

Text of Bhubaneswar Declaration adopted at the Tenth National Convention of Pakistan-India Peoples' Forum for Peace and Democracy

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Pakistan-India Peoples' Forum for Peace and Democracy

We, the delegates to the 10th National Convention of the PIPFPD, held at Bhubaneswar on February 10-11, 2018 under the overhang of the rapidly deteriorating relationship between Pakistan and India, renewed our commitment to the joint struggle for peace and democracy in the two countries.

The delegates met at a very critical juncture in the relationship between India and Pakistan:

- The Indo-Pak relationship has been reduced to the firing of mortar shells and anti-tank weapons, making the Line of Control the most violent 'live' border between two nuclear armed neighbours, and made further volatile against the backdrop of escalating hyper-nationalist war jingoism, including statements by Army Chiefs threatening the use of nuclear weapons.
- The Kashmir situation has steeply deteriorated with widespread and deepening alienation of youth and citizens exacerbated by the state's abandonment of the policy of recognising and dealing with Kashmir as a 'political' issue, and the overwhelming reliance on the use of a military approach including against protests by civilians.
- People-to-people exchanges between India and Pakistan have been disrupted, there is a deliberate obstruction of visas and the hostile stigmatisation of the initiatives for peace.
- Rampant violence against minorities has increased with the blatant complicity of state institutions and the political establishment.
- Systematically democratic institutions are being weakened and constitutional values of pluralism, inclusion and secularism undermined with serious consequences for the protection of the rights of vulnerable groups, including Minorities, Adivasis, Women, Dalits and Workers.

More than hundred and fifty delegates, representatives of State chapters of the Forum from over ten States, resolved to fight the war hysteria, including actively intervening on policy issues towards building friendly and cooperative relations between India and Pakistan, crucially recognising that it is integral to the strengthening of democracy within our countries.

- We urge the state to resume the India-Pakistan dialogue to normalise the relationship between the two nuclear powered neighbours and immediately resume the DGMO exchanges so as to reduce tension and military confrontation on the border.

- We reiterate the Forum's core belief, that Kashmir is not a piece of disputed land, but recognise the Kashmir issue as central to the normalisation of Pakistan-India relations. We call for a prompt resumption of a political dialogue by the Government of India, with all stakeholders, as promised in multiple policy commitments.
- We call for the immediate resumption of the visa process to facilitate people-to-people contact and resumption of the rail and road links, which have been completely shut down, at the earliest.
- We appeal for the prompt release of prisoners, such as Hamid Ansari, an Indian in a Pakistani jail, on humanitarian grounds, and we express our solidarity in support of Raza Khan, a peace activist who has disappeared in the vicious witch-hunt against activists.
- We urge the government to reach agreements on marine fishing rights with neighbouring countries, including Pakistan, and promptly release all fishworkers currently being held in Indian and Pakistani prisons.
- We demand the restoration of India-Pakistan Judicial Committee on Prisoners.
- We restate our demand for the demilitarisation of Siachen and an end to the sacrifice of lives of soldiers at the altar of militarisation.
- We emphasise the state's primary responsibility to protect the rights of all people living in India, especially the minorities and take legal action against all violators and enforce the rule of law.
- We affirm our commitment to find ways to strengthen democratic institutions and resist divisiveness promoted by certain vested interests' groups fanning communal tensions.
- We deplore the aggressive war hysteria being raised by certain sections of the national and regional media and the irresponsible statements and behaviour of certain journalists who are igniting 'nationalist sentiments'.
- We welcome the sharp gender perspective that was organically interwoven in all the thematic sessions, and emphasise the significance of the women's question in Indo-Pak relations and in that context we express our solidarity with the Kashmiri women's resistance day (February 23) against militarisation.
- We affirm the need to strengthen our organisation to perform these tasks

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