

Kashmir: A conference at the European Parliament

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The two day Conference on Gilgit Baltistan has concluded yesterday in the European Parliament under the auspices of International Kashmir Alliance. The conference was attended by the different groups leading Members of the European Parliament while Baroness Emma Nicholson was the Guest of honor at this occasion.

Among the prominent Members of the European Parliament were Mr. Golik Bogdan, Ms Mihaela Popa; Mr. Jeffery Van orders, Dr Miko Marianne, Dr Charles Tannock, Mr. Marek Czarnecki and Mr. Nirj Deva . Chairman International Kashmir Alliance Dr Syed Nazir Gilani, Secretary General Sardar Shaukat Ali Kashmiri, Mr. Mumtaz Khan vice Chair International Kashmir Alliance, and Dr Shabir Chaudhry spokesperson IKA intellectuals, academicians, press, Media, and civil society and people from different shades of opinion including Kashmiri diaspora participated in the conference. Baroness Nicholson referred the difficulties, oppositions she had to face from Pakistani circles on adopting report and also the efforts she had to make to get the insight of Pakistan administered Kashmir and Gilgit Baltistan because of the access and nature of control of Pakistan. She also told the participants that how and sensitive hard task was this for which she had to go through in series of meetings, interaction with all schools of opinion in order to learn about their views and ground socio-economic and political situation that seriously kept people and area underdeveloped and un-represented.

Especially Thanking to International Kashmir Alliance and particularly Sardar Shaukat Ali Kashmiri Secretary General of the said Alliance and Chair United Kashmir Peoples National Party Baroness Emma Nicholson said that Mr. Kashmiri has made valuable and substantial contribution and cooperation to get this report done in a most better way to conclude fundamental problems of the people of Gilgit Baltistan and Pakistani administered Kashmir.

He rightfully highlighted constitutional restraints and false political arrangements made by the Government of Pakistan regarding these areas. She said "it was the first time to learn about the perspective and prospects of this area and its territorial significance in the South Asian region. She said it is matter of regret that Pakistan has illegally ceded this region and separated it from rest of Azad Kashmir without the democratically collective will of the local people. She said it is also contrary to the fundamental human rights charter including UNCIP resolutions. Having regard of those initial resolutions and Pakistan failure to introduce and install meaningful democratic institutions in this area was and still a matter of concern for the world community and for the European Parliament. Speaking to the participants of the conference Mr. Jeffery Van Orders MEP said that "European Parliament has special focus on Gilgit Baltistan most neglected and marginalized region of former princely state of Jammu Kashmir and constitutional, political and socio-economic conditions of the people of this area. He said that European Parliament would emphasize on Government of Pakistan to restore the fundamental rights of the people, install democratic institutions including a constitutional Assembly, self rule and an independent judiciary. Dr Charles Tannock MEP strongly criticized discriminatory policies of the Ministry of Kashmir

Affairs and Northern Areas.

He said that Pakistan has illegally ceded this area and yet the political and constitutional restraints imposed have been noticed by the prestigious institution of European Nations. He supported constitutional, political and socio-economic freedom and right of self rule of the two million people of Gilgit Baltistan. Mr. Nirj Deva MEP pointed out that unemployment, joblessness and marginalized trade and business opportunities have turned the people of this area under poverty line.

He said it is the right of the people of that region to govern themselves through democratically elected representatives and Pakistan should end her control. He expressed his concern on human rights violations in Gilgit Baltistan. Talking to the delegates Mr. Abdul Hamid Khan Chairman Balawaristan National Front (BNF), said that we are illegally, undemocratically occupied by the Pakistan. No democratically elected representative was included when Karachi agreement was signed between Pakistan and Muslim Conference leaders in 1949. He said that Muslims Conference had no mandated by the people of Gilgit Baltistan to handover them and leaves them on the mercy of Ministry of Kashmir Affairs and Northern Areas. So called seditions charges have been filed against political activists in Gilgit Baltistan. Freedom of association and freedom of assembly has been barred in this region.

He said Northern Areas Legislative Council (NALC) has no powers on financial and political issues and all the matters are in the hands of Ministry of Kashmir Affairs and Northern Areas (KANA) in Islamabad. Addressing to the participants of the august conference Secretary General International Kashmir Alliance (IKA) and Chair United Kashmir Peoples National Party Sardar Shaukat Ali Kashmiri elaborated that Gilgit Baltistan is economically rich in minerals, forests, water, and tourism. Gilgit Baltistan is historically part and parcel of State of Jammu and Kashmir and two famous rulers of the state were belonging to the Gilgit Baltistan region. Mr Kashmiri pointed out that we endorse the loyalty and patriotism of Maharajah Hari Singh who introduced State Subject rule of 20th of April-1927 to protect the identification and culture of Kashmir. He said Pakistan has subsequently failed to comply with the UNCIP which asked Government of Pakistan to withdraw its army, para military forces and tribals simultaneously from the state and India was to withdraw bulk of forces after that. He said at one hand Pakistan claims to be the champion of the right of self-determination of the Kashmiri people, but she has denied the same rights under its controlled parts of Kashmir and Gilgit Baltistan.

Mr. Kashmiri strongly criticized the role and unlimited powers of Ministry of Kashmir Affairs and Northern Areas. He said that the poor health and sanitation facilities have deteriorated health conditions of the people particularly women and children in this area. The literacy rate is very low among men and only 3.5% among women in the area. Educational institutional are not established in 60 years of Pakistani control over this area and only Agha Khan Rural Support Program (AKRSP) is looking after the people in this regard. In his speech Mr. Kashmiri suggested that line of control must be opened and bus service should be initiated between Ladakh and Gilgit so that cultural link could be revitalized between and divided families could be reunited in this region.

He also suggested to the MEPs and delegations that a fact finding mission be formed to visit Gilgit Baltistan and Pakistani Administered Kashmir. Sardar Shaukat Ali Kashmiri recommended that to empower the women in deprived region a special quota be allocated for them so that they can participate in socio-economic and political advancement of 21st century. Mr. Mumtaz Khan said that the policies of Pakistan are based on lies and Minister of Kashmir Affair is holding all constitutional and political powers including policies regarding jobs, employment and development. The role of said ministry is contrary to the fundamentals of UNCIP resolutions and IKA is determined to highlight the miseries of two million people of Gilgit Baltistan. IKA leadership has interacted with different international institutions including UN Council for Human Rights and other notable offices

in the world.

Among the NGO representatives were Mr. Paul Beersmans president of Belgian Association for Solidarity with Jammu & Kashmir, Mr. Naeem Khan from Viena, writer and journalist Mr. Zafar Iqbal Manhas Srinagar, Kashmir, Nasim Iqbal Advocate JKLF, Dr Koenraad a university professor, Jamil Maqsood UKPNP, Franco Marino from Italy, Shabir Ahmed Advocate JKNAP, Dr Chris Verschoten of Brussels University, Flugida Barattoni NGO representative from Italia, Erkin Alptekin Germany, Mr. Marino Busdachin UNPO the Netherlands, Junaid Qureshi JKDLP, Dr. Charles Graves from Switzerland, Javid Hayat from Spain and many others from different groups and Diaspora Kashmiri