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## *Special Report Launch*

# **“Voices on Kashmir”**

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### PICTURES OF THE EVENT







The India Study Centre (ISC) at the Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad (ISSI) organized a launching ceremony of its flagship report entitled “Voices on Kashmir.” The Chief Guest of the event was Mr. Asim Iftikhar Ahmad, Spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan. The keynote speaker was Mr. Khalid Rahman, Chairman at Institute of Policy Studies, Islamabad. Other distinguished speakers included Altaf Hussain Wani, Chairman at Kashmir Institute of International Relations (KIIR); and Ahmad Quraishi, a Human Rights and National Security Journalist. The moderator thanked the Chief Guest and other speakers for their presence.

In his introductory remarks, Dr. Arshad Ali, Director ISC thanked the Chief Guest and distinguished speakers for their presence at the event. Dr. Arshad said that the issue of Jammu and Kashmir is the core dispute between India and Pakistan. He pointed towards the event of August 5, 2019, when India illegally and unilaterally revoked the special status of Kashmir which was a violation of the International Law including the resolutions of the United Nations Security Council, 4<sup>th</sup> Geneva Convention, and Shimla Accords. Since 1947, the people of Jammu and Kashmir have experienced all forms of violence and atrocities. Nonetheless, it was the determination of the people of occupied Jammu and Kashmir which caught the attention of the international community. Dr. Arshad emphasized that today there is a pressing need for an early resolution of the Kashmir dispute according to the wishes of the Kashmiri people and the resolutions of the UN Security Council.

Dr. Arshad further stated that Pakistan has utilized almost every platform to highlight the humanitarian, legal, peace, and security dimensions of the Kashmir dispute. He highlighted that the report launched by the ISC is an effort to highlight the concerns of the global community expressed in solidarity with the people of Kashmir. He further stated that these are the voices of conscience from all over the world which stretches from Europe to America and encompasses the regional and international organizations to highlight the plight of people from Jammu and Kashmir. The Report is also an urge to India that lasting peace in South Asia depends upon the resolution of the Kashmir issue. Dr. Arshad concluded his address by thanking DG ISSI Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhary for his supervision in the preparation of this report. He

further thanked the whole team of ISC including Mr. Muhammad Ali Baig, Mr. Kasim Masood, Ms. Misbah Mukhtar, and Ms. Mahwish Hafeez for their dedicated efforts.

**Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhary** began his remarks by welcoming all the audience of the event. He commended the director ISC and his team for preparing the report on Kashmir. He highlighted that the report is not based on any speculations instead every piece of evidence is duly referenced. The report includes voices from all over the world and within India, but no Pakistani voice is included in the report in order to maintain the objectivity.

Amb. Chaudhary welcomed the Chief Guest and all the speakers for their presence at ISSI. He asserted that as Kashmir is a longstanding issue to be resolved, the ISSI has and is playing its part in the resolution of the Kashmir issue. He further commended the young researchers and scholars sitting in the seminar and advised them to carry the legacy of Pakistan over the Kashmir issue. He later on concluded his welcoming remarks with positive wishes regarding the resolution of the Kashmir issue.

**Mr. Khalid Rahman**, the Chairman of the Institute of Policy Studies, Islamabad, in his keynote address highlighted the struggle of the Kashmiri people who are striving for their right to self-determination. He stated that the Kashmir issue should have been resolved earlier as the international law and UN resolutions are in favour of Kashmiris. He lamented the Indian stubbornness and complications in the global system which favours the powerful states. He praised the publication of the report by saying that it is a dire need of time to direct the discourse in favour of Kashmiris. Mr. Rahman highlighted that the report should include the voices of those Kashmiris who are not only demonstrating their struggle through voices but also through their actions which reflected their message to the world. He further stated that the present actions of Kashmiris should be linked to the past which shows the continuity in their actions. It will convey a message that all segments of society are on the same page regarding the liberation of Kashmir from India.

Mr. Khalid recommended to the academics that one should refrain from painting the Kashmir issue as only the violations of human rights. He commented that we must avoid entering that area and he regarded it as a success for Indians that they painted the issue as a human rights issue. However, Indian activities are a violation of International Humanitarian Law and there is more

room to talk about it. He also emphasized to the audience that we should have an internal realisation that where we went wrong. He, later on, pointed towards some statements by the high-ranked officials who stated that war is not an option. Instead, it should be like that war is an option over Kashmir but reasons and justifications over it is another debate.

Mr. Khalid pointed to the statements made by the international leaders that Pakistan and India should sit together and solve the issue. Nonetheless, it is a bilateral issue, but it has wider ramifications. Hence, Pakistan should put forward the narrative that India, Pakistan, and Kashmiris are core parties to the dispute but the whole world is a party to it. He concluded his address by saying that India is changing the demographics of Kashmir and Pakistan shouldn't limit its role to complaining about it, instead, it should expose the Indian ambitions.

**Mr. Altaf Hussain Wani**, Chairman of Kashmir Institute of International Relations, started his address by commending the ISC for preparing the report on voices on Kashmir. He applauded the keynote speaker's point that it is necessary to mention the historical struggle of Kashmiris and establish a link between them to show continuity. He also emphasized that Pakistan should promote more research work on Kashmir as the Indian perspective is dominant at the international academia. He also stated that India has already made demographic changes in Kashmir by granting citizenships and domiciles to non-Kashmiris and they are set to see a Hindu Chief Minister of Kashmir in the future.

Mr. Wani further said that our guns should be pointed towards the ambitions and agendas of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) instead of other actors. He concluded his remarks by stating that there is a need for aggressive diplomatic initiatives which Pakistan is unfortunately lacking. We should be very careful about the statements made by the officials which unfortunately grant an edge and lead to the Indian narrative on the international stage.

**Mr. Ahmed Quraishi**, a renowned journalist, set his tone by commending the ISC and ISSI for the launch of the report. Mr. Quraishi stated that the Kashmir issue shouldn't be side-lined in our media discourse as it lies in the core national interests of Pakistan. He stated that we must acknowledge the fact that there is a major shift in the thinking of the world as they look into Kashmir and India. In 2016, for the first time, the Kashmir issue was placed on the UN High

Commissioner for Human Rights annual international update on the major conflicts in the world. He recalled that how international human rights Non-Governmental Organizations were present at the time, recognized the success of the Kashmiri activists, and congratulated Altaf Hussain Wani's delegation with the words "Congratulations, you have arrived."

Mr Quraishi further stated the significance of this report by highlighting how it was the first time that the war crimes in Kashmir committed by the Indian security forces were now on the international agenda with detailed documentation. Before this report, he recalled that it was a taboo to talk about Kashmir internationally. Nonetheless, it is no longer the case as Kashmiri journalists are facilitated and encouraged by international media outlets to tell their stories.

His concluding remarks were based on three points. Firstly, how the world is ready to engage with the Kashmir issue. He illustrated the example of the Kashmir issue being raised at a meeting of G-7 countries which put considerable pressure on Indian diplomacy. He also pointed that how our government should reciprocate this newfound interest of the international community with positive engagement by moving beyond mere condemnation. Secondly, he stressed how it should not just be the responsibility of Pakistani diplomats to shape the narrative around Kashmir, instead Pakistani citizens, influencers, and journalists should also play their respective roles in this endeavour. Lastly, he reiterated Mr. Khalid Rahman's concerns about how confining the topic of Kashmir to just the realm of human rights is not enough. Although human rights are significant, but solely reliance on this approach will overlook the broader struggle of Kashmiri self-determination which should be raised at the international platforms.

**Mr. Asim Iftikhar Ahmad**, spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan, the Chief Guest began his address by thanking the panellists for their insights and commended the ISSI for its complementary efforts in assisting the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in projecting the national interests of the country. He stated that the Kashmir dispute is the core national interest which has enjoyed the national consensus from all governments. He appreciated the launch of the report and how it would forward the Kashmiri cause to the international community. Mr. Ahmad also highlighted the intensive efforts by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in emphasizing on the unilateral revocation of the international status of Kashmir by India.

Mr. Ahmed stated that Kashmir is an issue of regional peace as it is a potential nuclear flashpoint between India and Pakistan. He referred to the three sessions of the UN Security Council since 2019 which emphasized upon the significance of the issue on the international agenda due to sustained efforts by Pakistan in resolving the conflict in the light of UN Security Council resolutions. In this regard, Mr. Iftikhar highlighted the success of such efforts from a legal perspective that despite changes on the ground there was no *de jure* recognition or acceptance of the Indian actions in the international community. He referred to a statement of the United Nations Secretary General in which he expressed his concerns about human rights in Kashmir according to the UN Charter and UN Security Council resolutions which stressed upon refraining from the unilateral steps against them. Mr. Iftikhar emphasized how Pakistan's position has been consistent with such statements and has welcomed international mediation from the United Nations and friendly countries, albeit India has constantly rejected both.

He then deliberated on Pakistan's strong legal footing by comparing the Kashmir issue with Palestine which is on the permanent agenda of the UN. However, no significant progress is made despite several quarterly discussions to bolster its territorial claims. On the contrary, no country has acknowledged India's unilateral actions in the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK). Similarly, he also discussed the violations of human rights and International Humanitarian Law which the MOFA has stressed on multiple forums. An example was a dossier submitted in September 2021 which documented human rights violations, war crimes, and crimes against humanity widely shared in the international community.

Mr. Ahmad enumerated the foreign ministry's efforts in establishing an effective diplomatic outreach by highlighting that various diplomatic missions have been dispatched which involved engagements and briefings on several levels. Later, he also tried to dispel criticism concerning the role of Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in the Kashmir dispute by stating how the OIC's position on the matter has lent support to UNSC resolutions by putting the diplomatic weight of 57 countries in the peaceful resolution of the Kashmir dispute.

Lastly, he urged a whole nation approach to positively shape the narrative, both domestically and internationally. He stated that, the role of media in this regard needs to be elevated, aside from ambassadors and the traditional diplomatic apparatus, all intellectuals should collaborate as India



has incurred a huge reputational cost which we should capitalize upon by highlighting the daily sufferings of the Kashmiris. He concluded his discussion by stressing on constant engagements in efforts to see how we can tackle this issue and pressurize India that it's a dispute from the past that demands continued international attention.

The event organised by the ISC at ISSI was attended by a large number of people belonging to all walks of life. Several representatives of numerous embassies and members of the foreign diplomatic missions were also present at the event. More importantly, the event was watched closely by the university students and the print and electronic media provided coverage.