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KASHMIR VOICE

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KASHMIR COUNCIL EU

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

"I am happy to present you the latest issue of our quarterly newsletter. Our aim is to keep you updated on the latest news and current developments. Kashmir Council-EU continues to seek effective ways of supporting the Kashmiri peoples' struggle for self-determination, to draw attention to the abuses of human rights that have become a feature of everyday life in Kashmir and persuade the International Community that it is only through their active involvement that this 70-year old conflict will be resolved. We intend for this newsletter to be of service to the community and will be happy to publish any short articles, comments or announcements of future events that you care to send us."

- Mr Ali Raza Syed

An independent report commissioned by the office of OHCHR

The report describes the situation of human rights in the Indian-administrated Kashmir over the period July 2016 to April 2018. This period saw a dramatic increase in human rights violations, particularly the use of excessive force by the Indian security forces that resulted in heavy civilian casualties.

Starting from July 2016 the United Nations has made frequent requests to both governments of India and Pakistan to be allowed unconditional access to Kashmir to obtain first-hand information on the human rights situation. To date, the Pakistan government has agreed to the UN request while the Indian government has so far refused to grant access to the territory of Indian-administrated Kashmir. The Pakistan offer has been conditional on the Indian-administration granting unconditional access to the territory on its side of the Line of Control. In the absence of unconditional access, the authors of the UN report have been obliged to use remote monitoring methods to acquire information.

The report reveals that the use of pellet guns by the security forces resulted in multiple deaths and serious injuries of hundreds of civilians between 2016 and 2018. According to official figures, 17 people were killed by pellet injuries between July 2016 and August 2017. In January 2018, Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti stated before the state assembly that 6,221 people had been injured by pellet guns in Kashmir between 8 July 2016 and 27 February 2017; among the victims, 728 had eye injuries, and 54 people suffered some form of visual impairment due to pellet injuries. Several cases of civilian deaths caused by live ammunition were also reported in 2017 and 2018. JKCCS reported that approximately 108 people were killed in 2017, including 19 near sites of armed encounters between security forces and armed groups. JKCCS and the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons claim over 8,000 people have been disappeared since 1989.

A particular concern is the legal framework underpinning a system which provides minimum recourse to Kashmir in the face of major human rights challenges. Special laws enforced in the territory have created structures that obstruct the normal processes of law and justice and rob the civilian population of their right to legal remedy in case of alleged violations of human rights. Thus, there has been little movement towards the establishment of a credible investigative machinery into the contents of mass graves in the Kashmir Valley.

OHCHR stated: *'Any resolution to the political situation in Kashmir should entail a commitment to ending the cycles of violence and accountability for past and current human rights violations and abuses committed by all parties and redress for victims. Such a resolution can only be brought about by meaningful dialogue that includes the people of Kashmir.'*

RECENT EVENTS

The Kashmir Council-EU is one of a number of organisations launching fresh initiatives aimed at mobilizing additional resources to raise awareness of the human rights violations. Since the 2017 annual Kashmir-EU Week, the Kashmir Council-EU's main objective is to secure an agenda slot with the standing Human Rights Subcommittee (DROIT) of the European Parliament.

To mark the International Women's Day on the 8th of March the Kashmir Council-EU organised a conference in the European Parliament on the theme of mental health counseling and therapy for Kashmiri women suffering from PTSD. The conference underlined the importance of addressing mental health issues as experienced by Kashmiri women, the psycho-social problems as part of any post-conflict reconstruction, and stressed the positive role of the European Parliament and other European institutions.

FUTURE EVENTS

2018 Kashmir-EU Week

The Kashmir-EU Week has established itself as an indispensable annual feature of the programme of conferences hosted by the European Parliament. This year's Kashmir-EU Week will be organised by the Kashmir Council-EU in collaboration with several Members of the European Parliament during the week of 12-16 November 2018.

The 2018 Kashmir-EU Week aims to bring together representatives of different interest groups, European policymakers, and intellectuals, in an environment where participants feel free to discuss the important issues raised by the current situation in Kashmir. This year's discussions will provide the basis for a more coordinated approach to the issue of Kashmiri self-determination and involvement of the International Community.

The 2018 Kashmir-EU Week will kick off with the opening of an exhibition of photographs, artifacts, and books in the premises of the European Parliament in Strasbourg. We are grateful to the noted Belgian photographer Cédric Gerbehaye, whose work will be on display in the exhibition.





The Kashmir Council-EU Chairman, Mr. Ali Raza Syed expressed his deep sympathy for the family of the late Shujaat Bukhari who was shot dead by unidentified gunmen in Srinagar. He described the assassination as yet another attempt to deprive the press of its freedom to report and the Kashmiri community to speak. Freedom of speech and freedom for the media are essential elements in a well-functioning democracy.

Mr. Shujaat Bukhari was a prominent Kashmiri journalist and editor, he meticulously documented every ceasefire between Pakistan and India with optimism, even though they all inevitably failed. He wrote about the tens of thousands of civilians who have been killed in Kashmir's insurgency the many mass graves that fill our countryside, the protests and the rare glimmers of hope. In 2008, he decided to establish Rising Kashmir, hoping to create an independent voice for the Kashmiri community. He previously worked as the Srinagar bureau chief for one of India's largest and most respected newspapers, The Hindu, where he reported on Kashmir's escalating insurgency in the early '90s. Soon after, he became involved in peace talks, looking for a peaceful solution to the decades-long conflict. Mr. Bukhari believed that everyone had to be involved if efforts to find a sustainable solution to the conflict were to succeed.

The journalist had been given five security guards by the government after a murder attempt in 2000. In a 2016 article for BBC, Bukhari described the threat to Kashmiri journalists. "*Threats to life, intimidation, assault, arrest, and censorship have been part of the life of a typical local journalist,*" he wrote.

Police sources have speculated the killing might be related to Bukhari's involvement last August in a private peace-building initiative involving civil activists and members of the Indian and Pakistani governments. Senior militant leaders have criticised Bukhari and other Kashmiris involved in the proceedings.

The killing of Shujaat Bukhari happened at a time when the first-ever UN report on Kashmir was published. This landmark document calls for international investigation into human rights violations and abuses. He urged the International Community to become engaged in seeking a resolution to the Indian/Pakistan conflict.

ONE MILLION SIGNATURES CAMPAIGN

The Kashmir Council-EU has launched **ONE MILLION SIGNATURES CAMPAIGN** which enables European citizens to express solidarity with the peoples of Kashmir and to assert their right to self-determination that is called for by the UN resolution of 1948. Give your support by signing our online petition.

HANDICRAFTS

We have a limited number of top quality Kashmiri handicrafts for sale. You are invited to support our work to achieve self-determination for Kashmir by buying these exceptional items. On our website, you can find pictures and full information.

For more information, please contact us or visit our website and social media pages.

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**Support our work to
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