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*Report – In-House Meeting*

# **“Delegation of the European Parliamentarians”**

**July 30, 2019**



*Rapporteur: Majid Mahmood*

*Edited by: Najam Rafique*

## PICTURES OF THE EVENT



Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) hosted an In-House Meeting on July 30, 2019, with a delegation of prominent European Parliamentarians led by UK-based Jammu and Kashmir Self-Determination Movement International (JKSDMI). The delegation was headed by Mr. Richard Corbett MEP, Leader of the Labour Party in Europe. Other members of the delegation included: Irina Von Wiese MEP, Member of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Raja Najabat Hussain, Chairman Jammu & Kashmir Self-Determination Movement International (JKSDMI), Nazia Rehman MP, Cabinet Member for Finance, Sardar Sadique Khan, Lorraine Kirkwood, Assistant to Richard Corbett and Hussain Khan, Assistant to Irina Von Wiese.

Welcoming the delegation, Ambassador Khalid Mahmood, Chairman BOG ISSI said that the Kashmir dispute has three dimensions to it: political, legal and human rights. He went on to give a brief history of the dispute and said that the resolutions of the United Nations do not lapse with the passage of time. Hence, Indian argument that the resolutions are not valid now is misleading. He said that while the right of self-determination of Kashmiris is the fundamental issue, the human rights abuses and the draconian laws of the Indian security forces must not be ignored by the international community. He said that there are three ways for resolving the Kashmir dispute, one is through war, second through bilateral dialogue, and third through a third party intervention - the latter two have been staunchly refused by India.

Ambassador Mahmood said that Human Rights aspect of Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK) is more pressing as people there are undergoing a lot of repression. He mentioned a recent article in *Washington Post* describing IOK as a cage. Ambassador Mahmood apprised the EU delegation on the recent reports by UN Human Rights Commissioner, Amnesty International and a recent report in February 2019 on Torture by Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons and Jammu and Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society and said that these reports describe in detail about the nature of brutal Indian rule in Occupied Kashmir. He expressed his concerns that India has been planning for quite some time to change the demographics of Kashmir and ending the constitutional provision of special status of IOK by revoking article 35A and 370.

Ambassador Khalid was of the view that India needs to be pressurized by international community, as currently it is under no pressure. This pressure, he opined, could lead to resumption of talks between Pakistan and India on the Kashmir dispute. United Nations need to

be more proactive in this regard. He welcomed EU parliamentary delegation's active diplomacy and engagement, and expressed his belief that it is in India's own interest to solve the Kashmir dispute.

Mr. Richard Corbett thanked the ISSI for hosting them at such short notice. He also praised the Institute's extensive work in the field of strategic studies and analysis. Mr. Corbett was of the view that Kashmir is a stain on India and its aspired status, and that there is a sheer cost of maintaining security forces in Jammu and Kashmir region. Describing EU's efforts about persuading India to solve the Kashmir dispute, Mr. Corbett said that EU has a number of tools in this regard. Two most effective tools are targeted sanctions on security forces personnel's involved in human rights abuses and using trade relations as leverage. He said that EU can look into targeted sanctions on Indian army commanders if they are identified to signal India just like EU did with Russia.

Ms. Lorraine Kirkwood said that Kashmir has to be resolved due to the danger of larger conflict between India and Pakistan. She said that the 'Ireland Model' is something that was discussed in her meeting with Pakistan's Human Rights Minister. Ms. Lorraine was of the view that International Law is always on the opposing side and the UN resolutions are not having the desired impact. She said that many human rights violations are conducted by India in Jammu and Kashmir and their delegation is here to get feedback so that it can create awareness in EU parliament on their return. Ms. Lorraine said that the latest UN report on human rights in Kashmir has been noted in EU parliament. She praised Pakistan of revising its decision and giving unconditional access to journalists in Azad Jammu and Kashmir.

A number of issues came up in the interactive session. On Ambassador Khalid's query about the sort of action EU parliament may be seeking after these visits, Mr. Corbett said that it's still early to judge because EU parliament has had its recent elections and working committees are being formed. In answer to a question about using EU trade agreements as a leverage against India, Mr. Corbett said that EU has a history to use the trade trump card as has been the case with Bangladesh. But the problem with India is that EU has yet to conclude trade negotiations with India that have been going on for last nine years. EU will insert the clauses of human rights in trade agreement when it is finalized since India is a protectionist country and several such

barriers have already delayed EU-India trade agreement. Mr. Corbett also said that Indian officials have never entertained EU parliamentary delegations on Kashmir.

Ms. Lorraine Kirkwood asked whether it would be possible for South Asia to become one block on the lines of European Union because there is a vast potential for economic cooperation in this region. Ambassador Mahmood replied that we have the SAARC organization, but its impact is limited. He said that India is eager to talk about trade, tourism, cultural exchanges, people-to-people contacts but is not serious about fundamental disputes like Kashmir, Siachin, Sir Creek. So when there will be no progress on core issues, talks of trade and connectivity alone will not work.

Ms. Lorraine Kirkwood asked about the Chinese role in the Kashmir dispute given China's own record of human rights violation. Ambassador Mahmood said that China has a very positive image in Pakistan due to both historic reasons and recent increase in economic cooperation under CPEC. This positive image of China will be helpful for Pakistan in future, he argued.

A question was asked about the situation in Afghanistan and the prospects of a permanent settlement there. Ms Amina Khan, subject area expert from ISSI, replied that the recent developments on the negotiating front are positive and the chances of a deal are bright. But she also cautioned about the impact of spoilers that can disturb the process. She was of the view that US and Pakistan are now on the same page as it has been Pakistan's consistent position that Afghan conflict has no military solution but a political one. She warned that a new threat of ISIS is emerging that needs collective regional effort to deal with.