Pakistan and Kashmir can play a vital role in bringing the plight of Kashmiris to the forefront.

The participants of the Conference were unanimous in asserting that the international community, in particular, the Western world needs to impress upon India to withdraw its troops from Kashmir, and bring an end to the ongoing state violence. Lastly, there should be no room for a human rights violator to attain the coveted status of a Security Council member.