

Report

“In-House Meeting with a Seven-Member OIC Delegation”

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**THE INSTITUTE OF STRATEGIC STUDIES,
ISLAMABAD**

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The Institute of Strategic Studies held an in-house meeting with a seven-member delegation from the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). The delegation was lead by Ambassador Abdullah Alim, Assistant Secretary General, Political Affairs and Special Envoy for Jammu and Kashmir, The other members of the delegation included; Ambassador Ali Abolhassani, Director in the Department of Political Affairs, Mr. Khalid Bader, Professional Officer in the Department of Political Affairs, Mr. Othman Al-Amri, Administrative Member Staff in the Department of Political Affairs, Mr. Ibrahim Bin Abdulla Al-Khuzaim, Executive Director, Islamic Solidarity Fund, Dr. Abdul Aziz Hameed Al-Jubari, Expert at ISESCO Office in Sharjah and Mr. Nadzad Ajannovic, a representative from the Islamic Development Bank.

Besides the Director General, Dr Rasul Bakhsh Rais and research officers of ISS, the meeting was also attended by eminent Pakistani diplomats, Ambassador (Retd.) Ashraf Jehangir Qazi and Ambassador (Retd.) Asif Ezdi.

The Chairman ISS, Ambassador (Retd.) Khalid Mahmood welcomed the delegation. He appreciated the OIC's support for Pakistan and expressed his gratitude for the organization's support over the Kashmir issue and Pakistan's efforts to curb terrorism. The Director General, ISS, Dr. Rasul Bakhsh Rais said that it was indeed an honour and privilege to have the OIC delegation at the Institute and share views on issues of mutual interest. He also mentioned the fact that the ISS has completed forty years of its existence and said that it is a policy supporting institute involved in research and analysis of international issues.

Ambassador Abdullah Alim reaffirmed the resolve of the OIC for the resolution of the Kashmir dispute and pledged support for its lasting support. Ambassador Alim further stated that the OIC has formed a human rights commission to highlight the injustices being perpetrated in the Occupied Valley. He mentioned that the Organization was planning to organize a forum to highlight the Kashmir issue next year. He shared the experience of the delegation's trip to Muzaffarabad and their visit to the various refugee camps. The trip, he said, increased the Organization's urgency to do something tangible for the people of occupied Kashmir.

Mr. Nadzad Ajannovic, a representative of the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) gave a brief introduction about the bank and explained that IDB is a subsidiary of the OIC and assists poor countries in building medical facilities and schools. He further said that after seeing the situation in Kashmir, they have realized that a lot needs to be done in areas of education and health, as well as setting up of vocational centers in order to train people so that they get jobs.

Mr. Abdul Aziz Hameed from the ISESCO explained his organization's role in co-financing projects. He stated that a lot of potential exists in Kashmir for hydro-electric projects and that a similar project has been completed on Neelum-Jhelum River. He reiterated the OIC's resolve to support rehabilitation of schools in the area. Dr. Hameed repeated the OIC commitment to help poor Muslim countries in every way possible.

The discussion also focused on developing a collaborative partnership between ISS and OIC to help make concrete suggestions and proposals in order to improve the socio-economic and political situation in Kashmir. It was agreed that the first step in this partnership could be in the shape of studies by ISS to help the OIC to determine what specific projects to fund.

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The Director General ISS said that traditionally, the Institute has focused on topics of national security, foreign policy and critical foreign relations, but with issues such as sectarianism emerging at the forefront of the inter-state landscape, the ISS is looking to investigate further into development and social issues that may help shed light on the root of the conflict in South Asia rather than just dealing with the symptoms.

The OIC delegation said the Organization believes that research specialists in ISS can assist in demonstrating that the Kashmir problem is not limited to India and Pakistan alone, but that it may be detrimental to the neighbouring region as well. In effect, this would bring more attention to the issue on a global level.

In concurrence, it was proposed that the Kashmir dispute needed to be viewed from a different and broader perspective that is more in context with not only human rights violations but also threats to regional peace and international law and order. Human rights violations in Kashmir are frequent and well documented with political rights and fundamental basic rights – rights that are, in fact, mandated by the United Nations Security Council - routinely denied. International law has allowed all people the right to self-determination and when this right is violated, it permits the people to take up arms in defense of their rights and go so far as to solicit armed assistance for their resistance. As such the subject of Kashmir should be posed in all international forums, UN and OIC alike, not as a question of territorial dispute but as one of self-determination.

The importance of resolving the dispute was stressed on by the ISS on grounds that peace between India and Pakistan would remain fragile without a long-standing and permanent solution. The new leadership in Pakistan has shown a keen interest in arriving at a negotiated settlement and improving relations with India through contacts, trade, commerce and resolution of other outstanding issues. But with both countries at an impasse on how to resolve the Kashmir dispute to the satisfaction of all three parties, peace talks are stalled. And until such time as a tripartite agreement is reached, the Kashmir issue is likely to continue to fester and infect surrounding regions.

In further discussions, OIC delegation invited the ISS to work with them to produce a strategic work plan focusing on development in Islamic countries with far-reaching and sustainable results. The work plan would provide a framework for tackling the issues that plague Islamic countries and hinder development. Through factoring in elements such as development in education and improvement in economic infrastructure, OIC hopes to partner with ISS to consolidate the internal systems within Islamic countries and push forth development.

The OIC delegates also proposed setting up a human rights monitoring instrument to observe and regulate human rights practices in the Muslim community. In this regard, OIC suggested for the ISSI to support their endeavor by approaching the commission and conveying reports and complaints on any noted violations to which the commission may then respond accordingly.

- *Prepared by*

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