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## Indian peace delegation talks to media and civil society

# Peace between India, Pakistan vital to end violence, poverty

Staff Report

**ISLAMABAD:** In order to end poverty, hunger, violence against women and marginalised sections, exploitation of workers, especially home-based women workers in India and Pakistan, and in fact, in all the SAARC countries, realization of peace between India and Pakistan is a must.

This was an agreed statement by the Indian Peace Delegation and their host civil society organisations, which met the civil society and media at Pothohari Art and Craft Village, Islamabad, on Monday, said a press release.

The delegation planted a tree in Pothohari village and named it "Tree of Hope".

Some members of the Insanī Haqooq Itēhad (IHI) including SUNGI Foundation, SPO, Aurat Foundation, SDPI, PILER, SAFMA and Pakistan India Peace Peoples Forum for Peace and Development (PIPPFPD) is hosting the Indian peace delegation. Representatives of electronic and print media organizations and different civil society organizations were also present on the occasion.

The delegation members reiterated that although there were anti-peace forces in both the countries, there was a growing realisation among masses and even among the fanatic forces in India such as BJP that a stable and prosperous Pakistan was in India and South Asian region's interest. "We, the forces of peace and stability, have significantly defeated the forces of fanaticism and extremes," said Mr Janin Desai, an activist-journalist and national Joint Secretary of Pakistan India Peoples Forum for Peace and Democracy, and bureau member of South Asians for Human Rights.

PPP MNA Chaudhry Manzoor said his party believed in the words of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto who once said both the government should let the people meet freely, and that would bring peace. He, therefore, supported the idea that visa condition between SAARC countries should be abolished.

Karamat Hussain from PILER said the members of SAARC had already ratified a Convention in 1987, which calls for "suppression of terrorism" between the SAARC countries. But so far no mechanism has been developed for implementation of the convention, he said.

The delegation and the host civil society organisations demanded that the SAARC members must create a mechanism for the convention to end terrorism in the region. They also urged the SAARC countries to make the convention effective.

They said that all SAARC countries should give MFN status to each other, which is obligatory under WTO regime. India has given this status to Pakistan but Pakistan has not given such status to India. Also, a no-war pact is also necessary to seriously pursue the peace agenda in the region. De-nuclearization is must in the region since three generation's development prospects have been destroyed with the persistence of status-quo adding that we should not spoil the future of our fourth generation. They demanded that basic human principles have to be realized and practiced and both countries should fulfill their commitments with regard to social sector allocations especially in education and health.

They lamented that military and intelligence establishments of both countries

have ruined the peace prospects and both the countries have been wasting their numerous resources on defense and security expenditures. They underlined both the countries to cut their defense expenditures and divert those resources for social sector development to bring positive changes in the lives of people especially poor and marginalized.

They said political parties' in both countries pursue their political agenda in the process but people's pressure can help to positively engage the political parties to pursue a peace and people-centered agenda. However, media has played instrumental role so far and will have to play a key role in future, they urged. One of the civil society representatives said that in order to bring peace in the region, we need cut down the irrational military budgets and strengthen people through democracy.

Pro-people and pro-stability people should cooperate and strengthen each other in both countries to help cooperation and friendship prevail between these two countries to ensure people's real freedom from hunger, poverty, exploitation, marginalisation and discrimination.

During their informal discussion with the students of Qaid-e-Azam University, Mr Shahid Siddiqui, former member of Indian parliament, said anti-peace element in both the countries were interrupting the peace process repeatedly. "We need to fight out these anti-peace forces through mass-movement of people," he said. He said Indian people and parliamentarians wanted stronger Pakistan and not the weaker. Stronger Pakistan would benefit not only Pakistani people but peoples of all SAARC countries, he added.