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Jammu & Kashmir

Coalition of Civil Society

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About Us

JKCCS

The Srinagar-based Jammu and Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society, founded in 2000, is an amalgam of eight non-profit organizations working for the betterment of civil society in Kashmir.

Kashmiri civil society, even before the outbreak of the militancy in 1989, was already weak due to political uncertainty and lack of democratic space. Before the armed struggle, even people protesting against the hike in electrical tariffs were killed and dubbed as anti-Indian; this problem was only compounded by the government reaction to the armed uprising. Unfortunately international organizations that traditionally promote civil society and accountability have not been allowed inside Kashmir by the Indian government. There is a gradual increase in public awareness of the importance of civil society - this process has been accelerated by interactions with Indian institutions of civil society, many of whom visit Kashmir to monitor the human rights situation. There is a realization that the Kashmir imbroglio has caused massive human rights of Kashmiris and has indirectly contributed to the plight of many Indians. It is also widely understood that Kashmir is the cause of the militarization and nuclearization of South Asia, which has not only led to a large economic drain but also transformed the subcontinent into a political-military tinderbox.

The Kashmiri civil society is getting organized to build institutions which could work as watchdogs in the war-torn state. The same process is already being developed in Palestine; the PLO's Salim Tarimi identified the purpose of building civil society when he said, "When Palestinian state arrives, it will not arrive in vacuum. It will already have an infrastructure of political and civil institutions to support it." In Kashmir there is a legacy of distrust between the people and the political institutions. When politicians are attempting to secure offices they

stand for human rights, civil liberties and democracy. When they grab power they stifle the dissent, curtail civil liberties and have incarcerated the political opponents to appease the federal government. There is no dearth of empirical examples to support this trend and even the present generation of Kashmiri leadership should not be trusted without doubts; a strong and vibrant civil society is needed to serve as a check against the despotic and untrustworthy nature of politicians in the Kashmiri polity. Reinforcement of civil society is necessary to protect human rights, and the culture of intolerance is to be replaced by culture of dialogue and understanding for ensuring peace and democracy.

In India civil society is getting stronger because of growing democratic space. The issues of militarization, globalization, nuclearisation, fundamentalism, terrorism, communalism (Gujarat) and other issues, which effect people directly, are being confronted by the Indian civil society. Even in Pakistan civil society is gaining strength despite the lack of democracy. We are witnessing how people-to-people initiatives and track two diplomacy has flourished in India and Pakistan. The people's initiatives are dispelling the traditional distrust and animosity that have previously held the two neighbouring countries hostage. These measures are generating opinions in support of enduring peace and resolution of political difference. The governments of both the countries will not be able to ignore public opinion, which is the most effective weapon of civil society. The way civil society is gaining momentum in the newly established democracies or the third world countries, it is emerging as a countervailing power vis-à-vis government policy making and has been able to influence governments directly or indirectly to end the abuse of power.

In 2000 a bold initiative was taken by the different groups of Kashmiri civil society when they held a meeting between the Kashmir civil society and the Indian civil society group. Thirty-eight civil society actors from India headed by Mr. Ram Das, the retired Admiral and the Chairman of the Pakistan and India Peoples' Forum for Peace and Democracy deliberated over the issue of peace and democracy. It was also deliberated how Kashmir issue would be resolved. This people to people initiative was widely appreciated by the people and politicians. It was felt that more interactions should be there in future. It was also felt that a strong public opinion could be mobilized against the nuclearization in the region and in favour of building pressure on the Indian Government to resolve the Kashmir issue according to the wishes of the Kashmiri people, as it is bleeding the countries and threatening the peace in the subcontinent. There was follow up meeting at Delhi in November 2000 in which the civil society actors from India, Pakistan and Kashmir participated and discussed the issue of Kashmir, nuclearization and peace.

Soon after this meeting the Jammu and Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society was created with the goals of protecting international humanitarian law in Kashmir, promoting peace and democracy, taking a

stand against militarization and violence, and resolving the Kashmir dispute as per the wishes of the people.

The specific and substantive objectives of the Jammu and Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society are:

1. To strengthen the independent civil society movement in Kashmir.
2. To reactivate the paralysed (due to armed conflict) civil society of Kashmir by involving the secular democratic forces for alternate political activity.
3. The CCS is intending to create a forum where the important public issues could be deliberated, discussed and rationalized, particularly by the youth.
4. The CCS is trying to plan an important role in the process of conflict prevention and peace building, to combat the jingoist hysteria created by the governments of India and Pakistan.
5. To stimulate and to involve national and international political actions and to facilitate the formulation of concrete political proposal in the promotion of peace and democracy and to deal with the political questions that rise in conflict situations.
6. To build alliances with the Indian civil society and the European civil society for resolving the Kashmir imbroglio in a democratic and peaceful manner, for ensuring positive peace in the Southeast Asian region. Unless the structural causes and conditions that have given rise to the violent conflict are not eliminated, there can't be positive peace. The negative peace process alone is not enough to do the job, because without positive peace negative peace may collapse.
7. To build institutions in the state of Jammu and Kashmir to protect and promote the civil and political rights of the people. Only institutions can be guardians of the rights of the people. Institution buildings are necessary for ensuring peace and the civic rights of the person.

Partners in Europe:

- a) IKV Interchurch Peacecouncil - The Netherlands www.ikv.nl *)
- b) Lawyers Without Borders – NL www.advocatenzondergrenzen.nl

*) From 1/1/2007 onwards the Dutch NGO's IKV and Pax Christi merge and form a joint peacemovement, see website: www.ikvpaxchristi.nl