



Indo European Kashmir Forum (IEKF)

TELEPHONE: 07886 439 506

EMAIL: bhank17@live.co.uk

President: Krishna Bhan

PRESS RELEASE

(For Immediate Release)



“Conference on the Plight of Kashmiri Pandits/Hindus At the Houses of Parliament UK”

Thursday 4th September 2014, House of Commons, London:

On 4th September 2014, Ms Krishna Bhan, President of the Indo-European Kashmir Forum (IEKF) organised a conference in association with the Hindu Council UK on the “Plight of Kashmiri Pandits/Hindus”, in the House of Commons. The meeting was jointly chaired by Conservative MP- Marcus Jones and Labour MP-Virendra Sharma. The speakers at the conference spoke passionately on many different perspectives ranging from history of the conflict, analogies with recent events, geopolitical aspects, role of journalists and politicians and the relevance of conflict to the rest of the world. The mood in the packed Committee Room 10 was effusive, upbeat and one which demonstrated resolve and a call to action. Also in attendance were Bob Blackman MP and Richard Harrington MP who supported the issues raised.

The keynote speakers at the Conference included the Conference Organiser Krishna Bhan-President IEKF, Girdhari Bhan-Chair of VHP, Chandan Kotwal-Executive Member IEKF, Shantanu Bhagwat-Former Diplomat of India, Sanjay Jagatia-Director/Secretary General HCUK, Vivek Kaul-Executive Member of IEKF, Priyansha Raina-Lawyer & Political Activist, Lakshmi Kaul-Executive Member of KPCS, Gautam Sen-British Board of Hindu Scholars, Chuni Chavda-former Councillor and Satish K Sharma-General Secretary of the National Hindu Temples UK.

The main purpose of the conference was to express the Hindu community’s grave concerns over the forthcoming debate in the UK Parliament taking place on Thursday 11th September 2014 at the House of Commons. The debate in question has been secured by Liberal Democrats MP David Ward-Member of Parliament for Bradford East, together with support from Andrew Stephenson MP (Conservative) and David Nuttall MP (Labour), on behalf of the Jammu Kashmir Self Determination Movement Europe. Surprisingly, this debate has been granted as a result of some MPs, MEPs &

Lords from all the British Political Parties, together with members of the Kashmiri/Pakistan Community, who signed a petition asking the British Parliament to hold a special debate on the state of human rights for the Muslim community in Kashmir. However, IEKF believe, regrettably that some misguided Members of Parliament have supported this debate and it is for this reason IEKF and HCUK organised the conference in order to give the viewpoint of the Kashmiri Pandit/Hindu Community.

Marcus Jones MP welcomed the speakers and the audience. He said he appreciates the concerns of the displaced Kashmiri Hindus and asked the audience to lobby their own individual MPs for raising the awareness of the unprecedented human tragedy of Kashmiri Pandits/Hindus.

Krishna Bhan organiser of the Conference expressed her profound gratitude to Marcus Jones MP for supporting the Kashmiri Pandits/Hindus and taking out his valuable time to be part of this attempt to showcase a historical persecution of minority Kashmiri Pandits/ Hindus. She further stated that “by the virtue of the ‘Instrument of Accession’ the State of Jammu & Kashmir is an integral part of India and whatever happens in the State is an entirely domestic matter of India. Since 1990, planned and organized secessionist-terrorism has brutalized Kashmir, the valley of peace and exquisite beauty. Systematic efforts have been made to destroy its syncretic culture, traditions, and heritage, by an orgy of mindless violence fuelled by religious fanaticism and extremism, aided and abetted from across India's borders”.

Girdhari Bhan explained the role of the journalists and politicians and how media, politicians and the Human Rights bodies remained silent about the plight of the Hindu minority of Kashmir. Girdhari further stated “to those of us who were the victims of this historical tragedy and its first hand witnesses, the bias and distortion of the reports were appalling. The misuses of the media for propaganda by those who are driven by religious intolerance commit inhuman and illegal atrocities”.

Chandan Kotwal made a power point presentation and gave a brief introduction to the history of Kashmiri Pandits/Hindus. He commented “since the fundamentalist Pakistan-backed Islamists perpetrated forced exodus of over 400,000 the Kashmiri Pandit/Hindu community from the valley, this peaceful and law abiding community has had to face serious abuses of its human rights which were in direct contravention to the United Nations International Charter of Human Rights. Chandan continued “this took the form of targeted Killings and massacres of children, elderly and adults on multiple occasions. Sadly, whilst all the instances of killings are well documented and in some cases perpetrators have owned up to the killings, it is disappointing that not one of these has had an enquiry commission instituted to look into and to date the killers are roaming free. We urge the Government of India to constitute an enquiry into the Genocide and ethnic cleansing that was carried out against this miniscule community”.

As India and Pakistan continue to squabble over the territory of Kashmir, Kashmiri Pandits/Hindus feel they have been forgotten. They are afraid that they may lose their identity. Kashmir continues to be the land of their dreams, the subject of their poems and the inspiration behind their struggle. The Kashmiri Pandits/Hindus live in the hope that one day they will return to Kashmir.

Shantanu Bhagwat spoke on the origin of Article 370, how it was opposed even at the time of its drafting (with the Chairman of the Constituent Assembly, Dr BR Ambedkar refusing to draft it), how it was meant as a temporary measure and how its continued presence is the biggest hindrance in the way of integration of J&K with the rest of India and peace in the region. He also briefly discussed the implications of this Article which severely restricts the Union Government of India from implementing several laws in the State. Shantanu also discussed the gross violation of human rights of Kashmiri Pandits in the Valley, in particular the latest instance of refusal to allow them to visit the sacred Kaonsar Nag Lake. He mentioned how environment and ecology was being used as a smokescreen to divert attention from the real reason for disallowing the Yatra, namely the denial of the rights to Kashmiri Pandits.

Terrorism has taken the lives of thousands of innocent men, women and children; the terrorists have indulged wantonly in abduction, rape, murder, arson, extortion and looting. Government officials, political leaders and workers, members of judiciary, print and electronic presspersons, and prominent citizens have been threatened, attacked and killed. Religious "codes of conduct" have been imposed on common people, and there has been large scale destruction of public and private property including secular state schools. The minority Hindu community have had to flee their homes in the valley and today live as refugees in other parts of their own state and country. This is the "accomplishment" of the secessionist's proxy-war in Kashmir.

Sanjay Jagatia who co-organised the conference, spoke about the various cases of Ethnic cleansing and Genocide that have occurred across the World over the last 100 years and more importantly how World Governments and Human Rights Organisations had stepped up and in some cases brought perpetrators to account and yet the plight of Kashmiri Pandits/Hindus had received no supports, no media coverage and in fact just forgotten. Yet, we now see some misguided MPs holding the forthcoming debate in the UK Parliament to highlight the plight of the Kashmiri Pakistani Community who in fact are the real perpetrators of the ethnic cleansing of the minority Hindus community in the region! Sanjay passionately stated "No outside Government or Politician has the right now to involve themselves in a matter which should be and will be decided by the Indian Government and its people. However, it is encouraging to note that recent Press articles have shown that Indian Prime Minister and his Government has recently stated that the issue of rehabilitation of Kashmiri Pandits/Hindus is of national importance for the Government and strenuous efforts are being made for the safe return and rehabilitation of the community and the Government will not rest till it ensures return and rehabilitation of the Kashmiri migrants and wanted Parliament to adopt a resolution to endorse this commitment".

The conference heard first-hand experience of some of the victims who recall the day they found posters pasted to the outside wall of their home in Srinagar, the capital of Indian-administered Kashmir which basically instructed their families to leave the valley or die. Many fled overnight and left their childhood memories, their homes and their dreams behind. Those who could not flee were killed and tortured with horrific stories of people having their eyes pulled out and bodies hung on trees. The armed separatists used chainsaws to cut our bodies into pieces. It wasn't just the killing but the way they tortured and killed.

Vivek Kaul spoke about the Rehabilitation of Kashmiri Pandits back to Kashmir. He briefly took the audience through the chequered History of Kashmir up to unprovoked attack by Jehadi Kabalis in Oct 1947 & Indian Army's rapid response after Maharaja acceded Kashmir to India. Nehru's haste to approach UNO was also discussed which led to Indian Army announcing cease fire. Futility of UNO's plebiscite was discussed. Vivek said "the conditions under which Kashmiri Pandits/Hindus were hounded out by the Jihadis trained & sponsored by Pakistan. On 19th January 1990 similar treatment was meted out to hapless Kashmiri Pandits/Hindus by Islamic Jihadis. The result was an unprecedented Exodus, Killings & chaos". He drew comparison between Crystal Night /Kristallnacht of 1938 when German & Austrian Nazi thugs set upon Jewish homes, Synagogues & attacked Jews. On 19th January 1990 similar treatment was meted out to hapless Kashmiri Pandits by Islamic Jihadis. The result was an unprecedented Exodus, Killings & Chaos. Vivek concluded "that Kashmiri Pandits would love to live in Kashmir of their past but security concerns would necessitate Special Area where Kashmiri Pandits can enjoy administrative autonomy to pursue their dreams & aspirations under peaceful conditions".

Priynasha Raina spoke about the relevance of the current conflict in Kashmir to the Human race. She said "The conflict in Kashmir is in part caused by the belief of some elements in Pakistan of its belief in a two-nation state, its' religious supremacy that doesn't recognise secularism in its own country or another and its' absolute conviction in the imperialistic nature of Islam. Question arises, what prevents the turbulence, the mass murders in the Kashmir Valley replicating itself in another country, another continent? For a long time, and even to a great extent today, the true and complete story of the Kashmir Valley has not been broadcasted in the main stream media, for various and wide ranging reasons. Other than the shift in geo-political strategies, the world today is very different than it was in 1990 for another reason - we, the common people, who do not walk the corridors of power, have one formidable 'weapon' called social media. Suddenly, dissemination of news and information is far more accessible and readily available. We have seen how the negative forces have employed the internet and its various off shoots to achieve their objectives, why can't we galvanise forces and install a barrier to intolerance?"

Lakshmi Kaul told the conference about the 120,000 children who suffered t in 1989/1990. Overnight, they were rendered homeless, forced to live in tents in extremely unsafe conditions. They were exposed to the dangers of venomous snakes, scorpions and unhygienic open air communal toilet areas with no privacy. A large number of children were not only subject to mass brutal murder, but an equally large number who survived or were born after the exodus have suffered a state of trauma, social exclusion and have undergone a severe sense of identity loss. The Kashmiri Pandit/Hindu community did not just go through ethnic cleansing, but ethnic extermination.

Chuni Chavda explained that in October 1947, Pakistani army, dressed as tribals, attacked Kashmir. Not able to stand the might of Pakistani army, the ruler of Kashmir, Maharaja Hari Singh turned to India for military assistance. As India did not want to get involved in the war between Pakistan and Kashmir, India refused any help. At this stage Kashmir decided to join the Dominion of India and the Treaty of Accession was signed between Kashmir and India. On behalf of Kashmir Maharajah Hari Singh signed the treaty and the then Governor General of India the Lord Mountbatten of Burma signed the treaty on behalf of India. The Treat of Accession is legal. After partition the Hindu population in Pakistan was 15%, today it is barely 2%. Whereas in India the Muslim population has

increased by nearly 100%. Kashmir is India's internal matter. Let India deal with it as it suits her within law. India does not meddle in the British politics, and India expects the same from Britain. We mind our business, you mind your business. Finally, Chuni said "I conclude by saying India is Kashmir, Kashmir is India. Long live India. Jay Hind."

Satish K Sharma said "Hindus are the only ones with a clear continuous ancestral connection with Dharma and of all Hindus, Brahmins, especially the Kashmiri Brahmins, have a connection to a deep understanding of Dharma. This evil does not see regional borders or nationalities or religious denominations - it transcends all of these. When we think of ourselves as small regional religious denominations we become disconnected from the larger picture, and when we become disheartened in our smallness we become unable to act to protect Dharma. However, when we expand our vision to accommodate the greatest teachings of our various lineages, when we see Dharma and Adharma clearly - we connect to a source which is undefeatable and when we act to serve Dharma - it responds. It is time to move beyond despair to action, to stop carrying the awareness of the enemy in our minds and instead to be true to our Shastras - no space left for lip service or masquerades. My message was one of becoming active against adharma - here in the UK as well as in India and Kashmir - when we do recover Kashmir, as we are recovering India, what use will it be if the rest of the world has drowned".

A short group discussion was followed by tributes for the upcoming Kashmiri Hindus Martyrs Day on 14th September. Krishna Bhan paid tributes to the Kashmiri Martyrs who lost their lives in the Kashmir conflict. Prayers for the same were facilitated and one minute silence was observed in their honour. As India and Pakistan continue to squabble over the territory of Kashmir, Kashmiri Pandits/Hindus feel they have been forgotten. They are afraid that they may lose their identity due to their rootlessness. Kashmir continues to be the land of their dreams, the subject of their poems and the inspiration behind their struggle. The Kashmiri Pandits/Hindus continue to live in the hope that one day they will return to Kashmir.

Sanjay Jagatia moderated the second part of the conference and sent out a strong passionate and motivating plea to the Hindu Community in the UK to unite and learn from other communities on how to successfully lobby and campaign. Sanjay closed the conference by giving a vote of thanks and especially commended Krishna Bhan who had organised such a successful conference in a short time.

Photographs courtesy of Bhupendra Jethwa and Vivek Kaul

For Further information please contact the Conference Organisers:

Ms Krishna Bhan
President of Indo European Kashmiri Forum
& Director of Hindu Council UK
Tel: 07886439506
Email: bhank17@live.co.uk

Mr Sanjay M Jagatia
Director/Secretary General
Hindu Council UK
Tel: 07969756164
info@hinducounciluk.org