**Diplomats for Kashmir**

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Over the past few weeks, more and more diplomatic voices are being raised for Kashmir and its people. The chief US diplomat for South Asian Affairs, Alice Wells, speaking in Washington has expressed concern over continued detentions and an internet shutdown ahead of her planned visit to New Delhi for talks with the Indian government. She has also said she was closely following the visit by the US ambassador to India and other foreign diplomats to Jammu and Kashmir. Wells has said the arrest of political leaders is a concern and that the US seeks a return to normalcy. Kashmir has had no internet access for more than 150 days, a matter also taken up by Indian courts. Ms Wells is due to visit both New Delhi and Islamabad this month.

It is significant that the tours to Kashmir being arranged with diplomats by the Indian government are orchestrated by the Indians and foreign visitors have not been allowed to interact freely with Kashmiri politicians or people. Envoys from the European Union have declined an invitation to visit the territory because it did not include meetings with former chief ministers. The US delegation has however met Indian military officials, politicians and journalists in the other area. As one would expect, India has showcased the visit as one that shows normalcy does indeed exist in the valley.

There is nothing to indicate the lockdown under which Kashmir has remained for over 150 days, the communication shutdown or the arrest of scores of leaders. While access to diplomats and activists to Kashmir has always been tightly controlled, India has stepped up these restrictions, making it impossible to make independent assessments. American media has testified to this and quoted opposition parties as criticizing these arranged visits. We should ask if it is wise for diplomats from around the world to continue to visit Kashmir in these circumstances. It is important that outsiders see for themselves what is happening in the territory. But when these trips are misused and planned simply to show a particular perspective, they perhaps do more harm than good. Few have fallen in line with the Indian point of view. The human rights abuses are too blatant. But beyond comments and relatively weak rebukes directed towards New Delhi, more needs to be done by the world to alter the reality in Kashmir and convey to the beleaguered people of the valley their willingness to stand with them and help rescue them from the unending misery they have faced, most notably over the past five months.