**Time to upgrade — moral, political and diplomatic support to the people of Kashmir**

[Dr Syed Nazir Gilani](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/dr-syed-nazir-gilani/)

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I am in Islamabad and in a week’s time from 8th December to 17th December 2018 attended [four Conferences on Kashmir organised by Pakistan House](https://dailytimes.com.pk/237906/understanding-the-kashmir-issue/), Policy and Research Forum-Azad Jammu and Kashmir, All Parties Hurriyat Conference and Kashmir Media Service and the fourth jointly sponsored conference by International Islamic University — Islamabad and Policy and Research Forum AJK. I had to skip one Conference. Every little activity on Kashmir goes a long way to assure the people under siege, that they are not alone and people still have time to discuss them.

The discussion at these Conferences should not degenerate into a routine and the Government support should not end with a declaration which has no follow up. 14 June 2018 UN report on the Human rights situation in Kashmir and the massacre of 11 civilians by Indian security forces in Kashmir on 15 December 2018 in Pulwama, should change our narrative on Kashmir. There is an urgent need to revisit the narrative and upgrade it.

It was encouraging to notice Shireen Mazari Minister for Human Rights take a pro-active and very responsible stand in the Parliament in favour of the people of Kashmir. She lamented the role of all previous Governments and stated that Government of Pakistan’s support to the people of Kashmir should move further from a routine declaration of providing moral, political, diplomatic support. This one liner is of no help to the people of Kashmir and not enough to stop the Indian security forces from killing the defenceless Muslim men, women and children in the Kashmir Valley.

Government of Pakistan needs to structure the Kashmir Committee as soon as possible and ensure that its membership is not used as a political adjustment. As a beginning the Committee should comprise of members from all parties represented in the National Assembly and Senate. In addition to this there should be a programme of work for the first six months. The Committee should remain answerable after very three months in the National Assembly and at regular public forums specially organised for a feedback.

Government of Azad Kashmir should also set up its own Kashmir Committee around the jurisprudence of Section 11 of The Azad Jammu and Kashmir Interim Constitution Act 1974. Members of this Committee should be drawn from all disciplines of public opinion, in particular should include Kashmiris living in Azad Kashmir, four provinces of Pakistan and the diaspora, who understand the UN mechanism on Kashmir. This could end the present rat race of holding Conferences or staging events for mere optics here and abroad. Kashmir Committee of the Government of Azad Kashmir formed around the relaxed interpretation of Section 11 in the Constitution would not be a bone of contention with the Government of Pakistan. Constitution Act 1974 has been authored by the Government of Pakistan, under its responsibilities under [UNCIP Resolutions](https://dailytimes.com.pk/320580/india-pakistan-dialogue-and-kashmir/).

Government of Azad Kashmir should keep away from offending or defending the political parties of Pakistan. We need to keep their favour and work for creating a broader and national constituency of support in Pakistan. We should not err to earn the grievance of a political party, a common Pakistani or of any institution in Pakistan. It is time that Azad Kashmir Government refines the narrative of its advocacy of Kashmir case at home and abroad, and follows the wisdom of 8 July 1948 letter written by Sardar Ibrahim Khan as “President of Azad Kashmir Government” to Chairman of the UNCIP.

Return to basics is important. Government of Azad Kashmir has stopped sending “Kashmir Haj Delegations” that used to interact with Hajis coming from all over the world. Kashmiri Haj delegations were stopped in 1975 and we have missed an important universal yearly interaction. This would have been the best and only occasion to access the Hajis from India and convince them of Indian atrocities against the Muslims of Kashmir. Ending this practice has no merit.

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Ministry of Kashmir Affairs in Pakistan and the five members nominated by the Prime Minister of Pakistan from amongst Federal Ministers and Members of Parliament on the AJK Council, for reasons of their overwhelming share in the administration and legislation of Azad Kashmir, should be made answerable to the two Governments and the two Kashmir Committees. Government of Azad Kashmir should have the authority to seek work performance inputs from time to time and a mechanism should be worked out so that the Government of Azad Kashmir is free to interact with rest of the world.

Pending a UN supervised referendum in the State, Government of Pakistan, needs to improve upon its role under UNCIP Resolutions, envisaged in the Act 1974, and bring it in line with a relationship that exists between The Isle of Man and British Crown. The United Kingdom is responsible for the island’s defence and ultimately for good governance, and for representing the island in international forums, while the island’s own parliament and government have competence over all domestic matters. It would be a non-threatening relationship and an improvement on Karachi Agreement of 28 April 1949.

Pakistan under Section 31 (3) (a), (b), (c) and (d) of The Jammu and Kashmir Interim Constitution Act 1974 has taken on responsibilities under the UNCIP Resolutions, namely, Defence, Current Coin, and External Affairs. So there should not be any hiccup in upgrading Pakistan’s role at the international forums, in particular, at the UN under section 31 (3) (d). This would help Pakistan in narrowing down the misunderstanding which exists and continues to grow between it and the nationalist school of politics.

It is unfortunate that the nationalist school of politics in Azad Kashmir and in Europe thrives upon hearsay and does not reconcile its understanding with the jurisprudence of UN Resolutions and The Azad Jammu and Kashmir Interim Constitution Act 1974. Constitution of Azad Kashmir does allow the Government of Pakistan to reserve for itself a constitutional role in Azad Kashmir and in the affairs of Kashmir. It does not allow Government of Pakistan to freeze itself into inaction and refuse to act speed post, for the ‘rights and dignity’ and ‘security and self-determination’ of the people of Jammu and Kashmir.

The writer is President of London based NGO JKCHR, which is in special consultative status with the United Nations. He is an advocate of the Supreme Court and specializes in Peace Keeping, Humanitarian Operations, and Election Monitoring Missions. Dr. Gilani specializes in the Jurisprudence of UN Resolutions and Kashmir case. He was elected at the UN World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, to represent the Unrepresented Peoples and Nations of the World

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