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Report - Public Talk

“Human Rights Violations in IOK”

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Pictures of the Event





The Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad organized a Public Talk on September 3, 2018 on *Human Rights Violations in IOK*. Former Australian Senator Lee Rhiannon was the guest speaker at the occasion.

Welcoming the guests, Director General ISSI, Ambassador (Retd) Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry said that for any democratic society, human rights is a cross-cutting theme - be it political rights, civil rights, women rights or children's rights. Since Pakistan now has a third democratically elected government, the importance of human rights has grown and there is much more conscience on the issue. The Europeans have struggled to uphold human rights. The French Revolution on one hand showed that principle of freedom and liberty are important, but it also showed how difficult it is to uphold these principles. The American nation too has impounded on these principles. The European experience of war and conflict led it to take the right conclusion that human dignity is at the centre of all human endeavor. The United Nations (UN) was a culmination of that struggle. Very few people know that while the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted in 1948, several centuries ago the last sermon of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) also focused on human rights and therefore, for Pakistan, human rights are important not only politically, but by virtue of faith as well. This is precisely the reason Pakistan is signatory to a number of instruments of International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and others. Speaking on the situation in Indian occupied Kashmir, Ambassador (Retd) Chaudhry highlighted the recently released UN report, and said that finally the conscience of the world is waking up to this issue. A number of measures have been suggested in the report to which the Indian government's response has been extremely negative and hostile.

Speaking at the occasion, Senator Lee Rhiannon said that her visit to this part of the world has been extremely useful as it further strengthened her commitment to work with Kashmiris. A strong and united global voice in support of Kashmiris is a need of time. She lamented the fact that most people do not even know about the issue of Kashmir. Unfortunately, Indian narrative on the issue dominates. Though, with the release of UN report, that narrative is now unfolding. She expressed her resolve to further work towards changing that narrative. She also expressed her determination to talk to Kashmiri and Pakistani community in Australia. She said that there are many possibilities like picking up the recommendations of the UN report, particularly regarding the establishment of a commission of inquiry. Pakistan has accepted this report,

whereas the Indian government has rejected it. Senator Lee resolved to work with Australian Parliamentarians, particularly those who would be sympathetic to this issue including members of academia and Progressive Movement.

She admitted the fact that India being a growing economy and an economic partner of Australia is heard more. She also highlighted the fact that Australia is connected to this region through the Indian Ocean. Whatever goes on in the Indian Ocean has a direct bearing on Australia. This is why it is extremely important that nothing goes wrong between India and Pakistan, as both the countries are nuclear powers. She once again assured that she would initiate talks with community partners and show them pictures that were collected during her visit to Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK).

Senator Rhiannon's talk was followed by a question and answer session.

Responding to a question on what is it that would change the Indian mind, Senator Rhiannon explained that most Indians do not understand the issue of Kashmir in its true context. They think that Pakistan sends militants and they make this an excuse. She said that it is the world opinion that will change the Indian attitude. If world opinion turns in support of the Kashmir issue, it would in turn, put pressure on India.

Director General ISSI Ambassador (Retd) Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry commented that India puts the blame of infiltration on Pakistan. But historically, it is clear that there have been indigenous uprisings in Kashmir. People of Pakistan and Kashmir have remained connected for centuries. Whenever Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK) goes through pain, it affects Pakistan.

Another guest drew attention towards the demographic changes that are currently being carried out deliberately by the Indian government in the background of approaching elections in 2019. The guest also asked Senator Rhiannon whether she had visited Indian Occupied Kashmir and whether during her visit to Azad Jammu and Kashmir she met with any NGO people.

Senator Rhiannon replied that she had not visited IOK and she is very much conscience of this fact. She also admitted that during her visit to AJK, she did not get a chance to meet people from the NGO sector. However, she informed the audience that her visit to AJK was extremely useful as through her visit to refugee camps she was able to gather firsthand knowledge of the subject.

On the issue of demographic change, Senator Rhiannon admitted that it is a very serious issue. There has been constant drop in the ballots between Muslims and Hindus. She also drew a parallel between Israel establishing settlements in Palestinian land and Indian efforts to bring about demographic changes in IOK.

The Director General ISSI commented that Kashmir is not a real estate problem, and it was precisely on this understanding that Pakistan had suggested a number of Kashmir-specific Confidence Building Measures (CBMs). Number of crossing points were opened, a bus service and trade was also initiated across the LoC. Currently, he said, there are also efforts by India to annul Article 35 (A) of the constitution which bars people from outside the state from acquiring immovable property in IOK. This is being done to pave way for more outsiders to settle in the state of Kashmir.

A question was put to Senator Rhiannon whether Australia would raise the issue of human rights with India in its bilateral dialogue as it does with China. The Senator appreciated this question and said that on her return, she would definitely try to find out about it.

Concluding the talk, Chairman Board of Governors, ISSI, Ambassador (Retd) Khalid Mahmood said that among a number of human rights, the right to self-determination is the fundamental right. At the time of Partition, more than 542 Princely states were given choice to accede to either India or Pakistan. This was applied to all states except the state of Hyderabad, Junagadh and Kashmir. When this issue was tabled at the UN, the latter also talked about the right of self-determination under its auspices. Pakistan's relevance is also anchored in the UN resolutions. He said that Kashmiris suffered human rights violations even before partition and this got a whole new dimension after 1947. Unfortunately, this issue is not getting the kind of attention it deserves. It is largely due to short-sighted economic and political interests. People of Kashmir need support of the international community. The latest UN report has now changed things and this issue is gradually gaining attention. The report explains in detail the ongoing situation in IOK and the nature of draconian laws in that state. Most importantly, the report recognizes Kashmiri people's right to self-determination. India, as was expected has rejected this notion. He concluded his remarks by saying that it is very important for international community to support this cause, otherwise it will have serious ramifications for not only India and Pakistan, but for

regional stability as well. He thanked Senator Lee Rhiannon for taking deep interest in the issue, and the audience for their active participation in the event.