

Convention on Peace and Justice for Kashmiri Women

A 11-member all-women civil society delegation from New Delhi including representatives from well-known think tanks, non-governmental women organisations and academicians undertook a trip to Srinagar in October to interact with Kashmiri women and understand their pains-sufferings and points of view.

This was the first time that such a large contingent of women from New Delhi visited Kashmir to learn about the impact of the conflict on Kashmiri women. The consequences of the conflict have had an adverse effect on the health and psychology of Kashmiri women while leaving behind many widows and half widows.

A one-day convention 'Peace and Justice for Kashmiri Women' was organised at Gandhi Bhavan, Kashmir University, on October 30. The convention was organised by the Centre for Policy Analysis in collaboration with Action Aid, AIDWA, ANHAD, APDP, Joint Women's Programme, Kashmir Centre for Social and Development Studies, NFIW, WISCOMP, Women's Study Centre, Kashmir University and YWCA.

There was an overwhelming participation from women, men and youth during the day-long session. Interactions were held in a free and cordial manner throughout the session. The audience representing all groups came up with their impressions, ideas, opinions and observations with a free mind. Opportunity was given to maximum participants to intervene and put across their positions. Overall, the convention remained frank and vibrant.

The convention began with an overview followed by four sessions -- The impact of the conflict on the women of Kashmir; Enforced disappearances, widows and half widows; Health, trauma and suicides; and lastly, Making peace (resolution and recommendations).

The women from New Delhi pledged to take up issues related to Kashmiri women at the national level as well as to raise it at different international

forums. Those who went from New Delhi included Jyotsna Chatterji (Joint Women's Programme), Sehba Farooqi and Subhashini Ali (AIDWA), Seema Kakran (WISCOMP), Kalpana David and Leila Passah (YWCA), Zakia Soman (Action Aid), Annie Raja and Promila Loomba (NFIW), Anuradha Chenoy (academician and CPA) and Seema Mustafa (CPA).

Among many prominent women from Kashmir who made the programme a success included Hameeda Nayeem, Parveena Ahangar, Qurutulain, Syeda Afsana, Dr Nilofar Khan, Dr Effat Yasmin, Muslim Jan and others.

Representatives from human rights organisations and lawyers, including Faisal Qadri of the Human Rights Law Network, also participated.

Bollywood actor and theatre artiste Farooq Sheikh, who was the special guest at the convention, promised to hold two shows including *Tumhari Amrita* in Kashmir and donate the proceedings from these shows for the development of the village adopted by the Kashmir University. Addressing the audience, he said direct participation was the "need of the hour" for effective results.

Referring to 'Mir Behri', one of the areas adopted by Kashmir University, Vice Chancellor Prof. Talat Ahmad explained that the university had adopted the area so that it could be developed. The area is predominantly populated by widows who have low standards of education and live in unhygienic conditions.

Since lack of interaction increases gaps while discussions help to know each other's problems and resolve them, the convention endeavoured to bring together women of Kashmir and New Delhi on one platform to help them work together, said Prof. Sadiq Wahid, director, Kashmir Studies, Kashmir University.

Well-known psychiatrist in Kashmir Dr Arshad Hussain in his speech reflected on the impact of the conflict on the mental health of the Kashmiris. "In 80s the lone psychiatric facility had a few hundred patients visiting the hospital every year. Now the number exceeds a lakh," he said.

Seema Mustafa, CPA Director, observed that the "plight of Kashmiri women is directly linked to the state of conflict with the women becoming the victims of security forces and the draconian laws operational in the state." According to

her Kashmiris need the support of civil society to highlight their sufferings. But at the same time Kashmiris “should distinguish between Indian people and the Indian state.”

After listening to the tragic tales of the Kashmiri women, AIDWA activist Sehba Farooqi resolved that civil society would no longer remain mute spectator towards their sufferings.

The Convention adopted the following resolutions:

- 1) Demilitarisation;
- 2) Withdrawal of AFSPA, PSA and all other draconian laws;
- 3) Immediate trial and punishment of security personnel and all others accused of rape and molestation,
- 4) Release of political prisoners,
- 5) Rehabilitation of widows and half widows that must include employment,
- 6) Compilation of data of missing persons, and a time-bound investigation into the cases,
- 7) Appointment of a Commission of Inquiry under an impartial judge and experts into the present condition of women in Jammu and Kashmir;
- 8) Setting up hospitals for women to treat both physical and mental ailments in Srinagar and other towns in Jammu and Kashmir;
- 9) Resettlement of Pandits;
- 10) Fast track courts; and
- 11) A Dilli Chalo march to Jantar Mantar on December 10, 2012.