

PRESIDENT AJK WELCOMES TRUMP'S MEDIATION OFFER ON KASHMIR; EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND EUROPEAN UNION WILL PLAY THEIR ROLE



Sardar Masood Khan, President Azad Jammu and Kashmir, has said that the people of Jammu and Kashmir and Pakistan believe that the Kashmir dispute can only be resolved through peaceful and diplomatic means. He added that the people of Jammu and Kashmir and Pakistan have openly welcomed President Trump's offer for third-party mediation on Kashmir, and would extend their wholehearted support to this momentous initiative. "This is the first time that a sitting American President has made an offer of mediation on Kashmir. We must use this new diplomatic space for a just and lasting solution of the Kashmir dispute in accordance with international law and aspirations of the Kashmiri people", he said.

The AJK President made these remarks while addressing a joint press conference along with a delegation of British Members of European Parliament (MEP) led by MEP Richard Corbett, Leader of the Labour

Party in the European Parliament and the Co-Chairperson of the Friends of Kashmir Group in the European Parliament. Other members of the delegation who addressed the press conference included MEP Irina Von Weise, Vice-Chair Subcommittee on Human Rights and member Committee on Foreign Affairs in the European Parliament, MEP Shaffaq Mohammed, substitute member Subcommittee on Human Rights in the European Parliament, Councillor Nazia Rehman, Raja Najabat Hussain, Chairman Jammu and Kashmir Self-Determination Movement International, and Brussels-based Kashmiri activist Sardar Sadique.

The AJK President said that President Donald Trump's offer to mediate on Kashmir is a very positive development. He said that Pakistan and the people of Jammu and Kashmir have warmly welcomed the offer and would support the diplomatic overture made by President Trump. He said that it would be politic and prudent for India to take the same constructive path and cooperate with the USA and Pakistan for exploring a solution through diplomatic means that could offer a win-win situation for India, Pakistan and the people of Kashmir.

President Khan said that the Chinese government has also supported President Trump's offer.

A Chinese Foreign Office Spokesperson said: "We support the international community, the US included, in playing a constructive role in improving Pakistan-India relations through dialogue"

President Trump's offer and recent international reports on Kashmir have proved that this issue is international in character and could not be reduced to a bilateral matter, President Masood Khan said.

The AJK President said that India continues to use the guise of bilateral dialogue to maintain the status quo, exclude people of Kashmir and the UN from diplomatic processes, sabotage holding of bilateral talks even after grudgingly accepting them, perpetuate its occupation of

the territory and keep the international community at a distance from IOK in order to hide its crimes against humanity in IOK.

President Masood Khan thanked the European Parliament for holding a very important hearing on 19th February 2019, in its Subcommittee on Human Rights, on the report on human rights situation in Kashmir released by the High Commissioner for Human Rights last year. He said that the Members of the European Parliament during the hearing strongly endorsed the recommendations of the High Commissioner's report and called for their faithful implementation.

The President said that the High Commissioner's Office this year on 08 July, also released a follow-up report in which they have listed continued a) killing of unarmed people, b) excessive use of force, c) use of pellet guns blinding people, d) draconian cordon and search operations e) arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances f) curbs on freedom of expression and g) a culture of impunity for killings by the occupation forces.

The Report reiterated the setting up of a Commission of Inquiry by the Human Rights Council. It also called on India to repeal black laws - Armed Forces Special Powers Act and Public Safety Act -, set free political prisoners, halt enforced disappearances, restore internet and mobile connectivity and conduct credible and impartial forensic investigation of unmarked mass-graves in IOK. The report also called on India to respect the right to self-determination of the Kashmiri people which has the protection of international law.

The President said, "India has not and will never be able to win the hearts and minds of the people of Jammu and Kashmir through the use of force and their brutalization. Only diplomacy will resolve this problem and guarantee the fundamental right of the Kashmiri people".

President Trump's statement and recent international reports issued on Kashmir have proved this issue is an international one and cannot

be reduced to a bilateral matter between Pakistan and India.

President Masood said that India's military policy towards Kashmir has not yielded any result.

Responding to a question whether President Trump would incorporate UN Security Council resolutions on Kashmir in his mediatory effort or come up with a brand new 'out of the box' solution, President Masood Khan said that UN Security resolutions on Kashmir are keystone documents which cannot be ignored or set aside. They are a fundamental reference point especially in ascertaining the rights of the Kashmiris people, a principle that is embedded in the UNSC resolutions. "The cardinal principle for any out of the box solution should be a democratic reference to the people of Jammu and Kashmir to determine their will and political destiny", he said.

European Parliamentarians, while addressing the press conference, expressed their resolve that the European Parliament itself will play an active role for the resolution of the Kashmir dispute.

MEP Richard Corbett said that Jammu and Kashmir should not be treated as a forgotten conflict. He added that this is a crisis which the people of Jammu and Kashmir and the international community have faced for the past seven decades He said the European Union and the European Parliament will continue to use their potential leverage to bring a peaceful resolution to the dispute. He said that the MEPs will raise awareness on Kashmir especially at the European Parliament and will raise the issue with the member European nations. In this regard he said the Friends of Kashmir Group in the European Parliament would make proactive endeavours

Responding to another question, MEP Richard Corbett said that UK has a historical role in the resolution of the Kashmir dispute. He said that the Labour Party recognises this responsibility and will make every effort for a peaceful settlement of this dispute. He added that this

issue is not one country's responsibility but a responsibility of the whole global community.

MEP Irina Von Weise said that this visit will help create critical awareness on the situation by providing them first-hand observations and understanding of the plight of displaced people. She said that as Vice-Chair of Human Rights Committee, she will continue raising the issue of Kashmir in the European Parliament.

MEP Shaffaq Mohammed said that we feel the pain of the Kashmiri people and hope that this dispute is resolved amicably. He said that we have no enmity with the Indian people and our only concern is the grave human rights situation in IOK. He added that Europe suffered heavily last century due to the two World Wars and we hope the world never sees the same kind of turmoil elsewhere. Human rights should be put at the centre of developing trade and economic relations with India by EU members, he said.

MEP Shaffaq said that the UK and Ireland had successfully resolved their differences over Northern Ireland through dialogue. That model could also be used as a blueprint in South Asia to resolve the Jammu and Kashmir dispute.

Councillor Nazia Rehman urged that the people of Kashmir must be given their inalienable and fundamental right to self-determination. She said that human rights violations in IOK must be immediately stopped.